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EDITORIAL

The theme of this edition of the *Catholic Voyage* was chosen in early 2015; that is, shortly after the 2014 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops and long before the

October 2015 Synod of Bishops. Both Synods treated the theme of Family. At the same time, we are celebrating the Year of Consecrated Life. It was rather easy to see a connection between the family and the Consecrated Life. The vocation and mission of both are at the service of the church and society. The consecrated persons are called to further contribute to the evangelization of the family, which, in turn, is increasingly becoming more conscious of its responsibilities towards the vocation, formation and mission of consecrated persons and the clergy. Most of the contributions in this volume, thus, present *some* issues about the marriage and family life, the mutual relation and co-responsibilities between Consecrated Life and the Family, and particular questions concerning Consecrated life.

The Vatican Council II frequently speaks about the marriage and family; for example, in its documents on the *Apostolate of the Lay People* (n.11), *Christian Education* (n.3), *Religious Liberty* (n.5), on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*, IV, n.35), on Ecumenism, and principally *Church in the Contemporary World* (= *Gaudium et Spes*, nn.47-52). These constitute basic reference-points for subsequent post-Vatican II documents of the Magisterium and theological and pastoral works on the family.

The present edition begins with a reflection on certain aspects of the teachings of Vatican Council II's Pastoral Constitution on the *Church in the Contemporary World* concerning the dignity of marriage and family. The study by Kenduanyi Nagei demonstrates that the Vatican II emphasizes the family as an area of pastoral urgency. The family has its fears and anguish as well as its joy and hope. It is necessary to promote, defend and protect the dignity and values of the family. The Christian family, Nagei suggests, can become a Christian novitiate.

Evidently, there are difficult situations and challenges within the marital life. In relation to the sacraments, the study presented by Bartholomew Chidili examines the "slothful attitude" of many Catholic families towards the sacraments, Noting the "palpable lethargy towards some of the cardinal sacraments like Holy Eucharist and confession", the article probes into the matter with the aim of finding out the real causes of the lethargy. The article invokes the contributions from the eminent child psychologists. Is early education the panacea to rebuilding the shattering sacramental attitude? The author assessed the deep damage on the faith and on the psyche of the worshipers and then proposes solutions.

Turning to issues concerning the Consecrated life and its relation to the Family, an important initial or preliminary question could be asked. What has Africa to contribute to the Consecrated life?. One response, from Ikechukwu Kanu, O.S.A., highlights the idea of "family". The concept of 'Family', he argues, is a major contribution of Africa to the Consecrated Life. Kanu's paper questions the contribution of African ontology to the historical evolution of the consecrated life. Adopting the historical and phenomenological methods of inquiry, his article

claims that the spirit of community in the consecrated life was borne from the African spirit of the family.

In any case, no vocation emerges or grows in a vacuum. Emmanuel Ogu's article highlights the role that family background plays in nurturing vocations, particularly in answering religious call. The family is the first school of faith where children learn to recognize the call of God, which is to follow Jesus. This call, the author opines, requires the use of freedom, that is, a self-giving love. It also involves responsibility. In several ways, this call unveils the value of family prayer, catechesis and parents as the first witnesses of vocation to love. Similarly, the paper of Cletus Nwafor, OP endeavours to show that priests and consecrated persons are uniquely fruits of the family, in keeping with the Plan of God. It argues also that the continuity of humanity and the church depends on the family. The article invites everyone to an ever proactive resurgence against the dictatorship of the "culture of death" and to rediscover the beauty of the family as a domestic church.

The family contributes to not only the emergence of vocations, but also to the formation and mission of the clergy and consecrated persons. Nkechinyelu Ezeanyino, DDL, examines this theme in her study of the place and role of the family in the formation and mission of Priests and Consecrated Persons. The family, she notes, occupies the most important and indispensable place in the formation and mission of priests and consecrated persons. The family should ensure the proper and holistic up-bringing of children. Parents have to live exemplary lives in accordance with the Gospel values. The families should take special care to nurture vocations to priesthood and religious life whenever they see their sign in their children. Families have the duty of supporting priests and consecrated persons both while they are in formation and even more while on mission.

Can Consecrated persons exercise the role of mothers and fathers and, if so, how? Jean-Paul Tagheu, OP, investigates the motherhood and fatherhood of the Consecrated Persons in an African context. "The vow of chastity is not, as such, a vow against life, family, and begettingness. It is a vow for a new dimension of life, family and of new begettingness of human lives." The motherhood and fatherhood of the consecrated persons, he claims, is a motherhood and fatherhood of the Kingdom of God. This, it seems, goes beyond a simply biological fecundity and its expectations. Religious consecration sees human family, life and procreation from a unique perspective – the perspective of love, charity and the gift of oneself for others.

The study by Christopher Oshiofa Asamah, OMV, directs the reader's attention to social concerns; it focuses on the social concerns affecting the families today, particularly as regard the evangelizing mission of the Consecrated persons to the family in Nigeria. The article intends to contribute to the needed systematic

study of effective ways through which Consecrated Persons, as agents of evangelization, can be part of the social dimension of evangelization in relation to some social concerns of family. It appears as a call to Consecrated persons to a renewed, greater social commitment - rooted in the Gospel and in mission of the Church - in favour of the family in Nigeria, indeed Africa. Margaret Fagbamigbe, SSMA, too, examines Consecrated Life and evangelization of Family Life in Nigeria; however, she looks at Consecrated life and how consecrated persons could impact the family life by their own life of service. Family life in Nigeria, she opines, is in need of renewal, and consecrated persons are challenged to doggedly embrace the evangelization of the family life. There emerges the conviction and hope that when the family is healthy, the individuals in the society and the society and church themselves will be well and grow; but the author also recognizes that the work of evangelization calls for concerted efforts of consecrated persons and cannot be left for priests alone. A collaborative ministry is needed. The author suggests ways in which consecrated persons can participate in the evangelization of the family life in collaboration with the clergy.

Turning to another specific area of evangelization, the health care apostolate, Theresa Afareha, EHJ, reflects on the healing mission of the Church in imitation of the healing ministry of Jesus, which is understood as a call to care and give love to the sick and their families. Health workers ought to be more conscientious in their duties, observe the highest professional standards and the norm of the Christian ethics, while more fully respecting the rights of their clients or patients.

Celibacy and virginity are one aspect of Priestly life and Consecrated life that frequently emerge in discussions about marriage and family - in Africa and elsewhere. In his study on Catholic celibacy as a challenge to Tiv Family and Culture of Nigeria, Tersoo Gwaza, S.J., considers that, although in the minds of some people it is inconceivable and absurd for a normal human being who is balanced to embrace celibacy in perpetuity, nonetheless the charism of celibacy, manifested fruitfully in the life of Jesus Christ, enables priests to emulate the perfect priesthood of Christ, and that celibacy is a necessary option despite its challenges to our global village and cultures.

Studies and reflections on marriage and family will probably intensify in Africa and other regions especially after the recent two Synods of Bishops, on family. The Final Report of the 2015 Synod of Bishops has been published. We await the post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis on the pastoral care of family; its reception and implementation phases will follow. Several academic institutions and associations within the Church in Nigeria show a growing interest in furthering study and research on the theme of marriage and family. The present collection of articles is one contribution from Consecrated Persons and intend to advance.

The second part of this volume presents further reflections on other important and specific issues relating to Consecrated life. On the matter of

Religious Formation, Emmanuel Ogu, OP, explains that religious formation involves a call to radical following of Christ and he indicates what this means in practice for the process of formation of candidates for consecrated life and the priesthood. Rita Akin-Otiko, SSL, explores the gray areas of living the religious life within the context and demands of the natural family; thus, she examines the relation between Religious Life and Family bonds -- that is, the influences of the Water of Baptism and Blood Ties -- in the day-to-day personal and community life and conduct of consecrated persons, especially in relation to the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Daniel Onyeayana, CMF, invites Consecrated persons to rediscover the joys of their consecrations while we look to the Past with gratitude, the Present with passion and the Future with hope. The celebration of the Year of consecrated life offers a unique opportunity to begin afresh this re-discovery. On his part, Emmanuel Anagwo investigates the theme of Religious Obedience in the Consecrated Life, and explores its implications for the Liturgical Life of the Church, including the celebration of the sacraments. Implicit, broader questions could be raised. What is the relationship between religious obedience and the faithfulness to the rubrics of the Rite of the Sacrament to be celebrated? What is the understanding of the vow of obedience in our Religious Institutes, Orders and Societies and what, in practice, are its scope, limits and legitimate forms of inculturation and expressions in Africa?

Living the Consecrated life certainly does involve the administration and use of financial and economic goods entrusted to members of the Institute, as the Constitutions and Norms of most religious institutes show. This topic, however, is frequently not researched and treated in the theological and canon law literatures in Nigeria. Still, it touches somehow, albeit to varying degree, on a range of important issues of consecrated life - the vow of poverty, life in common, formation, and government Festus Ejiofor, MSP, boldly taking up this theme, examines the responsibility for the finances and economic growth of the Religious Community, starting from the formation of candidates to the living witness of Professed Members of the Institute.

Bishop Donatus Ogun, OSA (of the Catholic Diocese of Uromi) graciously offers to our readers an insightful and thought-provoking interview on a wide-range of issues about the consecrated life in Nigeria. All concerned should feel motivated to a renewed commitment, to contribute to an effective mutual relation, and to joyful communion and participation in the Consecrated life in the Church. Rejoicing today for the graces received especially on occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life, let us look to the future with hope.

Finally, we are glad to inform that the Catholic Voyage has a *motto*. In all things, it desires to witness to Truth and Mercy through promotion of love and service - as taught by the Lord Jesus and proclaimed by His Church - and, for this purpose, it affirms the value and use of faith and reason.

Enjoy the reading!

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Fr. Oseni Ogunu, OMV
Editor-in-Chief.

STUDIES AND PERSPECTIVES

THE FAMILY AT THE VATICAN COUNCIL II:

AN AREA OF URGENCY

Kenduanyi Mirabel Nagei²

Abstract

The Second Vatican Council has been described as the greatest religious event of the 20th century. Reading from the intention of the convener, Pope John XXIII, and the intention and pastoral tone employed by the Council expressed in the 16 documents that resulted from the Council, it is said that the Church was here examining herself *ad Intra and Ad Extra*. In both dimensions, the Council set out to present its doctrine positively and constructively, and not merely in the interest of apologetics or to formulate rules of conduct. *Ad Intra*, the Church was answering the question “*quid dicis de te ipso?*”-what do you say of yourself? In answering this question, she had to answer other related questions such as: what do you say of the role of the Church in the world? What do you say of the missionary activities of the Church? What do you say of the members of the Church? What do you say about the Family?

1.0 Introduction

Part two of Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes* (hereinafter GS)³ is titled “Some More Urgent Problems.” Under this chapter (GS 46) the Council identifies areas which excite general concerns among which are marriage and the family, culture, economic and social life, politics, peace and so on. In considering the family as an area of urgency, the Council was looking at the family and considering it in all its implication for the Christian life, the Church and the society. The Council reaffirmed the beauty and duty of the Christian family but did not fail to highlight the areas where there are “shadows.” The Council in addressing the family set out to do as they stated “we must seek light for this problem from the principles which Christ has given us; in this way the faithful will receive guidance and all men will be enlightened in their search for solutions to so many complex problems”

In this paper, we will look at the family following the guidance and enlightening proposals of the Council. We shall consider the Council’s vision on marriage and the Family, how the Christian family can become a Christian novitiate,

² Kenduanyi Mirabel Nagei is a Cameroonian Lay Theologian. Holder of a B.A in linguistics and a Minor in Education from the University of Buea, Cameroon, an HND in Theology from John Paul II Institute of Theology (JOPASIT) Buea, Cameroon. Holder of an M.A Theology from the Dominican Institute, Ibadan in Affiliation with Duquesne University, Pittsburg, Pennsylvania USA.

³ Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 7 Dec. in *Vatican II Council: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* Volume 1, by Austin Flannery, O.P., Bandra, Mumbai: ST PAULS, 2007. Note: The other Vatican II documents such as *Lumen Gentium*, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, *Unitatis reintergratio* are all taken from this version of Vatican II Documents.

the fears and anguish of the family, what the Council calls “areas of shadows” then the joy and the hope of the family then following by a conclusion.

The Family: the Council’s Vision

As stated in the abstract above, the Church was examining herself *ad intra* and *ad extra*. The reflection on the Church *ad intra* meant that she had to reflect on issues within her own household. The family as a “domestic Church” within the bigger household of the Church was reflected upon in some of the sixteen documents that came out of the Council. The decree on Lay People in the Church *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (hereinafter AA) the Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* (hereinafter LG), the Constitution on the Church in the Modern world *Gaudium et Spes*, the decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Reintegratio* (hereinafter UR) and many others either addressed directly or made reference to the family. While GS considered the dignity of marriage and the family (GS 47-52) AA considered the family as an area of the apostolate of the lay people (AA 11). LG considered the Christian family with the chapter (IV, no 35) which addresses the place of the Laity within the *Self Understanding* of the Church and UR looks particularly at things to be safeguarded and those to be dispensed with regards to mixed marriages.

The family at the Council was considered in its Latin origin *familiaris*.⁴ By this consideration, “the family includes all those who are in any way connected to the family: relatives, servants, guests, apprentices who sleep or at least eat with the family, and student Boarders.”⁵ The family is built on the sacrament of marriage which is the companionship of male and female which produces the primary form of interpersonal communion is God’s design (cf. AA 11). Far from being just a companionship of male and female, the married state is also said to be “the beginning and foundation of human society”. This implies that “the well being of the individual person and of both human and Christian society is closely bound with the healthy state of conjugal and family life” (GS 47). The mission of being the primary vital cell of the society is a “mandate” given to the family by God himself (Cf. GS 48) and is “rooted in the contract of the partners” which is manifested in their “irrevocable consent and confirmed by natural law”. According to John Paul II, by its nature, marriage which has the special mission of perpetuating humanity though built on the partners transcends the couple.⁶ It transcends the couple in that the

⁴ Ferdinand Klostermann “The laity” in *Commentary on the Documents of the Vatican Council II*. Volume 1. Trans. Lalit Adolphus, Kervin Smyth, and Richard Strachan, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1989) p.

⁵ Cf. Jordan Aumann, *On the Front Lines; The Lay Person in the Church After Vatican II*. (New York: Alba House, 1997), P.339.

⁶ John Paul II, *The Church in Africa, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in Africa* (Nairobi: Paulines, 1995) No. 85.

family extends beyond the individual household: it is oriented towards society. In this regard, "the family has vital and organic links with society, since it is its foundation and nourishes it continually through its role of service to life: for it is from the family that citizens come to birth and it is within the family that they find the first school of the social virtues.⁷ The family is thus a basic community for the society and a basic cell of the society.

The condition of families the Council says has a decisive bearing on the dignity, stability, peace and prosperity of human society as a whole (GS 48); hence Christian couples are for each other, and for their children and other relatives' "cooperators in grace and witnesses of faith." The Council list a number of things to be done (AA 11): the family then should offer true hospitality, practice justice and other good works that benefit those in want: they should adopt abandoned children, welcome strangers, help with the running of schools, support adolescence with advice, assisting engaged couples as they prepare for marriage, supporting married people and families in material and moral crises and taking care of the elderly by providing their needs and procuring for them a fair share of their of the fruits of economic progress. In doing these things enumerated above, (LG 35) calls on the couple in their married life to be witnesses of faith and love to one another and to their children. For the Council, 'the Christian family proclaims aloud both the present power of the Kingdom of God and the hope of the blessed life" The couple should champion to each other, to their children, to all those associated with the family and to the entire society.

The Christian Family: A Christian Novitiate

The Council writes that "married life is ordered towards the procreation and education of the offspring and it is in them that it finds its crowning glory" (GS 50). One is not to mistakenly think that the family is only oriented towards the begetting of children. For the Council, married love which is eminently human love because it is an affection between two persons rooted in the will embraces the good of the whole person, and its spiritual and physical expression with a unique dignity ennobles it (cf. GS 49). The family is also the "domestic Church" and as a "domestic Church", it is called to a life of faith. The Council believes that, *primi fidei praecones et educatores* meaning parents shall be the first to proclaim the faith to their children and to rear them or educate them in it. In this light, the family through mutual affection for its members and through family prayers is said to present itself as a domestic sanctuary of the Church; if the whole family takes its part in the Church's liturgical worship. It is therefore the role of the family to bring up children in the faith, which implies to bring them into the world and to bring them to God so that they can become responsible agents of social transformation. The parents have the responsibility not only towards their religious education, but in every aspect of life in society. They should pass values, particularly values of faith. It is their

⁷ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 166.

responsibility to provide and inculcate civic and religious values to their children, to form good citizens and good Christians. In this light, religious education become the foundation of a civic education.⁸

According to the Code of Canon Law (1983)⁹ which is also a product of the Council, marriage is both a vocation and a sacrament (cf. Can. 226). Married people have the duty to strive for the building up of the people of God through their marriage and family. By virtue of the fact that they gave life to their children, they have the most serious obligation to educate them. They have a serious duty to watch over the education of their children and to ensure that it is done according to the mind of the Church. Jordan Aumann sheds more light on this point. For him, since marriage is the normal vocation for men and women, everyone has the right to marry if he or she is suited for the marriage life except one chooses otherwise to be single. And that the first obligation of the married persons is in their own homes and family which we have said is “the domestic church.” This implies that “a person who neglects his/her family even for apostolic or religious activity is failing to live up to the duties of that state of life.” John Paul II reaffirms this when he says that “the duty of the laity to society at large begins primarily in the family, hence there is need for married people to be convinced of the unique and irreplaceable value that the family has in the development of society and the Church itself”¹⁰

Concerning the duty to educate their children, emphasis is laid on the fact that it should be according to the Catholic mind, other Canons in the Code makes further reference to the education of Catholic children. Canon 776, 777 reminds parish priests of the duty to provide religious instruction. Canon 778 asks the same of religious superiors and others who staff parishes or schools. Canons 793 and 814 more precisely with Catholic schools and is said to contain important legislation that pertains to parents, parish priests, religious and bishops. Parents are to watch over the education of their children diligently. Ensuring they have a proper education tallies with their role as instructors and formators so to say in this Christian novitiate.

The Family: Fear and Anguish

In as much as the Council’s tone is optimistic, she acknowledges areas of difficulties. It has been said already that the condition of families has a decisive bearing on the dignity, stability, peace and prosperity of human society as a whole (GS 48). The Council identified “shadows” lingering over the family in the areas of

⁸ Cf. Anthony Akinwale, “Strengthen the Family, Secure the Nation” paper presented as Guest Lecturer at the annual Cardinal Okogie Lecture, St Agnes’ Catholic Church, Maryland, Lagos, October 16, 2014.p. 7.

⁹ Cf. *The Code of Canon Law*, New revised English Translation (India: Theological Publications, 2005)

¹⁰ John Paul II, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World *Christifidelis laici*, in *John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation* (India: International Publishing House, 2005), no. 40.

“polygamy, the plague of divorce, so-called free love. The dishonor often brought to married life by selfishness, hedonism, and unlawful contraceptives”(GS 47) Aumann supports this by quoting John Paul II who points out that “signs are not lacking of a disturbing degradation of some fundamental values in the family,: a mistaken theoretical and practical concept of independence of the spouses in relation to each other; serious misconceptions regarding the relationship of authority between parents and children, the concrete difficulties that the family experiences in the transmission of values; the growing number of divorces, the scourge of abortion, the ever more recourse to sterilization; the appearance of a truly contraceptive mentality”¹¹ In the midst of these “shadows” which perpetrate “fear and “anguish” within the domestic Church and seem to cast a gloomy cloud over the institution of marriage, if the family is properly oriented by the spouses, it can become a kind of novitiate for Christian maturity.

George Weigel spelt out some of the things Vatican missed especially in *Gaudium et Spes*. For him, Vatican II did not foresee the “full measure of the effect of the DNA double-helix” of James Watson and Francis Crick and the new genetics that will follow. It did not foresee the “utilitarianism” of Jeremy Bentham and his followers will challenge the Christian view of the Human person. The Council did not anticipate emergence of “radical feminism” and its consequences on the West, neither did it foresee the “two worker family and the challenges it will effect on the family”. The Council did not did not foresee the “immortality project” of the new genetics and the new biotechnologies. It did not preempt that “a drop in fertility” across the globe led by Europe whose lack of children has led to a new demographic term to be invented. It did not foresee the “silicon revolution”, the rise of the internet and other new media communications. It did not anticipate the “radical forms of Islam” like jihadism, neither did it anticipate the fantastic “corruption and incompetence of post-colonial governments in the third world”¹² To this, we can add the legalization of same-sex marriage in some Countries. The implication of his assertion is that because the Council did not foresee the above mentioned issues which in one way or the other have an impact on the family, the Council in a way had failed to provide solutions to these problems.

Though we agree with Weigel that the Council did not foresee certain things the way they happened, it is difficult to ascertain that the Council really failed to address them. Our believe is that in the Council’s writings, we can find germs of solutions to current day crisis in the family. Nonetheless, the family which was a topic of urgency at Vatican II is still an area of Urgency even now. On the 8th of October 2013, the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops met in Rome to reflect on the “the pastoral challenges of the family in the context of

¹¹ Jordan Aumann quoting *Familiaris consortio* no. 6 of John Paul II in *On The Frontlines; The Lay person in the Church after Vatican II*. P, 126

¹² Cf. Gorge Weigel “Recuing *Gaudium et Spes*: The New Humanism of John Paul II” in *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition, Vol. 8, No. 2, Spring 2010, pp. 254-259.

evangelization” This was to pave way for the Extraordinary General Assembly which took place in October 2014 which is setting the groundwork for the Ordinary Assembly to take place in October 2015. The family like many aspects of the Church’s life is challenged and maybe will always be, but the Council believed that the principles given by Christ which she laid down could serve as an illumination on that part of the Christian family. The challenges in this area then can only be met in a spirit of true Christian charity and adherence to the Church’s teaching. While people blame the Church for ignoring science in opposing same sex marriage, for punishing the divorced, and for being lax with annulment¹³ and given the current challenges the Synod on the Family is discussing with regards to the pastoral care of the divorced and remarried, John Corbett writes

The Church’s teaching on marriage, divorce, human sexuality, and chastity can be hard. Christ himself saw this when he proclaimed it. However, the truth brings with it authentic message of freedom and hope: there is a way out of vice and sin. There is a way forwards that leads to happiness and sin. Recalling these truths, the Church has reason to accept the task of evangelization in our own age with joy and hope.¹⁴

The Family: Joy and Hope

As we talk of “New Evangelization”, the church continue to believe that the family is at the heart of the New Evangelization, this because the family is at the heart of the civilization of love. If the truth about communion of person in marriage and the family can regain its splendour, the building up of a new civilization of love will begin. In this regard, ministry to families forms an important part of evangelization.¹⁵

As a primary cell of the society, the family contributes immensely to nation building. Thus strengthening the family leads to strengthening the neighbourhood, the society and consequently the nation.¹⁶ In order to strengthen the family, the synergy of family, the Church and the whole society is needed if the family is to succeed at its task. Because the family is by its nature open to other families, and to society, and undertakes social roles, the good health of the society depends on the good of family. As the Church in GS tries to promote human dignity, to combat

¹³ Cf. Holy Taylor Coolman, “proposing a Christian Vision of Marriage: What can the Dominican Tradition teach us?” In *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition, Vol. 12, No. 3, Summer 2014, p. 630.

¹⁴ John Corbett Et. Al “Recent Proposals for the Pastoral Care of the Divorced and Remarried: A theological Assessment. In *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition, Vol. 12, No. 3, Summer 2014, p. 630.

¹⁵ Perry J. Cahall, “The Nucleus of the New Evangelization” In *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition, Vol. 12, No. 3, Summer 2014, p. 54-55

¹⁶ Cf. Anthony Akinwale “Strengthen the Family, Secure the Nation” P. 15.

atheism, to promote social justice, peace and stable political orders that work for the service of humanity, what a better place to start.

Anthony Akinwale observes that a society stands on three legs--education, law enforcement, and the arbitration of justice (school, the police, the judiciary). These three legs are strengthened by values inculcated in the family, the Christian novitiate. To this effect, the priority of family over society and over the state will always be affirmed by the Church. The Church asserts that every social model that intends the good of man must not overlook the centrality and social responsibility of the family.¹⁷ There are “shadow” in the area of the family but there are also hopes and joys. This is because even in the midst of these challenges, some families are doing well. The vision of The Council was that of happy families which will intend make happy Christians and happy citizens of the world.

Conclusion

The Council envisaged healthy families providing a good religious and civic education which will in tend produce good religious men and women, faithful to the ideals of the Gospel. The Council called for a witness of the Christian life which will have a positive influence on the temporary order in the way the carryout their civic duties. A formed conscience, one that is able to discern the dissenting voices of the time can only be one properly educated in religious matters. In this light, there is need for profound theological formation for parents who cooperate with the Church. The *Instrumentum Laboris* of the 2014 Extraordinary Synod¹⁸, states that “in her pastoral activity, the Church is called to assist families in the upbringing of children, beginning with Christian initiation. Catechesis and formation in the parish are indispensable means of assisting the family in educating, particularly during preparation for Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist.”

Kenduanyi Mirabel Nagei is a Cameroonian Lay Theologian. Holder of a B.A in Linguistics/Education from the University of Buea, Cameroon, an HND in Theology from John Paul II Institute of Theology (JOPASIT) Buea, Cameroon, an in M.A Theology from Duquesne University, Pittsburg, Pennsylvania USA. She is a Lecturer in the Dominican Institute, Ibadan, Nigeria.

CATHOLIC FAMILY AND THE SLOTHFUL ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE SACRAMENTS

¹⁷ Cf. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. (Nairobi: Paulines Publication Africa, 2005) p. 121.

¹⁸Cf. Synod of Bishops, XIII Ordinary General Assembly, “New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith” *Instrumentum Laboris*, (Vatican City, 2012)pp. 132-133.

Fr. Bartholomew Chidili, PhD¹⁹

ABSTRACT

The slothful attitude with which the Catholic families treat the seven Sacraments of the Church is becoming a serious concern among the scholars and diligent observers. One would have thought that with the Sacraments tutored as the centrepiece of the faith, every Catholic would be desirous to receive them as often as possible, i.e. in the case of Holy Eucharist and Confession for their daily spiritual energy and purification. And the other Sacraments like Baptism, Confirmation and Matrimony received as and when due. However, the Sacrament of the Holy Orders which is special to ministerial priesthood is nonetheless receiving due attention and professionalism as expected. But empirical evidence demonstrates that there is a palpable lethargy towards some of the cardinal Sacraments like Holy Eucharist and Confession. These Sacraments, are unarguably facing an uphill task in truth and honest practices; thereby casting a very big doubt as to whether they are really adjudged to be as essential as the Church claims them to be. Or has the Church unwittingly treated the Sacraments with levity and therefore providing ignoble ground for the laity to treat them with contempt. The curiosity raised by the observed lethargy compels this paper to probe into the matter with the view to finding out the real causes of the lethargy. The paper considers it necessary at this moment in time when the entire Catholic Church is addressing the Catholic family issues with a view to rectifying so many anomalies invading and crippling the church. The paper starts in earnest with the prologue, definition and the invocation of the contributions from the eminent child psychologists. The paper further understands early education, beginning from infancy through adulthood to old age like the African traditional religious pattern as the panacea to rebuilding the shattering sacramental attitude of the votaries. With randomly selected quantitative statistics the paper assessed the deep damage on the faith and on the psyche of the worshipers and then suggested solutions.

PROLOGUE

In their work, in 'Family Relations Journal,' Bronstein *et al.* maintain that there is no particular definition of family.²⁰ This is because there is no single correct definition of what a family is. Rather, there are multiple definitions in the literature, and these are necessarily related to the values of those who supply the definition. That is why Burnett and Lewis adopted a pedifocal definition, which includes as family members, all individuals who are involved in the nurturance and support of a child, regardless of where the child lives. Their inclusive definition, says the Journal, suggests that families may include nonrelatives and may have flexible boundaries. Moreover, the former tendency to treat individuals in the study of family type as homogenous has changed since Hare and Richards studied lesbian mothers with children. The Journal maintains that the heterogeneity that is inevitably present in

¹⁹ Fr. Bartholomew Chidili is an Augustinian priest who is with the Kaduna State University. He teaches Christian Religious Studies in the University. He also teaches African Theology and Religion in the Good Shepherd Major Seminary, Kaduna.

²⁰Bronstein, P. et al. (1993, July). Family Relations. National Council on Family Relations. Vol. 42, p. 66

any large grouping of people clearly emerged. The study demonstrated that the experiences of these women may differ depending on how the child was conceived.²¹ Similarly, by studying gay stepfathers, Crosbie, Burnett and Helmbercht cast light on the varying experiences of both gay men and stepfathers and therefore it affected the definition. The foregoing is an effort to say that the concept of family is no more what it used to be - i.e. a socially constructed phenomenon with fixed norms, values, and behaviors that vary widely and are formed or created by several processes.²² Furthermore, Eshleman argues that viewing selected patterns of behavior as fixed has led a number of scholars to question if the word family is even a meaningful concept, since it implies images of married couples, love, permanence, children, sexual exclusivity, home makers, legal unions, and intergenerational continuity. Such scholars have questioned whether these images are more than perceived idealism that is inconsistent with the realities of today's relationships: remarriages, dual careers, childless couples, one-parent households, same sex unions, gender inequalities, abusive partners and intergenerational disruptions.²³ Some writers, according to Eshleman, have asked if it is time yet to begin thinking about the family and families less in terms of traditional images and standards by which everything else is judged and more in terms of close relationships and sexually bonded primary relationships. The former term, he explains, suggests a traditional view held by a small segment of the population, while the later suggests a broader, comprehensive, more accurate portrayal of the reality of human close, primary, sexually bonded relationships.²⁴

Nevertheless, Eshleman accepts that it is difficult to find terms or concepts that differentiate family from nonfamily relationships and experiences. He quoted Ivan F. et al as suggesting the term sexually bonded as a characteristic. According to him, other scholars have suggested family realm as a term that differentiates familial types of human relationships from nonfamilial types, such as political, economic, medical, educational, military, and artistic relationships, among others. The family realm establishes ties across generations and includes characteristics of permanence,

²¹Cited in Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Human Services, Volume 80

Family Service America, 1999 - Social service Page 265

²² For example, Margaret Crosbie-Burnett and Edith Lewis (1993) utilize a situational definition of family in working with families where alcohol is abused. The term pedifocal, defined as "all those involved in the nurturance and support of an identified child, regardless of household membership [where the child lives]" (p. 244), expands the definition of the family from being only family members to include those working with the family.

²³Eshleman, J.R. (1994). Family. Boston. Allyn and Bacon Press.

²⁴ Ibid.

a comprehensive concern for all members, a process orientation that grows out of caregiving, a unique and intense emotionally, an emphasis on qualitative purposes and processes, an altruistic orientation, and a nurturing form of governance.²⁵

Despite the seeming elusive nature of the foregoing descriptions, this paper wishes to understand the term family along the traditional lines, which the latter description targets. I hope to expand and explicate the definition to give the meaning that the traditional family is the nucleus for the formation of moral character. This concept will be developed further with findings from behavioral sciences and statistical evidences and then draw conclusions.

Among other definitions of family, like Nuclear, Extended, and Sociological family, it is the Sociological family that this work would like to espouse. Sociologically, the family is a social institution and social system. As a social institution, it meets broad societal goals that centre on intimate relationships and the reproduction and socialization of children. As a social system, it has many interdependent components with major differentiations by gender, race, class, age, and so forth.

Family as a social institution fits in properly with the family where parents should involve themselves not only in bringing in children into the world but also personally and responsibly take full part in their upbringing and education. This definition tangentially fits in with what this paper understands as a Catholic Family. According to Vatican II, the role of parents in education has such an importance place in the life of a Catholic that it is almost impossible to provide adequate substitute.²⁶ Parents therefore must see it as a bounding duty to create a family atmosphere inspired by love and devotion to God and their fellow persons, which will promote an integrated personal, and social education of the child. Hence parents must be acknowledged as the first and foremost educators of their children. This kind of family assumes that an individual lives connected to others by relationships, not in isolation. Among the most important of these relationships, the Conciliar Fathers stress, are familial ones: they follow set rules that establish roles and patterns of interaction so that the family can function. These roles and patterns create a positive sense of family identity and promote satisfying relationships among family members. They also facilitate family unity and individual development and contribute to the family's ability to deal with distress. These roles and patterns of interaction, said the prelates, are rooted in one's family origin.²⁷

The alluded roles and patterns are consistent with Popcak's five signs of recognizing Catholic family which are stated as follows:

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Austin, F. (1984). Vatican Council II. Northport, New York: Costello Publishing Co.

²⁷ Austin, F. (1984). Vatican Council II. Northport, New York: Costello Publishing Co.

1. Catholic Families Worship Together–The Eucharist is the source of our love and the sign of the intimacy to which we are called. Therefore, as a family, we attend Sunday mass weekly (and Holy Days and at other times as we are able) and we actively participate in parish life–our spiritual home away from home. We also recognize that as fallen persons, we struggle to be the loving community we are called to be. Therefore, as a family, we regularly go to confession (recommended: monthly) to seek God’s healing and grace so we might better live his vision of love in our lives and homes.

2. Catholic Families Pray Together–As “domestic church” we recognize that we cannot love one another as God loves us unless we ask him, together, to teach us what this means. Therefore, in addition to our individual prayer life, we gather together as husband and wife and also as a family for prayer each day. In that time, we praise and thank God for his blessings, we ask him for the grace to love each other and the world better, we seek his will for our lives, and we pray for both our needs and the needs of the Family of God. We recognize in the words of Servant of God, Fr. Patrick Peyton, “the family that prays together, stays together.”

3. Catholic Families are Called to Intimacy–Tertullian once proclaimed, “The world says, ‘Look at those Christians, see how they love one another!’” The Christian life is first and foremost a call to intimate communion. We recognize that families are “Schools of Love.” Therefore, as a family, we constantly challenge ourselves to seek to discover new ways to be even more open with and loving to each other as husband and wife, parents and children. We recognize that children are to be a visible sign of the loving union between husband and wife and we work to make this a reality in our homes both in the quality of our relationships and in our openness to life. Further, we cultivate marriage and parenting practices that make each member of the family–husband and wife, parents and children– willingly open up to one another and seek to freely give themselves to create a deeper “community of love” and practice all the virtues that help us live life as a gift.

4. Catholic Families Put Family First–We recognize that– because our family relationships are the primary vehicle God uses to perfect us and challenge us to become everything we were created to be–family life, itself, is the most important activity. To protect the intimacy we are called to cultivate as the domestic church, we recognize the importance of regular family rituals and we are intentional about creating and protecting those activities such as family dinner, family prayer and worship, a game night and/or “family day”, and regular time for one-on-one communication and relationship-building. We hold these activities as sacred rituals of the domestic church and value them over all other activities that would seek to compete with them.

5. The Catholic Family is a Witness and Sign–God wants to change the world through our families. We allow ourselves to be part of his plan for changing the world in two ways. First, by striving to exhibit– in every way possible in our daily

interactions as husband and wife, parents and children– the love and intimacy that every human heart longs for. We must show the world that this love is a possible dream worth striving for. Second, we will carry this love outside the home by serving the world-at-large in a manner that is responsible and respectful of the integrity of the family unit. We do this by committing ourselves and our families to the intentional practice of all the corporal and spiritual works of mercy within the home and outside of it. To this end, the ways we, as a family, are trying to fulfill this responsibility will be a regular topic of conversation in our homes.²⁸

This is consistent with the notion of the extended family system where people have concern for one another. As a matter of fact, no one exists or does anything individually. There is what one might call group thinking and group living. In the words of Mbiti,²⁹ "only in terms of other people does the individual become conscious of his own being, his own duties, his privileges and responsibilities towards himself and towards other people. When he rejoices, he rejoices not alone but with his kinsmen, his neighbors and his relatives whether dead or living. When he gets married, he is not alone, neither does the wife 'belong' to him alone. So also the children belong to the corporate body of kinsmen, even if they bear only their father's name. Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. This individual can only say, "I am, because we are, and since we are, therefore I am."³⁰

This type of family is dynamic and functional. It handles the training of children in a very high degree manner. Children brought into these families are treated primarily with parental love and care and then it becomes the duty of the community at large to impart the desired behavior in the children. Because African community is punctilious of her character, children are exposed to dignifying behaviors which will influence them into becoming good members of the community. Religion and other skills of the community are inculcated in the same manner. This is the period the Catholic families should seize the opportunity to inculcate Catholic culture in their children. Within this period, the values of Sacraments should be imparted through daily practices. Although men and women share the responsibility of raising the children, with women paying more attention to the girls, while men are busier with the males, the importance and dignity of the Sacraments should be inculcated to both males and females with equal intensity and stress. While girls learn what makes them good girl, future good wives and mothers, boys embark on what builds them up as virile men and responsible

²⁸Greg, Popcak: 5 "Marks" of a Catholic Family—(My response to the Extraordinary Synod Survey Part II)

December 11, 2013

²⁹ Mbiti (1969:108)

³⁰African Religions and Philosophy. London: Heinemann

husbands and good citizens. Catholic religion should be made way of life for these youngsters at this moment in time. As the content of African extended family system is spread through life long span and is imparted step by step according to the age of the child. So should the children be exposed to Catholic lifestyle in all its ramifications by the parents and the caregivers. At the center of traditional African family system is a solid tradition of marriage, genuine love and concern for every member of the family and community at large; so is the Catholic family life system.

This must be what the conference of Catholic Bishops meant when they envisioned the family life as an intimate community of persons bound together by blood, marriage or adoption, for the whole life, They used this idea to qualify the Catholic tradition which they insist, proceeds from marriage - an intimate exclusive, permanent, and faithful partnership of husband and wife. This Catholic vision, they say, is rooted in the covenantal love of Jesus Christ. Adding with stress that family "constitutes a special revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason too (the family) can and should be called the domestic Church" This elevated position of the family, places it at the service of building up God's kingdom in history. Thus the family is to serve life in its transmission, both physically and spiritually by handing on values and traditions as well as developing the potential of each member to serve life at every age.³¹ And according to Hauerwas, every community has to provide some account and means to initiate their young into their moral traditions and activities, in order to encourage its members to move from the less good to better, and from the good to excellent. ³²

This becomes necessary when we discover in the words of Wilson citing Konrad Lorenz's famous phrase, saying, "inside every person there is a `parliament of instincts'. These instincts have to be curbed, otherwise they will bring insurmountable problems to persons. For as Wilson observed, the moral sense is among the calmer passions; they need to be protected against wilder rivals. ³³ Moreover, Wilson, suggests that moral conduct is so important that if the parents could spend half of the time they spend in teaching multiplication table in moral conduct, children will learn a lot. He insists that children are intuitive moralists, equipped by nature for making distinctions and rendering judgments. He maintains that instincts founded in nature are developed in the family, strengthened by daily habits - or punishment and social ostracism. Stressing further that we acquire virtues as we acquire crafts, by the practice of them. Above all says he, the family transforms a child's natural sociability into moral sense.³⁴

³¹National Conference of Catholic Bishops. (1988). *A Family Perspective In Church and Society*.

³²Hauerwas, S. (1986). *A Community of Character*. Indiana. University of Notre Dame Press

³³Wilson J. Q. *The Moral Sense*. Free Press, New York, 1993

³⁴ Ibid.

From learning theories we learn that children learn by imitation. Mowrer expatiated on this point when he quoted the works of Humphrey, Holt, and Piaget. According to him, Humphrey et al stated his research work as follows: Breed (1911) reports that pigeons placed in a cage where they could see each other, eating, pecked the ground although no food was given them. The sight of other birds pecking had become a conditioned stimulus for pecking. Here the imitation is direct from other animals, and does not depend on the animal's own activity.

If mother happens to gurgle at the same time as the child is gurgling and making few other movements, and gurgles, then after a time the gurgle from the mother will call forth the "imitative" gurgle from the child. Here the original secondary stimulus comes from without, and we have a kind of converse of type one. There may be other types, but all will be found to depend, as these do, upon the establishment of a conditioned reflex where the secondary stimulus is similar to the reaction. Imitative action may be defined as action involving a conditioned reflex the secondary stimulus of which is similar to the reaction.³⁵

This is supported by E. B. Holt's experiment which reads as follows: There is an amusing and instructive little game that can be played with child, say of five years that illustrates three points that I would bring out. At moment when the child is in good humor and not keenly bent on any special activity, one stands up in front of the child smiling, and copies whatever movement the child happens first to make. The child will almost infallibly (smile and) repeat this movement. One repeats after him. He will repeat again, and with each repetition the child's movement becomes more energetic and longer in sweep... Now when the game is in full swing, if the older person introduces a new movement the child will almost infallibly imitate it, and this will start a new sequence.³⁶

This little game brings up more points than the three that I wish to emphasize here. Of these three, the first is that the increasing vehemence of the child's repetition of his own and the other person's movement is directly due to echo...

Secondly, when the game is in full swing, and the older person introduces some new motion, the child will copy it..

Thirdly, our game with the child sheds some little light on the process known as "leadership" When the game is in full swing it becomes at times ambiguous as to which individual is leading, and which is copying, the other. (pp 117-119)

The third sample from Jean Piaget cited by Mowrer, makes it abundantly clear that the child learns by imitation. According to him Piaget maintains that "in

³⁵Mowrer H.O. (1960). *Learning Theory*. New York: John Wiley & Sons INC(pp. 4-5)

³⁶Ibid.

order to stimulate a baby's voice, the other voices must either reproduce certain familiar sounds already uttered by the child, or certain intonations known by him. Moreover, the child must be interested in the sounds he hears, in which case the contagion is in no way automatic, but is a kind of spontaneous circular reaction. In a word, vocal contagion is mere stimulation of the child's voice by another voice, without exact imitation of the child's voice.

Secondly, there is mutual imitation, which is apparently exact imitation, when the experimenter imitates the child at the very moment when he is uttering his or that particular sound. The child then redoubles his efforts, and stimulated by the other voice, imitates in his turn the sound his partner is imitating...The child makes no effort to adapt himself to the sound he hears, but merely has to retain the sound he himself was making a moment earlier, and his imitation is only a continuation of the circular reaction. (pp. 10-11).

When the child now hears others making sounds similar to those he himself makes, accommodation to these sounds is inseparable from a schema of assimilation already formed, and thus at once sets the schema in motion, the result being imitation.

The lessons from these experiments are very inspiring. The first experiment helps us to understand that actions are conditioned phenomena. These actions are best conditioned in people from their infancy and these conditioning are best done by the nearest person to the child who are invariably the parents who gave life to the child. This lesson is further forcefully demonstrated by Piaget's experiment in the third example.

The second experiment helps us to understand among other things the increment of learned act in children. The more they see the adult society do something the more they increase in doing it. A case in point now is the proliferation of the fire arms in the society today. It has been said that 2 out of every 3 adult American has fire arms today. This I believe has increased the phenomenal fire arms among the kids which is causing an untold hardship in the society today. As Edelman put it, it is adults who have manufactured and profited from the guns that have turned neighborhoods and schools into war zones.³⁷

So what do we expect children from the aforementioned families to be? Instead of searching for ways of amelioration, the public in the voice of Mr Reinharz is condemning and multiplying laws for the children. Hear Mr Reinharz, "This commission must communicate, to a Legislature that has refused to listen for seven years that 14 year - old with a gun is the most dangerous person on the block, in school or in the city. The youth that instinctively cannot understand the concept of morality should not possess without serious sanction the instrument that defines

³⁷Eshleman, J.R. (1994). Family. Boston. Allyn and Bacon Press.

morality more often than anything else." The question here is; has this 14 year - old ever been taught any morality? Does he or she know that carrying gun or killing people is bad? No! For as 'Philadelphia Inquiry' reported, "Hardman a 16- year -old doesn't see his biological father often, not since he left home when Hardman was 3. Now it is just him and his mother." If this kid turns out bad who shall we blame? Where do we expect such a kid to learn morality? That is why I agree with the paper that "kids are tempted to make it the way they've seen so many others. In the inner city, says the paper, kids see fewer and fewer of what Penn's Anderson calls "old heads" - those working men who believe in the work ethic, family life and the church."

This is roundly corroborated with the ethic of the Catholic's receiving Holy Communion. Holy Communion in the Catholic faith has been adjudged as the centerpiece of the faith. But with the latest statistics in two churches in Malali, Kaduna, Kaduna State, we discover the abysmal flaws of the adult community impacting dangerously on the faith. The two churches are St Monica and St Rita.³⁸ In the month of August, 23, 2015, six hundred and sixty eight [668] worshipers attended Mass in St Monica. Out of this number only 143 worshipers representing 21.4% received communion. This means that out of 668 worshipers who attended Mass that Sunday only 21.4% of the total attendees received communion. As Christ would ask, "Where are the nine?" in the case of the healed ten lepers, I now ask "where are the whooping 78.6% attendees? Granted that some of these might be children not old enough to receive Holy Communion and perhaps some miss road Protestants who embedded themselves in the congregation. But these group will never be more than 8%; so how do we account for the 70.6% who did not show up for Communion? As if this is not bad enough, when you look into St Rita's situation you will even raise more deep questions. On the same Sunday Mass, 663 worshipers attended Mass in St Rita. Only 136 worshiper which is 20.5% received communion. So where are the whooping 79.5% worshipers who failed to receive communion? How do we account for this huge number of Catholics who did not receive Holy Communion? The real question is what is the matter with this huge number not receiving communion? Why is such a poor attitude towards the reception of the Holy Communion? What exactly has gone wrong with the teaching and understanding of the Sacraments of the Church? Is it the problem of the teachers not communicating the Communion lessons properly, or the members too slow to understand, or total lack of understanding or that the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist does not hold any tangible meaning for the worshipers? Or what? Even more damning statistics below reveal even more bleak future of the faith of Catholic membership. From the same churches we have these dismal statistics as follows:

³⁸ Sunday Bulletin, St Monica's Parish Malali, Kaduna, August 23, 2015, Back Page.

Church Attendance Percentage ³⁹	Communion	Month	Day	Year	
St Monica	860	208	August	Sunday 16 th 2015	24.1%
St Rita	760	152	August	Sunday 16 th 2015	20%
St Monica	874	218	August	Sunday 24 th 2014	25%
St Rita	759	130	August	Sunday 24 th 2014	17.1%
St Monica	827	202	August	Sunday 17 th 2014	24.4%
St Rita	576	140	August	Sunday 17 th 2014	24.3%

The Statics above reveals that on Sunday, August 16th a total number of 1620 Catholics attended Mass both in St Monica's and St Rita's Church; only 360 attendants received communion representing 44.1% of the attendees; so where are the rest of 55.9% attendees?

The same question goes to Sunday, August 24th, 2014 where a total of 1633 Catholics attended Mass, both in St Monica and St Rita where only 348 members received communion representing 42.1%; attendees, so where are the rest of 57.9% attendees?

The same question could go to Sunday August, 17th 2014, where a total of 1403 Catholics attended Mass, in both St Monica and St Rita where only 342 members representing 48.7%; attendees received communion; so where are the rest of 51.3% attendees?

In as much as the answers to the raised questions are very hard to come by; the statistics in these randomly sampled Sundays demonstrate that less than half of the total Mass attendees received Holy Communion – the centerpiece of Catholic faith; so what is the matter with the Catholics?. From this ugly situation, one might ask, what shall be the future of Catholic Faith in the sampled parish? Since these statics could be said to be representing the majority of many parishes in the Archdiocese of Kaduna and indeed in many Catholic Archdioceses and Dioceses in Nigeria; the question now is, how can we account for the future of the Church in Nigeria? Does this not overtly demonstrate that the pastoral instructions particularly in the areas of the Sacraments are very weak in all the dioceses? From all indications even the blind can see the bleak future of the church. Are the pastors really trying their best, only that the congregation is too dull to understand or totally skeptical about the whole idea of the Sacraments?

Whatever may be the answer, it is glaringly clear that the sacramental faith is in bad shape. Hence, the Bishops of Nigeria must stand up and give a clarion call on their

³⁹ St Monica's Sunday Bulletin August 16th 2015 and August 17th and 24th 2014.

priests who must wake up the Catechists and indeed all the teachers of Catechism to wake up to their catechetical responsibilities. This will stir the total membership of the Church to arise to look inward to see the dire need for deep understanding and practice of the values of the Sacraments as essential prerequisite for salvation. This is very important, particularly at this moment in time when the insurrection of many churches and the ever increasing influence of circularization is not only causing confusion among the Catholics but also leading many Catholics to either throw in their towel of faith with the mushroom churches or decide to remain a Catholic but a lazy noncommittal one. Some people say that the reason is with the time people started receiving the Holy Communion. Although it is true that many Catholics indeed start receiving the communion very late in life and therefore never developed that kind of sturdy stamina and fervent ethic for communion; but we can reasonably say that quite a good number of the congregants start quite in a good time but obviously show deep rooted laxity in the reception. This has been totally blamed on the sloth environment developed by the adult and lukewarm Catholics who form the group of early receivers but never bothered to develop further interest after their "First Holy Communion." Many more other reasons could be adduced like casualties from marriage debacles, serial mortal sinners and others, but these group of bad-Catholics can never assemble to such a huge percentage as we have noticed above. Whatever might be other possible further reasons might be handled by further diligent studies, but at moment, what we do know from this study is the outstanding apathy in the reception of the Holy Eucharist. For even the blind can see from the statistics that the children of this generation have slim or no role model to emulate at all. Hence, there is no gainsaying the fact that Catholic families have not done well in this regard. They have not lived up to what they profess and have not demonstrated in their practices a warmth and glowing example enough to attract the faith of the incoming generation. The adult community must stand up to live up to the children's role model by seriously living committed sacramental life to the open glare of both the young and old. This paper is indeed calling on all the recipients to buckle up to show a sign of deep understanding of the Sacrament by cultivating a habit of frequent and fervent reception of the Sacrament. They must wake up by applying the type of sincere dogged devotion they apply to all their business endeavors. Our duty this time is to deepen our knowledge and practice of the faith in all the Sacraments of the Church but particularly the Holy Eucharist, Penance and matrimony so that in no distant time the Catholics with Prophet Joel 2:26 will acclaim, "Never again will my people be ashamed."

Conclusion

The foregoing has examined the sacramental life of the Catholic Family and found her wanting. It exposed unimaginable slothful attitude deeply surrounding the sacramental life of the Catholic community of faith and suggested some palliatives for amelioration. The paper borrowing from the experts of child psychology suggested early education; beginning from infancy through adulthood to old age to be the ideal stratagem to build up the shattered attitude of the

worshippers. The paper makes a clarion call on the church leaders beginning from the Bishops, Priests, Catechists and indeed all well-meaning membership of the church to rise and redeem the falling faith of the Church. The paper underscored the fact that, since the source of moral character is within the family, the parents, and indeed all the children's caregivers must rise up to their responsibilities by inculcating right behaviors including religious behaviors in the children. Here, the paper resolved to target the establishment of sound foundation for religious faith. In this way it will be difficult for the church to experience this type of dangerous drop in her sacramental life. Thus the solution for the seeming crashing church and rotten society therefore, is neither in building more prison yards nor in Brady Bill expedition. Rather, it is in going back to the roots with every sense of purpose. The root at this point in time is the family, the traditional family where character is formed; where authentic religion is practiced; where children are loved and trained with all the good aspirations of the society. A place where Sawatzky et al call the basic unit within which the child functions, where the child's emotional needs are primarily met and in which behavior patterns are formed.⁴⁰

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**THE CONCEPT OF 'FAMILY' AS THE CONTRIBUTION OF AFRICA TO THE
CONSECRATED LIFE**

Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu,, O.S.A., Ph.D

Augustinian Institute, Makurdi

Abstract

The Year of Consecrated Life which was inaugurated last year 2014 by his Holiness Pope Francis, and which will end in February 2016 has provided diverse opportunities for consecrated persons to reflect on the different dimensions of the consecrated life. This year being the year of the extraordinary synod on the family, a new aperture has opened as a locus for reflection on the consecrated life. In attentiveness to the various discourses on the family and the consecrated life, this piece focused on the concept of family as the contribution of Africa to the consecrated life. It questions the contribution of African ontology to the historical evolution of the consecrated life. It adopted the historical and phenomenological methods of inquiry in its investigation. The research discovered that the spirit of community in the consecrated life was borne from the African spirit of the family.

Keywords: African, family, consecrated life, ontology, community, theology.

Introduction

At the heart of the evolution of the 17th century, emerged a popular perspective among scholars: philosophers, anthropologists, sociologists, theologians, among others that Africa contributed nothing to world civilization. Since it was costily assumed that the presence of the human prerogative of reasoning was absent in the African, it was not surprising that they were relegated to the background of obscurantism and impotency. Among this college of thinkers was Hegel (1956) who posits that the Negro is yet to go beyond his instinctual behaviour to identify a being outside of himself:

In Negro life the characteristic point is the fact that consciousness had not yet attained to the realization of any substantial existence.... Thus distinction between himself as an individual and the universality of his essential being, the African in the uniform, undeveloped oneness of his existence has not yet attained. (p. 93).

In the same vein, Levy-Bruhl (cited by Njoku 2002), questioned the veracity of an untutored African knowing about God. In his perspective, the African way of thinking is non-logical and full of inner self-contradictions and, therefore, unworthy of the consideration of the civilized mind. Sharing in the contention of Levy-Bruhl, Baker (cited in Kanu 2005a) writes:

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. He rarely believes in a future state of reward and punishment, which whether true or not are infallible indices of human progress. (p. 199).

In the opinion of Masolo (1994), at the heart of this debate on the identity of the African is the concept of reason, a value which is believed to stand as the great divide between the civilized and the uncivilized, the logical and the mystical. Kanu

(2015b) explains that this perception of the Negro by Western scholars have made Negro-hood a burden for the Negro- with an attendant crisis of identity and authenticity. In our own time of African cultural renaissance, an attempt to identify and appreciate the African cultural heritage, circumstances have arisen to question the contribution of 'African civilization' to world civilization. This year, being the year of consecrated life, it would be interesting to question the contribution of African ontology to the historical evolution of the consecrated life. This piece, therefore, has the burden of unveiling the contribution of the African cultural heritage to the rich religious heritage of the consecrated life.

The Family in African Ontology

According to Alyward, (1975), the African traditional life is centered around the family. The family is where life is generated, a basic unit of life which represents in miniature the life of the entire people. Kanu (2015a&b) avers that, it is in the family that the values of the clan, the tribe and of Africa are transmitted. It is, therefore, not surprising that the family, with all it implies, has been one of the strongest forces in African life. This is evident in Uchendu's words in *Things Fall Apart*:

We do not ask for wealth because he that has health and children will also have wealth. We do not pray to have more money but to have more kinsmen. We are better than animals because we have kinsmen. An animal rubs its itching flank against a tree, a man asks his kinsman to scratch him. (Achebe 1958, p. 132).

The African concept of family is different from the Western understanding. In Igbo-African ontology, the family is referred to as the *ezi na ulo*, that is, literally, *the outside relations and those in the house*. Unlike the Western concept, the idea of family does not only apply to husband, wife and children, but also includes, somewhat vaguely, the in-laws, uncles, cousins, nephews distant and near, and even maids and servants. Thus, according to Ogbalu (2006), when the Igbo-African person talks about his family, he refers to his wife or wives, that is, if he has more than one, his children and everyone that is dependent on him. He might also include his children's children and wives. However, when a young man refers to his family, he means his father, mother and a number of other relatives. It is because of this extension capacity of the African family, that the concept 'extended family' was coined to convey the profound meaning it embodies. The African concept of the family does not exclude the ancestors and the unborn members who are still in the loins of the living. They are, for the African, the buds of hope and expectation.

Characteristically, the African family is an institution in which "everybody is somebody". Westerman (1949) puts this succinctly: "The whole of existence for the African is organically embodied in a series of associations and life appears to have full value only in those close ties" (p. 65). Achebe (1958) writes:

A man who calls his kinsman to feast does not do so to save them from starving. They all have food in their homes. When we gather together in the moonlight village ground it is not because of the moon. Everyman can see it in his own compound. We come together because it is good for kinsmen to do so. (p. 155).

The African family, according to Iroegbu (1995) is bound together to the extent that individuals find meaning and fulfillment in it; the individual is not defined without reference to the family: he/she is either the son or daughter of someone, or the father or mother of someone. The indisputable and inevitable presence of, not just the family to which the individual belongs is expressed in proverbs such as, *Ngwere ghara ukwu osisi, aka akpara ya* (If a lizard stays off from the foot of a tree, it would be caught by man). Mbiti (1969) sums up the bond between the individual and the African family thus: "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore, I am" (p.108).

In every African family relationship, there is hierarchy based on age and degree of kinship. In this relationship, Mbiti (1969) avers that the oldest members have a higher status than the youngest. Within this hierarchy, there are duties, obligations, rights and privileges dictated by the moral sense of the society. Failure in performing ones duty either as parents and children or otherwise has consequences attached. In the family, it is the duty of family members to be hospitable to one another, relatives, friends and even strangers.

The Theology of the Consecrated Life

Consecrated persons according to Kanu (2015) are the members of Religious Institutes and Societies of Apostolic Life. The Code of Canon Law (1983) teaches that they are lay persons or clerics who assume the evangelical counsels by means of a sacred bond, and become members of an institute of consecrated life according to the law of the church. They totally dedicate themselves to God with the goal of pursuing perfection in charity by faithfully embracing the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. In this sense, consecrated persons respond freely to the invitation of the Holy Spirit to follow Christ the poor, the celibate, the obedient son, more closely, thus becoming in this life a sign of the life to come. *Lumen Gentium* (1964) maintains that:

The evangelical counsels of chastity dedicated to God, poverty and obedience are based upon the words and examples of the Lord. They were further commanded by the Apostles and Fathers of the Church, as well as by the doctors and pastors of souls (No. 43).

These counsels in the contention of Fleming (1990), are referred to as evangelical because the religious vows are central to the life of Jesus and message and also because religious consecration is founded on baptismal consecration. The consecrated life is also traceable to the post-apostolic church, especially to those

early Christians who dedicated themselves to a gospel-oriented life-style, to a radical following of Jesus Christ. The first person in this line according to Nwachukwu (2010) was Anthony of Egypt. He was followed by a line of disciples, until it became an institution in the Church.

Very significant is the idea of consecration. It is derived from the word 'holy' or 'holiness'. In Hebrew it is *qadash* and in Greek *Hagios*; these are translated to mean 'to consecrate' (Leviticus 15:31; Ezekiel 14:7). In Numbers 6:5-7, 12, the Nazirites were referred to as consecrated because of their vows to God. This makes the person holy, a consecration that separates the person from others. Thus the word consecration implies a setting apart or a separation. This separation for Mayers (1987) does not in any way imply superiority, or complete severance from those the consecrated are called to serve. *Lumen Gentium* (1964) says, "The state which is constituted by the profession of the evangelical counsels, though it does not belong to the hierarchical structure of the church, nevertheless, undeniably belongs to the life and holiness of the church" (No. 44). The document continues:

The holiness of the Church is fostered in a special way by the observance of the counsels proposed in the gospel by the Lord to his disciples. An eminent position among these is held by virginity or the celibate state. (No. 42).

Thus, *Perfectae Caritatis* (1965) exhorts consecrated person thus:

Members of each institute should recall first of all that by professing the evangelical counsels they responded to a divine call so that by being not only dead to sin but also renouncing the world they may live for God alone. They have dedicated their entire lives to his service. This constitutes a special consecration, which is deeply rooted in that of Baptism and expresses it more fully. (No. 5).

The Consecrated Life before Encounter with Africa

An examination of the historical development of the consecrated life reveals that for more than two centuries, Christians were persecuted in the Roman empire until the 4th century, when Constantine legalized Christianity in the Empire of Rome. With this legalization, Christianity became the popular religion in Rome, however, it lost the self-sacrificing spirit which it possessed during the era of Roman persecution. In reaction, many holy men and women went into the desert, propagating a new kind of martyrdom for the kingdom of God. The Greek word for desert, *eremos*, is the root word for the eremitic life. Those who lived this kind of life were referred to as hermits (200AD-350AD). Because of the role which the desert played as the *locus* for the expression of this kind of life, this period is also referred to as the age of the desert. The pioneer of this kind of life who symbolized this new ideal in a way no one else had done was Saint Anthony of the Desert. He provided guidance to many other hermits who were scattered in the deserts of Egypt and Syria in search of the way of perfection. The image of the religious life at the time was that of a holy

ascetic. In the desert they prayed and fasted, doing battle with the devil in the wilderness as Christ had done long ago. However, they did all these as individual hermits. The idea of community was absent.

The Consecrated Life after Encounter with Africa

With the passage of time, the eremitic life gave birth to the cenobitic style of life (350-1200), that is, a communal asceticism. The word cenobitic is from the word *cenobium* which means community. As saint Anthony was the pioneer figure of the eremitic life, St Pachomius was the father of the cenobitic life. He was born to pagan parents in 292 in Thebes, Luxor, in Egypt. He adopted the idea of communal patterns and established a monastery where monks lived in common between 318 and 323. He, with the help of his sister Mary, founded a network of about ten thousand monastic communities for men and women. After Saint Basil visited the monks of Egypt, Palestine and Syria, he founded a monastic community in Asia Minor, with the addition of apostolic service as his innovation. In Palestine, Melania the Elder, a friend of Saint Jerome, promoted communal asceticism. With her experience of famous hermits in Scetis and Nitria, she founded a monastery for women in Jerusalem and another for men, which she left in the care of her disciple Rufinus. Gradually, from the Eastern half of the Roman empire, Cada et al (1979) aver that this way of religious life spread to the Western half of the Roman empire, especially in Spain and Gaul. As these different persons moved beyond the shores of Africa, Egypt, they took with them the value of community which was at the heart of monasteries of the time.

In Algeria, Africa, an African, Saint Augustine began a community of monks also referred to as Canon Regulars in 397. They lived according to the rule of Saint Augustine in monasteries, sharing their goods in common. Augustine wrote down a rule that is called The Rule of Saint Augustine; it was followed by every Augustinian and some religious Orders and Congregations that are based on the Augustinian principle. Their main purpose of coming together, according to the Rule and Constitution of the Order of Saint Augustine (2010), is to live harmoniously in one house intent upon God and in oneness of heart and mind. They called nothing their own but possessed everything in common. With Pachomius and Saint Augustine, however, the frame for the consecrated life was already made, with the idea of community life at its centre. Thus, in 529 Saint Benedict founded a monastic community in Monte Cassino in 529 along the same spirit of community living. Gradually, the importance of the presence of community spirit spread across Europe. This spirit of community in the consecrated life that began in Africa and by Africans and then spread to other parts of the world is considered the African touch of the consecrated life.

Conclusion

This piece has studied the contribution of the African cultural heritage to the consecrated life, with particular reference to the concept of family in the African

cultural heritage. It further studied the concept of family in Africa and the theology of the consecrated life as a background to the study of this contribution. The eremitic era in the history of the consecrated life was explored, and it revealed an epoch distant from an encounter with the fundamental principles of Africanity; at this time, consecrated persons dwelt as individual hermits in their various hermitages. With the emergence of consecrated persons like Pachomius and Saint Augustine, who had a community of consecrated persons in Africa, the idea of a coenobium began. This is believed to be borne from the rich African cultural heritage of the family. This is, therefore, understood as the contribution of Africa to the consecrated life. This further helps the African consecrated person to understand that the religious life is not just a Western religious culture that was transported from Europe to Africa, but that it is a religious system to which he made fundamental contributions and, therefore, has a stake in, and thus, should protect.

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FAMILY BACKGROUND AND ITS ROLE IN ANSWERING RELIGIOUS CALL

Emmanuel N. Ogu, OP (Ph.D)⁴¹

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the role family background plays in nurturing vocations. The family as we know is a domestic church. It is the first school of faith where children learn to recognize the call of God. Vocation is fundamentally the following of Jesus in his radical way of life unto the cross. This requires the use of freedom that is totally for nothing else than pure self-giving love. Additionally, it talks about the importance of family prayer, catechesis and parents as the first witnesses of vocation love to their children.

The family is a vital part of the process of life long faith formation at all stages of faith development; and that parents need to assume their roles in fostering faith and a deeper spirituality within their homes. It is within the heart of the family that the call to a radical following of Jesus is frequently heard. There the mystery of vocation, of God calling individuals for consecration and mission, is born, fostered and encouraged, nourished and guided. Family background is an important consideration in human formation and for a solid foundation. For example, Saul was a Hebrew born of Hebrew parents and was brought up in the Law of Moses. One aspect of the family is to inspire children to discern and follow their own chosen vocations from God. The Church understands family to mean a domestic Church, the basic unit of society in which God is worshipped and relationships formed. We recognized that parents are the first educators of their children, providing the foundation for a spiritual and religious life. That is why the family is the first school of faith in which children learn to recognize the call of God and respond to it.

Formation in the family is fundamental and foundational in responding to this call. The child born into a family starts early to imbibe the ethos of the family as we see in the boy Saul. It is here that the first school of faith begins for the child as we see in the boy Saul. Thus the family is the first school of faith where children learn to recognize the call of the Lord and respond to it. The young Samuel in the scripture heard the voice of the Lord in the quiet of the Temple⁴², so the family provides a holy space in which the Lord's voice may echo and be recognized in the hearts and souls of their children. The Church documents used creative terms to describe the family; some of the terms are "natural and fundamental school for faith formation," the first experience of the Church.

⁴¹ Rev.Fr. Emmanuel N. Ogu, OP (Ph.D) currently teaches at the Dominican Institute, Ibadan, and is also the Student-Master of the Dominican Student brothers in formation for his Order.

⁴² I Sam. 3

We know that the core teaching of the Second Vatican council is the radical call of all to holiness. However, we also know that God calls a chosen few, that should be many, to follow him even more closely in a life of apostolic celibacy for the kingdom of God, whether it be as a priest, religious, or layperson. The founder of Opus Dei once remarked that those called by God own ninety percent of their vocation to their parents. The family is the seed-bed of vocations."⁴³

Pope St. John Paul II posits that the role of family "as educators is decisive that scarcely anything can compensate for their failure in it. For it devolves on Parents to create a family atmosphere so animated with love and reverence for God and others that a well-rounded personal and social development will be fostered among the children. Hence, the family is the first school of those social virtues which every society needs."⁴⁴ Hence, the strength and stability of the family represents the condition for the growth and nourishment of vocations because stability creates an environment of harmony, love, and joy in which to discern spiritual realities.⁴⁵

Parents are the first preachers of the faith to their children, a task that is carried out by words and by example. Smith, affirmed that the best way to get most youth involved in and serious about their faith communities is to get their parents more involved in and serious about their faith communities. Childhood religiosity also fosters commitment to the Church – Catholics who learn to be religious when they are young find it relatively easy to claim their Catholic identity. They also come to appreciate the benefits of being Catholic.⁴⁶ Thus parents who love their own vocation and love themselves are the best witnesses of vocational love to their children. Within the family values and motivations begins to be formed.

Vocations begin to be imbued with a deep Christian identity and mission. In the family the kingdom of God orientation of moral character starts. In sum, the quality of family life, of relationships within the family, either nourishes and fosters vocation or weakens and destroys it. Pope Francis avers that the Church highlights the role of intact families with two parents, both mother and father, playing complimentary roles of carrying out this mission of love, however the church has always manifested the greatest care for divided families and believes in the on-going witness of single mothers and fathers to their own children's faith and vocational discernment.⁴⁷

⁴³ John McCloskey, "The Family: Seedbed of Vocations" *Catholic City: The Mary Foundation*, <http://www.catholicity.com/mccloskey/familyvocations.html> (10 Aug. 2015).

⁴⁴ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio* (November 22, 1981), n. 36

⁴⁵ Pope Francis, "What the Popes Want Parents to Know about Vocation Promotion" *Vocation Boom*, <http://www.vocationboom.com/4725-2/> (August 10, 2015).

⁴⁶ Smith Christian & Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul searching: The Religious and Spiritual lives of Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 34.

⁴⁷ Pope Francis, "What the Popes Want Parents to Know about Vocation Promotion" *Vocation Boom*.

The family is the environment in which human personality and affective maturity are to be formed in children so as to prepare them for productive life as Christian adults and citizens (Pope Francis). It is the duty of parents to impact this catechesis to their children. Also, it is their duty to accompany young people struggling to choose their proper vocation. The Church documents also “places a high value on the parents’ cooperation in the work of Christian formation with educators and pastors. Perhaps it is best to say that Parish catechetical programs and schools are encouraged to cooperate and coordinate with parents who have the primary responsibility for and authority over their children’s education.”⁴⁸

A child who receives the integral formation in his/her family will be ready to discern the vocation proper to him/her. Families are the seed-beds for religious vocation. Children whose parents practice their faith are the ones most likely to hear and respond to Christ’s invitation to follow him in the consecrated life.⁴⁹ Youth in families where faith is often expressed by Parents in word and deed are three times more likely to participate in Church activities and spend time helping others. Families that express their faith also have an impact on participation in Church life and activities. It is evident that youth who are most likely to respond to God’s invitation to consecrated life are those raised in homes where faith is part of the normal ebb and flow of family life.

Pope Francis stressed the importance of prayer by saying that, the role of prayer in the family is indispensable, not only for the growth of the life of faith but most especially in the planting and growth of a religious vocation, which in itself will be dedicated to the ministry of prayer and liturgy in future. The church looks at the family as the first seminary or formation, because it is in the family that children acquire piety, prayer and of love for the church.⁵⁰ The family is an intimate environment where good attitude and behaviour are transmitted and acquired. Thus formation in the family is fundamental and foundational for a child to discern his or her proper vocation in life. Parents are encouraged to pray with one another and with their family, so that abundant blessing may come upon their family and marriage love and thus find a full expression of its spiritual fruitfulness.

Pope St. John Paul II says that “We must remember that if parents do not live the values of the gospel, the young man or woman will find it very difficult to discern the calling, to understand the need for the sacrifices which must be faced, and to appreciate the beauty of the goal to be achieved.”⁵¹ Hence, parents need to have a sense of vocation and mission themselves to pass on to their children. Religious practices in the home virtually double the probability of a youth responding to the

⁴⁸ Pope Francis, “What the Popes Want Parents to Know about Vocation Promotion” *Vocation Boom*.

⁴⁹ Butler, Sara; “Families foster openness to religious life”, 2015

⁵⁰ Pope Francis, “What the Popes Want Parents to Know about Vocation Promotion” *Vocation Boom*.

⁵¹ Pope St. John Paul II, *The Consecrated Life: Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Vita Consecrata* (1996), n. 107

call to serve the Lord. The more children participate in religious activities and develop a sense that religion is an important part of their lives, the more they are likely to have close personal relationships with God and the more they are likely to learn about the major developments such as Vatican II, both of which foster adherence to Church's teachings. The two most important influences on youths responding to God's invitation are having parents who talk to them about religion and having religious educators and catechists who are effective in their ministry. Their commitment to Catholic practices needs to be firm and consistent. That means attending Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation, arranging their children's catechetical instruction and sending them to Catholic schools. Parents received their children from God and must be willing to give them back to God for the service of his people.

Finally, the contextualized and holistic family formation is essential for answering the religious call. The family witness through prayer and active participation in the church, provides a good home for nurturing vocation. Thus parents' commitment to Catholic practices needs to be firm and consistent. Above all, the active enlivening, integrating and uniting work of the Holy Spirit, the giver of charisms and vocation is needed to enable an individual answer the call.

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PRIESTS AND RELIGIOUS AS FRUITS OF THE FAMILY

CLETUS NWAFOR, OP⁵²

ABSTRACT

After an attempt to articulate the fact that priests and religious are uniquely, fruits of the family in keeping with Divine Ordinance, the paper makes use of what is articulated to further show that the continuity of humanity and the church consists in the family. By way of conclusion and submission, it invites all men and women of goodwill to an ever proactive resurgence against the dictatorship of the “culture of death” which more than ever threatens our collective existence – to fight and rediscover the glory of humanity which consists in the family being a domestic church.

INTRODUCTION

Priests and religious are not necessary being which God is. They are biological fruits of the natural family ordained by God as comprising of father, mother and their children. The family traditionally understood as such is key to understanding the co-creative role of husband and wife in the entire scheme of creation insofar as it takes the husband and his wife to achieve the procreation reality for the continuity of humanity and the church in keeping with God’s ordinance.⁵³ In this connection, priests and religious become an even more fruitful extension of this Divine ordinance by the very reality of their being set apart as special servants of God to gather the scattered children of God to that eternal kingdom, that one great family where God will be all in all. Such is the pulsating nuance in understanding priests and religious as fruits of the family which this paper seeks to articulate.

For the purpose of fruitful reflection, this paper shall explore the dialectic of love and life in situating priests and religious in the discourse on the family whilst integrating the necessity of the evangelical counsels in this regard. It shall proceed to show albeit an excursus, that the continuity of humanity and the church rests on the family and conclude by inviting all men and women of good will to an even more proactiveness against the “culture of death”.

THE DIALECTIC OF LOVE AND LIFE IN SITUATING PRIESTS AND RELIGIOUS IN THE FAMILY DISCOURSE

⁵² Cletus Nwafor is a Dominican brother of the Province of St. Joseph the worker Nigeria and Ghana. He currently studies theology at the Dominican Institute Ibadan, Nigeria.

⁵³ Genesis 1:28; 2:22-24. Psalm 127:3 speaks especially of children as a gift from Yahweh and a real blessing, a point clarified by *Familiaris Consortio* when it taught that “...the fruitfulness of conjugal love is not restricted solely to the procreation of children...”

The family is a nursery of love and life. John Paul II teaches that “the fundamental task of the family is to serve life, to actualize in history the original blessing of the Creator—that of transmitting by procreation the divine image from person to person”⁵⁴. In his *Evangelium Vitae*, He goes even further to speak of the family as the “sanctuary of life.”⁵⁵ The centrality of the sanctuary of life which the family is, is intrinsically linked to the prior centrality of love which God is⁵⁶, insofar as “Love begets life and life is brewed in love.” Here, the interplay of love and life in situating priests and religious in the family discourse stirs a fruitful reflection. The family is the fruit of conjugal love. Priests and religious are primary products or rather, fruits of this consummated conjugal love. As fruits of love, they freely assume the vocation of unique and radical witnessing to that Supreme Love which God is by the very reality of their vocations.⁵⁷ In simple terms, priests and religious, primarily, bring God to souls and souls to God who is love. For, “Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it.”⁵⁸ Pope Francis underscores this missionary dimension of the family which Priests and Religious men and women eloquently testify to precisely in their being set apart when he taught that “the Christian family is missionary: it announces the love of God to the world.” To better dedicate themselves to this service of love and life, Religious men and women profess the evangelical counsel. But, while the evangelical counsel is native to the religious life, it cannot be said to be alien to the priesthood. To the essentiality of the counsels to the priesthood as well as the religious life we wish to now turn.

THE EVANGELICAL COUNSELS: A TESTAMENT TO LOVE AND LIFE⁵⁹

The evangelical counsel is grounded on the truth that God is the one good and treasure who can fulfil and satisfy his people as no created good can.⁶⁰ Understood as such, the essentiality of the evangelical counsel to the priesthood and religious life

⁵⁴ *Familiaris Consortio*, 28

⁵⁵ *Evangelium Vitae*, 6, 11, 59,88,92,94

⁵⁶ 1 John 4:8

⁵⁷ See, CIC 573 §1; *Vita Consecrata*, 3. See also, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 22-23

⁵⁸ *Redemptor hominis*, 10

⁵⁹ I am indebted to my brothers, Basil and Paul for shaping my understanding of how the evangelical counsels cannot be said to be alien to the priesthood in their book, Basil Cole,OP and Paul Conner,OP, *Christian Totality Theology of the Consecrated Life*(Mumbai: St Paul Press, 1997),p. 326-329. Hereafter: *Christian Totality Theology of the Consecrated Life*.

⁶⁰ *Vita Consecrata*, 16 . see also, *Christian Totality Theology of the Consecrated Life* ,p. 328

becomes evident while the reductionism that sees the counsel as an exclusive preserve of the Religious life diminishes. To me, the distinctions usually made between radical poverty, chastity and obedience embraced by the Religious on the one hand and then, clerical poverty, celibate-chastity and obedience embraced by secular priests is more of a technical distinction than a real distinction. For, in effect, the counsels aids Priests and Religious to conform their lives more and more to the example of the Poor, Chaste and Obedient Christ their spouse. John Paul II echoes this fact when he teaches that, "Jesus Christ, who brought his pastoral charity to perfection on the cross with a complex exterior and interior emptying of self, is both the model and source of the virtue of obedience, chastity and poverty which the priest is called to live out as an expression of his pastoral charity for his brothers and sisters..."⁶¹ Hence, every Priest whether a secular or religious need to cultivate what theology calls the "evangelical counsels of ease": obedience, chastity and poverty. For even when these counsels are not professed as vows, the virtues they represent greatly assist especially the diocesan or secular Priests to live up to the dignity and mission to which he has been consecrated by the imposition of hands and the prayer of consecration.⁶² Speaking of the evangelical counsel vis-à-vis its native audience that is, the consecrated persons, John Paul II reiterates that,

the profession of the evangelical counsels makes them a kind of sign and prophetic statement for the community of the brethren and for the world; consequently they can echo in a particular way the ecstatic words spoken by Peter: "Lord, it is well that we are here" (Mt 17:4). These words bespeak the Christocentric orientation of the whole Christian life. But they also eloquently express the radical nature of the vocation to the consecrated life: how good it is for us to be with you, to devote ourselves to you, to make you the one focus of our lives! Truly those who have been given the grace of this special communion of love with Christ feel as it were caught up in his splendour: he is "the fairest of the sons of men" (Ps 45:2), the One beyond compare.⁶³

Speaking of the necessity of the counsels as the surest and securest means to eternal bliss vis-à-vis the new law and the states of life being considered in this discourse, the robust and clarificatory teaching of the Angelic Doctor of the church is noteworthy. Aquinas teaches us that,

... man is placed between the things of this world, and spiritual goods wherein eternal happiness consists: so that the more he cleaves to the one, the more he withdraws from the other, and conversely. Wherefore he that cleaves

⁶¹ *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 30g

⁶² *Christian Totality Theology of the Consecrated Life*, p. 326. See also, CIC 1009 §2

⁶³ *Vita Consecrata*, 15

wholly to the things of this world, so as to make them his end, and to look upon them as the reason and rule of all he does, falls away altogether from spiritual goods. Hence this disorder is removed by the commandments. Nevertheless, for man to gain the end aforesaid, he does not need to renounce the things of the world altogether: since he can, while using the things of this world, attain to eternal happiness, provided he does not place his end in them: but he will attain more speedily thereto by giving up the goods of this world entirely: wherefore the evangelical counsels are given for this purpose. Now the goods of this world which come into use in human life, consist in three things: viz. in external wealth pertaining to the "concupiscence of the eyes"; carnal pleasures pertaining to the "concupiscence of the flesh"; and honors, which pertain to the "pride of life," according to 1 Jn. 2:16: and it is in renouncing these altogether, as far as possible, that the evangelical counsels consist. Moreover, every form of the religious life that professes the state of perfection is based on these three: since riches are renounced by poverty; carnal pleasures by perpetual chastity; and the pride of life by the bondage of obedience.⁶⁴

Again, addressing it to its native audience, the consecrated persons, John Paul II summarizes the necessity of the counsel and its place in the human and ecclesia family thus:

By professing the evangelical counsels, consecrated persons not only make Christ the whole meaning of their lives but strive to reproduce in themselves, as far as possible, "that form of life which he, as the Son of God, accepted in entering this world." By embracing chastity, they make their own the pure love of Christ and proclaim to the world that he is the Only-Begotten Son who is one with the Father (cf. Jn 10:30, 14:11). By imitating Christ's poverty, they profess that he is the Son who receives everything from the Father, and gives everything back to the Father in love (cf. Jn 17:7, 10). By accepting, through the sacrifice of their own freedom, the mystery of Christ's filial obedience, they profess that he is infinitely beloved and loving, as the One who delights only in the will of the Father (cf. Jn 4:34), to whom he is perfectly united and on whom he depends for everything. By this profound "configuration" to the mystery of Christ, the consecrated life brings about in a special way that *confessio Trinitatis* which is the mark of all Christian life; it acknowledges with wonder the sublime beauty of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and bears joyful witness to his loving concern for every human being.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 108 a. 4.

⁶⁵ *Vita Consecrata*, 16

ON EVANGELICAL OBEDIENCE

We shall dwell a little more on this counsel because Thomas Aquinas teaches us that obedience is chiefest of the counsels and gives us three reasons for saying so thus:

First, because by the vow of obedience man offers God something greater, namely his own will; for this is of more account than his own body, which he offers God by continence, and than external things, which he offers God by the vow of poverty. Wherefore that which is done out of obedience is more acceptable to God than that which is done of one's own will,..."Secondly, because the vow of obedience includes the other vows, but not vice versa: for a religious, though bound by vow to observe continence and poverty, yet these also come under obedience, as well as many other things besides the keeping of continence and poverty. Thirdly, because the vow of obedience extends properly to those acts that are closely connected with the end of religion; and the more closely a thing is connected with the end, the better it is. It follows from this that the vow of obedience is more essential to the religious life. For if a man without taking a vow of obedience were to observe, even by vow, voluntary poverty and continence, he would not therefore belong to the religious state, which is to be preferred to virginity observed even by vow; for Augustine says (De Virgin. xlvi): "No one, methinks, would prefer virginity to the monastic life."⁶⁶

John Paul II affirms Aquinas' teaching in reiterating that obedience is "a priestly value of primary importance" for "obedience to the father is the very heart of the priesthood of Christ...made servant, obedient to death on the cross(Phil. 2:7-8)"⁶⁷ John Paul II speaks of three dimensions of clerical obedience but of my interest in this paper is the apostolic and communitarian dimensions of obedience because of its existential relevance to harmonious pastoral coexistence and solidarity between the diocesan clergy and the religious clergy working in their diocese – their fellow workers in the vineyard of the Lord. Obedience is *Apostolic* says John Paul II because it "recognizes, loves and serves the church in her hierarchical structure."⁶⁸ Here, the priest is enjoined to develop a *habitus* of conscientious submission to his ordinary and to Peter's successor, the Pope. In this connection, "the obligation to follow the magisterium in matters of faith and morals is intrinsically united to all the functions which the priest must perform in the church. Dissent in this area is to be considered grave, in that it produces scandal and confusion among the faithful."⁶⁹ Evangelical

⁶⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 186 a. 8.

⁶⁷ *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 61

⁶⁸ *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 28b

⁶⁹ *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 62

obedience is also *communitarian* in the sense that the priests' mission is a collaborative one. Of striking interest in this regard is the emphasis on the pastoral solidarity and collaboration that ought to exist between the diocesan priests and the religious priests working in the diocese and who according to this manual "represent a spiritual enrichment of the entire diocesan presbyterate, to which they contribute specific charisms and special ministries, stimulating the particular church by their presence to be more intensely open to the church throughout the world."⁷⁰ In our own time when religious men and women are somewhat perceived as expatriates in their diocese of residence by the diocesan clergy, this message of salvation speaks to such an unhealthy existential reality. Today, more than ever, evangelical obedience yearns to be lived as the proper antidote for the idolatry of power. Evangelical obedience conquers the love of power whilst enthroning the power of love without which no one can behold God.

ON EVANGELICAL CHASTITY

The order of presbyterate may be conferred "Only on men who have given proof that they have been called by God to the gift of chastity in absolute and perpetual celibacy."⁷¹ Hence, the priest is obliged to embrace celibate-chastity especially in our own time where it would seem that celibate-chastity is an alternative forgone to amass material wealth and live opulently. The discipline and virtue of clerical celibacy is "a sign of communion with Jesus Christ in his complete gift of self to the church."⁷² "the church as spouse of Jesus Christ, wishes to be loved in the total and exclusive manner in which Jesus Christ her head and spouse loved her. Priestly celibacy, then, is the gift of self in and with Christ to his church and expresses the priest's service to the church in and with the Lord."⁷³ "Celibacy frees the priest for the ministry of generous and undivided love." It is "that liberating novelty which the world, especially today, demands as a radical testimony that following Christ is a sign of the eschatological reality...sacred ministers can more easily adhere to Christ with an undivided heart and dedicate themselves more freely to God and to the service of man."⁷⁴ Addressing this counsel to its native audience, the Religious, the canon law affirms thus: The evangelical counsel of chastity embraced for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven, is a sign of the world to come, and a source of greater fruitfulness in an undivided heart. It involves the obligation of perfect continence

⁷⁰ *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 31d

⁷¹ *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 29b

⁷² *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 29a

⁷³ *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 29d

⁷⁴ *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 58

observed in celibacy.⁷⁵ Today, more than ever, evangelical chastity beckons to be lived as the proper antidote for the idolatry of sexual gratification plaguing our times.

ON EVANGELICAL POVERTY

Priests and religious more than ever experience that constant tension between prodigality and frugality (simplicity of life) in living this counsel in a world plagued by a trendy idolatry of materialism. In fact, nowadays, it is not uncommon to find some priests and consecrated persons who perceive celibate chastity as an alternative forgone to amass material wealth—living prodigally. This way of life is radically incompatible with evangelical poverty which derives from the Poor Christ to whom Priests and Religious are now wholly configured to. Nowadays too, it cannot be wished away any longer that there seems to be a causal connection between the trendy spate of abducting priests for ransom and the opulent lifestyle of some Priests. Poverty in spirit and in reality becomes a necessity therefore, in stemming this ugly trend. Priests and religious must strive for the simplicity of life. “the Priests use of created “goods with a sense of responsibility, moderation, upright intention and detachment ...will help conform him to Christ”, who “through his condition of poverty manifested that he has received everything from eternity from the father and all to him is restored in a complete offering of his life ...Any kind of affectation and luxury....will be eliminated by leading a simple life, and the priest will more easily be the friend , by preferential option, of those most in need.”⁷⁶ For secular priests, evangelical poverty “indicates a freedom from undue attachment to material things as well as a responsible use of them.”⁷⁷ “Such poverty assures God’s people and the priest himself that he is not using the church for his own needs. The priests’ poverty opens his heart to the truly poor and keeps him ready to sacrifice his own comfort for the sake of those whom Jesus sends him to serve.”⁷⁸

ON THE CONTINUITY OF HUMANITY AND THE CHURCH IN THE FRUIT OF THE FAMILY:AN EXCURSUS

Just recently, the Supreme Court of the United States of America passed into law the bill that makes same-sex marriage legal. And the President of America, Barack Obama reacting to this Supreme Court ruling speaks of it as “victory for America.” To me, this ruling comes to all men and women of goodwill as a brutal reminder that

⁷⁵ CIC 599

⁷⁶ *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 67

⁷⁷ *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 30a

⁷⁸ *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 30c. quoted in *Christian Totality Theology of the Consecrated Life* , p. 328

mankind's wicked resilience to annihilate itself against the will of God is still very much alive—that humanity has not lost its Cainine vestiges.⁷⁹ Pope Francis in keeping with the ever ancient and yet ever new teaching of the Church reminded humanity of the looming danger that such a ruling portends for her thus: "Let's not be naïve; we are not talking about a simple political battle; it is a destructive pretension against the plan of God. We are not talking about a mere bill, but rather a machination of the Father of Lies that seek to confuse and deceive the Children of God...Gay marriage discriminates against children, in advance, depriving them of their human development given by a father and a mother and willed by God. At stake, is the total rejection of God's law engraved in our hearts and the very survival of the human family, which he defined as father, mother, and their children."

Indeed, the family is the nursery of life—that great womb of life in which God deigns to ensure and secure not just the continuity of humanity but the continuity of his Church. For, through this sanctuary of life, God continually nourishes his church with sacred vocations to the priesthood and religious life. Priests and religious in turn, sanctify our world and indeed all God's creation through the exercise of their ministry and unique witnessing. "...in a world often alien and even hostile to faith, believing families are of primary importance as centers of living, radiant faith. For this reason, the Vatican Council II...calls the family the *Ecclesia domestica*⁸⁰. It is in the bosom of the family that parents are by word and example...the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children. They should encourage them in the vocation which is proper to each child, fostering with special care any religious vocation." For "the fruitfulness of conjugal love is not restricted solely to the procreation of children, even understood in its specifically human dimension: it is enlarged and enriched by all those fruits of moral, spiritual and supernatural life which the father and mother are called to hand on to their children and through the children to the church and to the world."⁸¹ *Familiaris Consortio* goes on to reiterate that "in its own way the family is a living image and historical representation of the mystery of the Church." Quoting St Thomas Aquinas, Pope John Paul II wrote: "The sacrament of marriage gives to the educational role the dignity and vocation of being really and truly a 'ministry' of the Church at the service of the building up of her members. So great and splendid is the educational ministry of Christian parents that Saint Thomas has no hesitation in comparing it with the ministry of priests: 'Some only propagate and guard spiritual life by a spiritual ministry: this is the role of the sacrament of Orders; others do this for both corporal and spiritual life, and this is

⁷⁹ See Genesis 4

⁸⁰ *Lumen Gentium*, 11; *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11

⁸¹ *Familiaris Consortio*, 28

brought about by the sacrament of marriage, by which a man and a woman join in order to beget offspring and bring them up to worship God"⁸²

As we think about the family as the domestic church vis-à-vis the place of priests and religious in the entire scheme, we also think of the contemporary challenge of raising a homely-family—a family that “prays together and stays together” in a world largely plagued by the culture of individualism; we also think of the family in the words of Pope Francis as “a school of solidarity and sharing for the overall benefit of the society.” To the extent that our families are homely, to that extent shall our families be a concrete witness to the here and now and yet to come eternal home where God will be all in all; that home church where the dignity and fundamental human rights of every member at every stage is respected and treasured; where Christian traditions, virtues and values are handed on to the progeny in daily living for the continuity of the church and the betterment of humanity. On this journey of building a homely-family amidst contemporary anti-family currents, the holy family of Nazareth remains for us an irreplaceable model of a true Christian home. The holy family of Nazareth remains a school where we learn the PTF of family living—Patience, tolerance and forbearance grounded in love.

As we think about Priests and Religious as fruits of the family vis-à-vis the continuity of the church and humanity in the fruit of the family which children is, we also think of the many anti-family currents threatening family life today. The necessity of family life is grossly challenged and threatened by the dictatorship of the “culture of death.” The monstrous philosophy of “might is right” has become the very grounding of human relationality. While Boko-Haram[ISIS] and indeed, our political leaders plot our extinction, euthanasia, abortion, contraception, same-sex marriage, murder has not ceased to punctuate and conjugate the trends in family life. These trends unequivocally contradict the sanctuary of life which the family is. These trends, in the final analysis, reduce the family to a sanctuary of death. To challenge the necessity of family life is to challenge the continuity of the human race and God’s salvific plan for her through his church. And given the sacredness of human life, any generation that loses the sense of the sacred is headed to doom. The human family as we have it today is headed to extinction and doom if it does not collaboratively rediscover its identity and mission which consists in being a domestic church. The reality of our common humanity can become our common grounds for resisting these common enemies of family life in these trying times.

CONCLUSION

This paper has shown that Priests and Religious are uniquely, biological fruits of the natural family in keeping with Divine ordinance. And, that the pulsating nuance of their fruitfulness consists in gathering the scattered children of God to that one great family

⁸² *Familiaris Consortio*, 38

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where God will be all in all consistent with the embrace of the evangelical counsels proper to their unique vocation.

CONSECRATED PERSONS AND SOCIAL CONCERNS OF EVANGELIZATION VIS-À-VIS THE FAMILY IN NIGERIA

Christopher Oshiofa Asamah, OMV⁸³

ABSTRACT

In Nigeria, we live in a period with so many social concerns affecting the families of today. In these precarious moments, one cannot but think out ways through which Consecrated Persons as “agents of evangelization” could contribute to the improvement of the social conditions of families in the society. Evangelization today cannot flourish independently of the social concerns of humanity. There is a need to bring into the general purview of evangelization the social concerns affecting the families of today. In fact, we cannot talk of any holistic form of evangelization done outside the contextual realities in which we are in today. What it implies is that, any form of evangelization must be able to embrace the whole of realities affecting those to be evangelized, social, political, economical and religious realities. Thus, a systematic study of the effective ways through which Consecrated Persons can be part of the social dimension of evangelization in relation to some social concerns of family was carried out with the write up “Consecrated Persons and Social Concerns of Evangelization vis-à-vis the Family in Nigeria”.

INTRODUCTION

In the reality of our ecclesial life today, the need for consecrated persons to be fully engaged in the social dimension of the ecclesial ministry of the Church is of so much importance. This is because ours is an epoch which does not permit indifference to the many social realities facing humanity today. Evangelization today cannot flourish independent of the social concerns of humanity. Hence the need to constantly remind all of the need to be aware of what the men and women of our time are going through. We cannot talk of any holistic form of evangelization done outside the contextual realities in which we are in today. What it implies is that, any form of evangelization must be able to embrace the whole of realities affecting those to be evangelized, social, political, economical and religious realities.

In his first apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis, invites Christians “to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization” marked by the joy of the gospel, and our encounter with Jesus Christ, “which liberates us from the sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness.”⁸⁴ With such beauty that flows from the encounter with the gospel, in the Person of Jesus Christ, through the missionary activity of the Church in the world, and the actions of the Holy Spirit, one cannot

⁸³ Christopher Oshiofa Asamah OMV, is a religious priest with the Oblates of the Virgin Mary, presently working in N. S. Di Fatima Santuario, S. San Vittorino, Rome.

⁸⁴ Francis *Evangelii Gaudium*, Apostolic Exhortation, November 24, 2013, n. 1.

ignore today the need for Consecrated persons to reflect on their own contribution to making the message of evangelization more effective and touching on the issues affecting the many families of today.

SCOPE AND CONTEXT

It is indeed very important to state from the onset, that this article has its focus on Consecrated Persons and the social contexts of evangelization in regards to contributing to the improving of the social realities affecting families in Nigeria. This article does not in any way hope to historically and sociologically attempt to make a complete study of the connections between consecrated persons and evangelization. Therefore, it suffices to state that this work is only a contribution to the various ways in which consecrated persons can be galvanized into a deeper-renewed approach to the social context of evangelization as it affects families in Nigeria.

Some clarifications are needed also to help the reader to understand a few things which do not concern this work as it progresses. Firstly, this is not a work on mission *ad gentes*, but on evangelization. Therefore, one should not confuse this work as a work on mission *ad gentes*. On the one hand, we must understand and state that mission and evangelization are not the same realities. The first concerns the proclaiming of the message of the gospel to new territories, while evangelization concerns itself with the building of the already existing faith of the people, promoting the values of the gospel which there have already received. In fact, John Paul II, further made the above distinctions and defined mission in three concrete categories, mission *ad gentes*, pastoral activities, and new evangelization.⁸⁵

The specific mission of this article is aimed at the social aspect of evangelization, and not so much on mission *ad gentes*, which is directed to those who have not yet believed in Christ, or far from him, or in whom the Church has not taken root.⁸⁶ With the above clarifications, we shall now try to examine the following precise issues in this work: orientations of evangelization today, consecrated persons and evangelization, the social milieu of family in Nigeria, and proposing some possible ways of engaging in effective evangelization in its social context. At the end it is hoped that this work would help to galvanize thoughts and provoke some actions among consecrated persons in the work of evangelization its social context vis-à-vis the family in Nigeria.

ORIENTATIONS OF EVANGELIZATION TODAY

The mission to evangelize is as old as the Church itself, because right from the first moments of the Church, to evangelize has always been a mandate she received

⁸⁵ Cf. John Paul *Remdemptoris Missio*, Encyclical Letter, December 7, 1990, nn. 33-34.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, n. 34.

from the Lord, to make disciples of all nations. Thus, Benedict XVI, rightly stated in clear words that:

It is the duty of the Church to proclaim always and everywhere the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He, the first and supreme evangelizer, commanded the Apostles on the day of his Ascension to the Father: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Mt 28:19-20). Faithful to this mandate, the Church – a people chosen by God to declare his wonderful deeds (cf. 1 Peter 2:9) – ever since she received the gift of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:14), has never tired of making known to the whole world the beauty of the Gospel as she preaches Jesus Christ, true God and true man, the same "yesterday and today and for ever" (Heb 13:8), who, by his death and Resurrection, brought us salvation and fulfilled the promise made of old.⁸⁷

Through the mandate received from the Lord, the Church has made mindful efforts to reach out to the men and women of each epoch, with its own history, cultural realities, and eminent questions. Precisely because, each epoch has its own peculiar realities which are often times not universal issues and/or constant for every age and time. Even in this same age, some issues of evangelization might not be the same for every culture and people within the same epoch. A clear example is the drop of active participation in the liturgical life of the Church in most of what used to be Christian Europe. Whereas the above might rightly be a strong issue in Europe, in Africa on the contrary, that is certainly not an issue where at least people are still very active in the liturgical life of the Church. Nonetheless, a crowded church does not necessarily mean deep and rooted Christianity. If not, how do we explain the many terrible atrocities we keep experiencing in our African continent even in Christian communities? Or how do we explain the high level and cancerous reality of tribalism that is eating the fabrics of our social-political, economic and religious lives?

In our time, the Church has not failed to contextualize her missionary mandate to bring the gospel to shed its brilliant light on the realities of today. In this day and age, we are faced with a great danger, whereby the world is "pervaded as it is by consumerism" and "the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience."⁸⁸ And in the midst of such perverse society, the Church through evangelization reaches out to the world to proclaim the joy of the gospel, precisely because the world needs to hear the gospel and its message of liberation. There is an urgent need to make the gospel to be heard anew in the world of today, especially knowing that we are faced in some lukewarm attitude towards the values of the gospel. For it is a reality that:

⁸⁷ Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter *motu proprio ubicumque et semper*, September 21, 2010.

⁸⁸ Francis *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 2.

Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor. God's voice is no longer heard, the quiet joy of his love is no longer felt, and the desire to do good fades. This is a very real danger for believers too. Many fall prey to it, and end up resentful, angry and listless. That is no way to live a dignified and fulfilled life; it is not God's will for us, nor is it the life in the Spirit which has its source in the heart of the risen Christ.⁸⁹

EVANGELIZING IN MERCY AND LOVE

Evangelization today is not just telling people about God, but letting the men and women of our time experience the beauty of God's mercy and love, which flows from our encounter with the Person of Jesus Christ. Benedict XVI, rightly puts it that: "Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction"⁹⁰ This encounter, is further made explicate through an evangelization that is rooted in the mercy of God for his people. That is, an evangelization which opens the doors of God's mercy to those searching for a sense of direction and purpose in life.

Every form of service in the Church "arises out of the joy of meeting the Lord and from his call. The mission is to bring to the men and women of our time the consolation of God, to bear witness to his mercy."⁹¹ Consolation from the gospel of mercy should shape our sense of evangelization today and the way we minister to the people of our time. Hence, in the teaching of the Church, it must be noted that there is no room for hostile praxis which quenches the thirst for God's love and mercy. "People today certainly need words, but most of all they need us to bear witness to the mercy and tenderness of the Lord which warms the heart, rekindles hope, and attracts people towards the good. What a joy it is to bring God's consolation to others!"⁹²

Authentic evangelization should bear the hallmark of mercy, and love. To this end, Pope Francis has never ceased to remind the men and women to today of how the value of mercy should influence the whole idea and practice of evangelization. And this takes concrete shape when the ones who evangelize are able to be with the people and show them the merciful face of God in their concrete realities. In his

⁸⁹ Ibid., n. 2.

⁹⁰ Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est* December 25, 2005, n. 1.

⁹¹ Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Rejoice: A Letter to Consecrated Men and Women*, February 2, 2014, n. 8.

⁹² Ibid, n. 8

words to the Bishops of East Timor, during their *ad limina* visit in 2014, the Pope says: “agents of evangelization must be able to warm the hearts of people, to walk with them in the night, to discuss their illusions and disillusion with them, to overcome their divisions. Without diminishing the value of the Gospel ideal we need to accompany, with mercy and patience, the different stages of people’s growth which they build day after day.”⁹³

The logic of mercy which features in the teachings of Pope Francis as it relates to evangelization cannot be overlooked or wave outside as something of little or no importance. Since, “without mercy, today we have little possibility of inserting ourselves in a world of “the wounded” that are in need of understanding, forgiveness, and love.”⁹⁴ More than ever before, the world needs evangelizers who are merciful, and do not block the flow of God’s mercy reaching out and liberating the men and women of our time. In this line of thought, Benedict XVI emphatically states that, “In our time, humanity needs a strong proclamation and witness of God’s mercy.”⁹⁵ When those who are at the fore front of evangelization lack the value of mercy one is tempted to ask what then is the motivation of such evangelization? Through mercy and love, we are able to deeply reflect and become proactive agents in addressing the many social predicaments affecting the men and women who look up to the evangelizers for a new form of hope and consolation through their pastoral activities rooted in the love and mercy of the incarnate Word.

It is interesting to note that the indissoluble connection between evangelization and mercy and love. They are core aspects of the gospel message. In fact, it is in mercy and love that the incarnate Word, revealed his salvific liberating acts for humanity. The mystery of the incarnation and the works of Jesus Christ and his paschal mystery are all summed up in the very mystery of his love and mercy for humanity. Undeniably, “mercy is the central nucleus of the Gospel message; it is the very name of God, the Face with which he revealed himself in the Old Covenant and fully in Jesus Christ, the incarnation of creative and redemptive Love.”⁹⁶ The onus of the gospel message is a revelation of a God who loves the sinner, and who is not tired of forgiving the sinner. When we take away this core aspect of mercy and love from the practice of evangelization, we are left with an empty message for a wounded people, who are waiting to be consoled by the words and actions of the evangelizers.

Mercy and love help the Church to reach out and to not close her doors to humanity. The Church cannot be an evangelizer with a closed door. “The Church is called to be the house of the Father, with doors always wide open.”⁹⁷ Pope Francis

⁹³ Francis *Address of Pope Francis to the Bishops of the Episcopal Conference of East Timor on Their "Ad Limina" Visit*, Monday, 17 March 2014.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Benedict XVI, *Angelus Message, September 16, 2007.*

⁹⁶ Benedict XVI, *Regina Caeli Message on Divine Mercy Sunday, March 30, 2008.*

⁹⁷ Francis *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 47.

has decried the fact that: "Frequently, we act as arbiters of grace rather than its facilitators The Church is not a tollhouse; it is the house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems."⁹⁸ A close door in itself signifies either a dead Church or a Church that is not connected to the people who are wounded.

Passion for the love of God should be our motivational strength for evangelising. Outside the purview of the love and mercy of Christ evangelization loses its saltiness and value.

"Caritas Christi urget nos" (2 Cor 5:14): it is the love of Christ that fills our hearts and impels us to evangelize. Today as in the past, he sends us through the highways of the world to proclaim his Gospel to all the peoples of the earth (cf. Mt 28:19). Through his love, Jesus Christ attracts to himself the people of every generation: in every age he convokes the Church, entrusting her with the proclamation of the Gospel by a mandate that is ever new.⁹⁹

The love of Christ fundamentally leads us to love the men and women of each time, and to embrace them with the joy of the gospel. "Joy is not a useless ornament. It is necessity, the foundation of human life."¹⁰⁰ The love and joy which flow from the gospel are magnetic forces for an effective evangelization, and can only be attained by those who in themselves have a deep sense of the love of Christ and have been touched by the joy of his gospel.

CONSECRATED PERSONS

Consecrated Persons are "men and women who set out to follow Christ with greater liberty, and to imitate him more closely, by practising the evangelical counsels (....) Many of them, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, became hermits or founded religious families. These the Church, by virtue of her authority, gladly accepted and approved."¹⁰¹ Consecrated persons live a life which is based on the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ and who continues to shape the consecrated life.

The Consecrated Life, deeply rooted in the example and teaching of Christ the Lord, is a gift of God the Father to his Church through the Holy Spirit. By the profession of the evangelical counsels *the characteristic features of Jesus – the chaste, poor and obedient one – are made constantly "visible"*

⁹⁸ Ibid, n. 48.

⁹⁹ Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter "*Motu Proprio Data*" *Porta Fidei*, 11 October, 2011, n. 7.

¹⁰⁰ Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Rejoice*, n. 3.

¹⁰¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 918.

in the midst of the world and the eyes of the faithful are directed towards the mystery of the Kingdom of God already at work in history, even as it awaits its full realization in heaven.¹⁰²

Consecrated persons belong to Societies of Apostolic life, Religious Order and Institutes devoted contemplation or the works of the apostolate be it Societies of Apostolic lives and secular Institutes, as well as other forms of consecrated persons. "Consecrated life is a call to incarnate the Good News, to *follow Christ*, the crucified and risen one."¹⁰³ This means in reality, to follow Jesus Christ, "to take up his way of life, to adopt his interior attitude, to allow oneself to be invaded by his Spirit, to absorb his surpassing logic and his scale of values, to share his risks and his hopes."¹⁰⁴

Consecrated persons ought to be men and women who radiate the joys of the gospel and who bring this into their daily lives, and encounter with the people of God. It is a life which bears testimony to the joys of the gospel. And this joy in itself comes as a result of an encounter with the Divine Word. It is this joy in the gospel that Consecrated Persons ought to proclaim to our wounded world.

In the work of evangelization, first and foremost, the communities of Consecrated persons must radiate the values of the gospel. It is indeed a sad reality as observed by Pope Francis, the discord in the Christian communities. Thus, he writes,

It always pains me greatly to discover how some Christian communities, and even consecrated persons, can tolerate different forms of enmity, division, calumny, defamation, vendetta, jealousy and the desire to impose certain ideas at all costs, even to persecutions which appear as veritable witch hunts. Whom are we going to evangelize if this is the way we act?¹⁰⁵

We cannot be effective evangelizers if we are not evangelized ourselves, and understand the principle of love and the value of working together and learning to forgive. Thus, the advice of Pope Francis should animate Consecrated Persons to enter into a deep renewal of learning to live as one. "To pray for a person with whom I am irritated is a beautiful step forward in love, and an act of evangelization."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, March 25, 1996, n. 1.

¹⁰³ Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Rejoice*, n. 5.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, n. 5.

¹⁰⁵ Francis *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 100.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, n. 102.

CONTEXT OF FAMILY LIFE TODAY IN NIGERIA

In the light of so many issues affecting the people of Africa, one needs no intellectual gymnastics to accept the observations of E. E. Uzukwu, that Africa is seen as a continent of misery based on the endless crisis on the continent.¹⁰⁷ And Nigeria as a nation is not spared from the endless list of crisis facing the continent of Africa. We exist as a nation in a continent of endless crisis. Just when we might be celebrating progress in one area, we are faced with even more quagmire situations in other areas.

The times and changing realities have today not only affected the way people live and think but the very nucleus of human society, family life. The economic and social contexts of today in which families find themselves in could best be described as scandalous because of the vast wealth and resources in Nigeria. Many of the families we encounter are troubled by all forms of realities which threatens the stability of families, and the peace of the society. It is not an uncommon feature in our communities, and during the course of our pastoral encounters and duties, to witness the many plights of families. Their (families') social realities, becomes for us as Consecrated Persons, a vital context for understanding the challenges before us in relation to evangelization. Thus, the words of A. E. Orobator can easily be applied here, that "social contexts provides an important tool for understanding the church in Africa."¹⁰⁸ In like manner, social contexts are necessary and important tools for understanding how best to respond via evangelization to the various challenges facing families in Nigeria.

A closer analysis of the situations of today confirms that ours is an age of great distress despite technological advancements in many areas. It is in an age of religious intolerance leading to religious massacre and displacement of so many families, as well as the death of many members of several families. We also see among nations, especially in the so-called Third World nations, how very often most families live in depressing economic situations.¹⁰⁹ Ours is a wounded society and the precarious situations are so obvious that there cannot be any authentic evangelization of families if the socio-political and economic realities are ignored. Ours is an age of great injustice in the market place, where the gap between the few rich and the vast poor is increasing.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Cf. E. E. UZUKWU, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches*, Orbis Books, New York, 1996, p. 1.

¹⁰⁸ A. E. Orobator, *From Crisis to Kairos*, p. 15.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, Apostolic Exhortation, November 22, 1981, n. 6.

¹¹⁰ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 56.

For us in Nigeria, the situations are even more precarious, based on so many factors which we cannot exhaust in this write up. However, it is good to know that these situations are as a result of several factors: greedy and inept political and civil class, manipulation of the poor with religion and the propagation of false prosperity gospel (which promises so much and fulfils nothing), unstable economic systems, religious violence as well as political instabilities even in the face of so-called democracy. We have not forgotten also the whole issue of lack of developmental projects to build a society that is just and dedicated to the promotion of the common good.

Poverty is a depressing condition which affects a vast majority of the populace with a few privileged class and their collaborators living in affluent in the society. The level of poverty in Nigeria is not only alarming but scandalous and challenging for a society that is richly blessed with so many natural resources, and not to forget the vast human resources that abound in the country. It beats human imagination that Nigeria should ever be considered among third world nations, because most of the so-called western nations do not have as much resources as Nigeria. Yet, as a nation, we are not near the many nations of the world that have less than the natural and human resources which we have. Such depressing situations pose a great challenged to the followers of Christ, and especially to Consecrated Persons.

In a just society, where things are planned out and the structures are put in place to promote the common good of everyone, there is going to be a reduction of the sufferings of the people. For example, very often in Nigeria, the poor have no access to qualitative education, and security, or economic powers. In such context, the reality becomes a big gap that exists between the rich and the poor. "The real problem today is the conspiracy of a greedy elite to further impoverish the poor, through the selfish appropriation and reckless plunder of the material and agricultural resources of our fatherland."¹¹¹ The cancerous level of poverty and underdevelopment couple with "situations of unemployment have material and spiritual repercussions on families."¹¹² These can intrinsically promote a whole break down of values of family life and create societal crisis with devastating consequences on development and peace in the society.

Furthermore, there are also the social and moral contextual predicaments of widows who are constantly maltreated by in-laws, orphans, as well as childlessness of many women which are seen as a taboo in the society. Thus, there abound so

¹¹¹ G. Ehusani, *A Prophetic Church*. Provincial Pastoral Publications, Ede, 1996, p. 73.

¹¹² Pontifica Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, LEV, Città del Vaticana, 2004. n. 294

many childless women, who have become victims of all forms of abuses and discrimination. These issues are constantly before us and there is no way there can be effective evangelization without bringing into pastoral perspective and pastoral decisions if these whole gargantuan issues are not addressed. In fact, these issues pose to us fundamental questions about our Christian faith and Consecrated commitments. But one truth which we cannot ignore is that, the Christian faith and especially the very nature of Consecrated life, implies that, "God's revelation through the incarnation obliges us to unmask the ultimate scandal of our faith: Jesus Christ made a radical choice in favour of those considered to be the dregs of the world."¹¹³

EVANGELIZATION AT THE SERVICE OF SOCIAL CONCERNS

At this point, we shall postulate several ways of helping to evangelize effectively in its social context taking into consideration the social plights of families in Nigeria as we have already pointed out above. The various ways we shall point out, are not in themselves solutions to the problems of families, but methods through which as Consecrated Persons, we could be more effective in letting the gospel to shed its light on social conditions of families in our ecclesial communities and the society in general. On the one hand the goal at this point is to focus on some ways of realizing evangelization in its social context. It is indeed only prudent to state that, the pointers we shall present subsequently here might not be exhaustive in themselves but they should help to contribute in the thinking process of finding out best models and practice of evangelization in its social context.

We have already stated above that within the contextual orientations of evangelization today, are two key essential elements which should be present in every form of evangelization. These elements are mercy and love. Without them it would not be possible to even comprehend why Consecrated Persons should be effectively active in the transformation of the society and the building and promoting a better social condition for families through the work of evangelization. Mercy and love are the eternal keys or put differently inseparable components for evangelization. Without mercy evangelization is impossible, and without love there cannot be a transformation in the precarious socio-economic, political and economic situations of the families of today. The difference between actions for social change done in mercy and love and actions for social change done for self-aggrandizement are self-evident in themselves. While those actions that are done out of mercy and love are aimed at the interest of those who suffer injustice and distressing situations, the other is only a promotion of selfish interests and goals. Therefore, it is important always to understand here that what we aimed at are those actions for social change rooted in the principles of Jesus Christ, which is selfless love.

¹¹³ J. M. Ela, *My Faith as an African* translated by J. P. Brown and S. Perry, Eugene, Wipf & Stock, 1988, p. 105.

1 EVANGELIZATION AND CULTURAL VALUES

Looking at our cultural heritage, values for life and respect the community are valid sources which when put in proper perspective can shape the way evangelization is carried out. There are important values within our cultural worldview especially those that promote unity, life, and common good. Consecrated Persons should be the first persons to promote such values because these values are the same values which the gospel promotes. Moreover, “whenever the Christian faith incorporates and lives the African values of communion and solidarity, with their specific requirements and implications, this enlarged community has a specific impact on the health of human relationships. In fact, it is this option for community that governs all the contemporary questions about evangelization in Africa today.”¹¹⁴

We need to bring back those cultural values of communion and solidarity which were rooted in our cultural worldviews. In fact, one could easily say that the dilapidating social realities in Nigeria could easily be traced back to neglect of our cultural values that were once the foundation of our society. Once the neglect of those values had reached an alarming stage, we were left with self-deification over and above the common good of the people. Thus, this paved way for the many ills in the society of today. And indeed, these realities have caused untold hardship for families. The plight of the young people, the disrespect for the institution of marriage, the high increase of unemployment, and the insecurity in the land are all traceable to a neglect of those (good) values that that once shaped the cultural worldviews of the many cultures in Nigeria. To this end, Consecrated Persons must be at the forefront of bringing those beautiful values back into our society, through their active participation in the social dimension of evangelization in relation to families in Nigeria.

2 EVANGELIZATION AND SOLIDARITY

“The apostolic vocation of the church is an encounter with Christ in order to continue his mission.”¹¹⁵ The mission of Jesus Christ with humanity and in our world was an eternal mission in solidarity. And the whole of the activities of Jesus Christ pointed to the fact that in him humanity has a point of reference in terms of the solidarity. There is no better solidarity than the perfect example of the incarnate Word of God, who has opened the way for humanity to enter into an ongoing solidarity with the suffering people of each epoch. Solidarity “expresses in summary fashion the need to recognize in the composite ties that unite men and social groups

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p. 146.

¹¹⁵ O. A. Onwubiko, *The Church in Mission: In The Light of Ecclesia in Africa*, Nairobi, Paulines Publications, 2001, p. 384.

among themselves, the space given to human freedom for common growth in which all share and in which all participate.”¹¹⁶ Solidarity encompasses all forms of willingness to be committed to the good of one’s neighbours, and be ready to serve them and to be at the service of each other, not for some personal gain, by taking advantage of others, but to promote the dignity of the other.¹¹⁷ Solidarity “is a virtue directed par excellence to the common good.”¹¹⁸

Social evangelization should help us to promote the values of justice and peace and human development in solidarity, taking into cognisance the scandalous presence of injustice in the society. In fact, “Justice is about guaranteeing the basic conditions of life for the most number of people, rather than for a privileged few.”¹¹⁹ There should be a radical witness to the truth and value of social justice. A society that careless about the vast majority of her people must be taught by the social message of evangelization by Consecrated Persons that such a reality is unfair and cannot be acceptable. For when there is justice lacking in the economic setting there would also be lacking peace and development. These realities explain why in Nigeria very often there is unstable peace, because there is lack of justice as well. Therefore,

To build peace requires the active pursuit of the goals and benefits of development. The components of this development are many and varied. Essentially they would include the following elements: creating opportunities for human fulfilment, eliminating inequalities that polarise different groups, addressing social ills (unemployment, lack of social services like education, housing and healthcare), curtailing environment degradation and creating just and human environments of living and working.¹²⁰

In solidarity, Consecrated persons are not only showing greater concern for those who are at the receiving end of injustice, but they become agents of social transformation as well. As agents of social transformation in the society, consecrated

¹¹⁶ Pontifica Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, n. 194.

¹¹⁷ Cf. John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, Encyclical Letter, December 30, 1987, n. 38

¹¹⁸ Pontifica Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, n. 193.

¹¹⁹ A. E. Orobator, *The Church as Family*, p. 36

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 37.

Persons, are in fact, bringing the gospel to have its way in the social realities of the people and in the society. "God's revelation through the incarnation obliges us to unmask the ultimate scandal of our faith: Jesus Christ made a radical choice in favour of those considered to be dregs of the world."¹²¹ To be in solidarity inevitably implies "attentiveness to those who live in a state of oppression and suffering under unjust social structures."¹²²

One cannot separate constructive attentiveness to the issues of social concerns in the society and the work of evangelization. Although, why the Church is not a mere social entity and the work of her members (in this case Consecrated Persons) cannot be reduced to mere social works, issues of social concerns constitute a major concern for the members of the Church. In relation to this therefore, there is no gainsaying that Consecrated Persons should be active in every ecclesial way possible to promote solidarity with families who are the first victims of today's social concerns. In the light of the gospel that we present to the world, Consecrated Persons are called therefore "upon to bear witness to God in faith at the heart of a society in which, for a greater number of jobless, marginalized girls and women, their only work tool is their bodies."¹²³

3. Evangelization and Human Dignity

In an age of greater awareness about human dignity, it is not an overstatement to note that issues affecting human dignity form a whole lot of concerns for those involve in evangelization, but even more for Consecrated Persons. This is so because issues of "human rights are a topic for discussion everywhere."¹²⁴ Also, it is a statement of fact that "all social values are inherent in the dignity of the human person, whose authentic development they foster. Essentially these values are: truth, freedom, justice and love."¹²⁵ Thus, Consecrated Persons cannot be ignorant of the vast issues of human dignity which are common topics of discussions today. We do not need to look too far to see how these issues are present before us, because these issues abound in multiple realities in our ecclesial communities and human society. "The poor and the underprivileged are crying for justice but only a

¹²¹ J. M. Ela, *African Cry*, p. 105.

¹²² Ibid, p. 104

¹²³ Ibid, p. 92

¹²⁴ B. Bujo *The Ethical Dimension of Community: The African Model and The Dialogue Between North and South*, Nairobi, Paulines Publications, 1997, p.143.

¹²⁵ Pontifica Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, n. 197.

few people seem to pay attention to them. They are being denied self worth and basic rights.”¹²⁶

Evangelization should necessary take into consideration of the many ways the rights of families have been trampled upon and the unethical situations which debase the human person. At the core of every evangelization we must state is the promotion of the dignity of the human person. For the gospel message is rooted in Christ who cares for every human person and human family. Thus, the Christian faith is a “witness to a God who takes up the cause of those who cannot defend themselves.”¹²⁷ For Christ that is proclaimed to humanity “touches human needs at all levels.”¹²⁸ It is this same Jesus Christ that calls and sends forth into the world Consecrated Persons, according to their particular vocations to be the salt and light of the world, and hope for the oppressed and voice for the voiceless suffering families in Nigeria.

Conclusion

In this write up, we have been able to look at evangelization in its social context from the purview of how Consecrated Persons could be better involved in the social dimension of evangelization especially as it affects families in Nigeria today. We stated from onset that our purpose was not to address all the issues associated with evangelization in its social context vis-à-vis families in Nigeria, but to point some strong orientations from the social perspective of evangelization today. During this course of this write up, a conscious effort was made to domesticate the orientations of evangelization in its social context vis-à-vis the magisterial teachings of Pope Francis. Thus, constant references of his *Evangelii gaudium* were used especially during the first part of this article. We tried to address as much as possible some social concerns regarding evangelization with an eye on the social concerns affecting families in Nigeria.

By way of concluding, it is thus worthy to restate that, Consecrated Persons have a huge role to play in the social dimension of evangelization in Nigeria. This role flows from our understanding of the orientations of evangelization in the Church today, which takes into cognizance the many social concerns of the men and

¹²⁶ I. Jooji, *Mending the Cracked Pot*, Ibadan, Daily Graphics, 2003. P. 47.

¹²⁷ J. M. Ela, *African Cry*, p. 93.

¹²⁸ M. A. Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa*, Eugene, Orbis Books, 1986, p. 99.

women of our time. The time has passed for a lukewarm attitude towards the social plights of families. Thus, Consecrated Persons have much to impart in the world for the social transformation of the social situations of families, in the light of the joy of the gospel.

CELIBATE FOR MEN, MARRIED TO GOD: THE MOTHERHOOD AND FATHERHOOD OF THE CONSECRATED PERSONS

TAGHEU Jean-Paul, OP¹²⁹

ABSTRACT

The African vision of life and family according to which, every son and daughter of the family must, in turn, become father and mother of a new family constitutes a resistance and a strong obstacle to religious life. It especially presents an African challenge to the religious vow of chastity and consecration for the Kingdom of God. The vow of chastity is not, as such, a vow against life, family, and begettingness. It is a vow for a new dimension of life, family and of new begettingness of human lives. Hence, the motherhood and fatherhood of the consecrated persons is a motherhood and fatherhood of the Kingdom of God. That is why, as celibate as they appear to be, they are all married to God for a parenthood of love and charity. As such, against a certain and an absolute African familial view of biological fecundity and birth, religious consecration sees human family, life and procreation from another perspective, that of love, charity and the gift of oneself for others.

INTRODUCTION

Till date, a good number of African families oppose priestly and religious vocation for their children because of the principle of biological fatherhood and motherhood, as understood within the African context defined by the ‘communitarianisation’ of the individual.¹³⁰ In Africa, John Mbiti says, the human being is nothing if she or he does not get married and give birth to children.

For African peoples, marriage is the focus of existence. [...] Marriage is a duty, a requirement from the corporate society, and a rhythm of life in which everyone must participate. Otherwise, he who does not participate

¹²⁹ Brother TAGHEU Jean-Paul, OP, is a dominican, from the Dominican Vicariate of Equatorial Africa, Province of France. He holds a Bachelor's Degree in Modern French Letters from Yaoundé First University, Cameroon; a Master Degree in Philosophy from the Catholic University of Central Africa, Yaoundé, Cameroon. A Licentiate in Philosophy from the Salesian University, Rome. He holds a bachelor's Degree in theology from Angelicum, Rome; a MA Degree in theology from Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA. He is currently an assistant Lecturer at the Dominican Institute, Ibadan, Nigeria.

¹³⁰ According to Mbiti, “in traditional life, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes his existence to other people, including those of past generations and his contemporaries.” “The individual can only say: “I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am. This is a cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of man.” ” John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Garden City: Anchor Books, Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1970), 141.

in it is a curse to the community, he is a rebel and a law-breaker, he is not only abnormal, but “under-human.” Failure to get married under normal circumstances means that the person concerned has rejected society and society rejects him in return.¹³¹

Begettingness is a cardinal point, which defines African anthropology and the individual in the society. A person is nothing if she or he does not have children. For this reason, some families can concede the priestly and religious vocation of their children, if and only if they will secretly come and perform their duty of motherhood and fatherhood for the life and perpetuation of the family lineage. For them, indeed, “to die without getting married and without children is to be completely cut off from the human society, to become an outcast and to lose all links with mankind.”¹³²

Yet, by placing ourselves in the perspective of the new paternity and maternity we have in Christ through religious and priestly life, we can review this African traditional conception of biological family life, marriage and fecundity and at all cost. By doing so, we will value human family, not first of all from the angle of biological fecundity and begettingness, but by the loving of Christ and the neighbour, in view of the Kingdom, which is the universal and ultimate human family to love and to take care of. With this, one could define another African humanism based on the gift of self to others and on the *ministerium* (service) of charity, and not first of all on the physical motherhood and fatherhood, generation or procreation. This is, in fact, what we intend to discuss in this paper, which is not to undermine or devalue human biological family and procreation, but to re-value it through the singleness or celibacy of the consecrated persons (religious).

In the first part, we shall speak of vows or evangelical counsels, which characterise religious life as its very being, and defines the *sequela Christi* (following of Christ) of the consecrated persons. Based on this, in the second part, we shall speak of religious as prophets of the eschatological family, because of their way and state of life which foresee and already anticipate –though imperfectly – the coming Kingdom. In the third part, we shall address the motherhood and fatherhood of the religious who, though celibate in the sight of men, are married to God for life, for eternity. Hence, in our fourth part, we are going to discover that religious life gives and saves lives for the society in general, and for the Church in particular. For this reason, and despite their weaknesses, religious persons have to live faithfully and responsibly their commitment to Christ through the evangelic counsels. This will constitute the last part of our reflection.

THE SEQUELA CHRISTI: POVERTY, CHASTITY AND OBEDIENCE

¹³¹ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 174.

¹³² John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 175-176.

According to the Code of Canon Law, a vow is a deliberate promise made to God for some possible and better good. It is a religious virtue which needs to be fulfilled by the person professing it.¹³³ Every promise, even the religious one is not a vow, but every religious vow is a promise because of the commitment to be faithful by which we are temporally or perpetually tied to God. In terms of religious vows also known as evangelical counsels, Christ is considered as the Religious *par excellence*, the Primordial or Fundamental Religious. He is the source, the root and the goal of religious evangelical counsels. For it is to imitate Him who was poor, chaste and obedient till death, that we commit ourselves after Him through the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

The poor Christ: Christ the Poor Man shows us his poverty through his incarnation. He accepted to lose His heavenly honours and glories, in order to come down to look for us, to love us and to enrich us by His poverty. It is on account of His poverty that Saint Paul writes as follows to the Philippians: "Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross." (Philippians 2: 6-8, RSV¹³⁴). Much further, speaking of Christ's poverty, the same Paul affirms again: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich." (2 Corinthians 8: 9).

Christ accepted the poor condition of a manger, the crib, in which He was born (cf. Luke 2: 6, 12, 16), because "there was no place for them in the inn," which was in fact made for all. (Luke 2: 6). Christ chose poor parents, who could only afford a pair of pigeons for sacrifice during His presentation in the Temple (Luke 2:24). He lived a poor life even within His apostolic mission, such that He did not have a personal roof to live under.

To all His followers, He said: "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head." (Luke 9:58; Matthew 8:20). When the crowd wanted to make Him King, He declined the offer and preferred to withdraw into a desert place in order to pray. (cf. John 6: 15). He even lacked money to pay the collectors of the half-shekel tax. (cf. Matthew 17 : 24-27). Furthermore, although He was born in a manger, He died miserably on the cross, like a malefactor or a cursed one between two thieves. He deprived Himself of His garments, of His life and of everything upon the Cross on which He ended His earthly life. He did not even have an honourable and befitting burial. His burial was done in the haste and His tomb an unknown and borrowed tomb (John 19:31, 41).

Christ's poverty was not only material, but also affective and spiritual. Though He is the Word and Wisdom of God, He accepted to be educated and taught in a human manner as someone who does not know anything. In fact, Luke the

¹³³ Cf. *The Code of Canon Law. New Revised English Translation* (Bangalore: Theological Publications, 1983), can. 1191, §1.

¹³⁴ *The Holy Bible. The Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1966), is the version we are using in this essay.

Evangelist says of Him that, He “grew and became strong, filled with wisdom.” (Luke 2: 40). At His birth, He had no friends and companions but the poor shepherds and their flock (cf. Luke 2:16-18). Denied by His people, just a few believed in him and in what He was doing for their sake (cf. John 1:11-13); even His own disciples. In brief, He was hated without a cause (cf. John 15:25).

In short, as Fulton Sheen puts it, through His poverty of fact and of spirit, His economic, social and intellectual poverty, Jesus conquers three kinds of pride: “the pride of what one has [possession], which is economic pride; the pride of what one is [by position], which is social; and the pride of what one knows [knowledge], which is intellectual pride.”¹³⁵ Religious vow and live after this Christ’s poverty, “the Universal Poor Man of the world.”¹³⁶ They want to follow and imitate Him till the end, in order to be configured to Him in holiness, and perfect Life.

The chaste Christ: Jesus showed His chaste life by living single and perfectly continent all his life. The matrimonial status of the consecrated persons is first applied to and accomplished in Him who says: “there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to receive this, let him receive it.” (Matthew 19:12). He is therefore the First Eunuch of the Kingdom of heaven. Still, it is to express the universal and fundamental value of His perfect chastity that He replied to the Sadducees: “You are wrong, because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.” (Matthew 22: 29-30).

Hence, following and imitating the perfect chastity of this Universal Man, the religious takes vow of chastity and lives it as consecration to Christ, the First and Primordial Eunuch of the Kingdom.

The Obedient Christ: Christ showed us His obedience to the Father by accepting to be sent by Him in communion with the Spirit for the salvation of souls (cf. Psalm 35; Luke 4:18-19; John 3: 17; 5:30, 37). In the name of this obedience to the will of His Father, He accepted death; death on the Cross. Saint Paul, highly describes this obedience of the Son of God when he writes: “though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.” (Philippians 2: 6-8).

Time and again, Jesus tells us Himself: “My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work.” (John 4:34; 5: 30; 6:38). At Gethsemane, while He was tempted to flee from His Father’s will, He committed Himself to the Father saying “Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.” (Luke 22:42; Matthew 26: 39; Mark. 14:36). As human, Jesus is the very incarnation of perfect obedience. He is the Universal Obedient Man in the world; and it is to imitate His obedience that we follow Him, so as to be perfect as He, His Father and the Holy Spirit are perfect. In all, religious *sequela Christi* is from and for Christ the poor, chaste and obedient till the end. It

¹³⁵ Fulton J. Sheen, *The Cross and the Beatitudes. Lessons on Love and Forgiveness* (Missouri: Liguori Publications), 2000, 50.

¹³⁶ Fulton J. Sheen, *The Cross and the Beatitudes*, 51.

is in this following of Christ that they are seen as prophets of the eschatological family, and their state of life as premise of the life to come.

CONSECRATED PERSONS: PROPHETS OF THE ESCHATOLOGICAL FAMILY

Speaking of the excellence of religious life, Dominic Hoffman and Basil Cole wrote: "The Kingdom of God is an inestimable treasure – in our Lord's words it is "the pearl of great price". It is a treasure so great that a man must be willing to give all he has in order to obtain it. For, time is short and eternity is one way of saying forever."¹³⁷

Based on this affirmation, familial paternity or maternity of a priest or a religious is of another order. It is not a paternity or a maternity like that of the earthly spouses, but a paternity or maternity proper to the Kingdom of God and belonging to the Kingdom of God. It is a spiritual and eschatological paternity and maternity. Eschatological, in the sense of what we will soon be, and live in God in the eternal life which has already started. In fact, in the new and eschatological humanity of the Kingdom, we will live in Christ like Angels, without any necessity of a biological and carnal fecundity and union (cf. Matthew 2:30). Because of Jesus, we now have a new filiation in God, in whom we are reborn, no longer according to the flesh, blood or carnal will of men and women, but of God Himself (cf. John 1:13); the very Father and Mother of the New Family of Christ. As Kasper notes,

Priestly celibacy is part of the context of the following of Christ who, unlike the Rabbis of his time, lived celibate. It is part of the call's context to leave one's family for Christ's sake and Gospel's (Mark 10:28ff.); and to be entirely present at the service of "many" (Mark 10:45), because of the Kingdom of heavens (Mark 19:12), totally, without division, and with carefree about a family as well (1 Cor. 7:33ff.). Lastly, the priest must bring up to date Christ Jesus in His sponsal love for the Church His Spouse, and express the eschatological newness of the Gospel. Celibacy assumed in a voluntary way bears, thus, a witnessing character really suits to the priesthood.¹³⁸

Thus, in the celibate and chaste life, there is a sort of anticipation which shows that with the advent and event of the resurrection that has already begun, marriage has lost its firm propos (purpose) and its absolute interpretation, in terms of assuring perennial or continuity of the human being's life (cf. Genesis 1:28).¹³⁹ With the

¹³⁷ Dominic Hoffman and Basil Cole, *Consecrated Life: Contribution of Vatican II* (Mumbai: St Pauls, 2005), 26.

¹³⁸ Walter Kasper, *L'Église Catholique. Son Être, sa Réalisation, sa Mission*. Traduit de l'allemand par Joseph Hoffmann (Paris: Cerf, 2014), 337.

¹³⁹ Cf. Pier Giordano Cabra, *A Short Course on the Consecrated Life. Reflections on Theology and Spirituality*, (Libertyville: Institute on Religious Life, 2010), 23.

resurrection, we have another alternative of life besides marriage and marital life. This alternative is celibacy and chastity for the Kingdom of God. With the resurrection, one must quit his or her earthly biological family, not so as to get married and found a new family (cf. Genesis 2:24), but to enter into the Kingdom of God, in which union and communion with God is greater and profound than marital union between a man and a woman.

In this new dispensation, one is father, mother, brother and sister of / for Jesus when one does the will of God, that is, to hear and to put into practice the Word of God (cf. Matthew 12:46-50 ; Mark 3:32-35 ; Luke 8:9-10; 11:28), in order to be perfect as God the father is perfect (cf. Matthew 5:48). Luke the Evangelist explains it very well in his version of Jesus' response to the question of the Sadducees about marriage after death.

The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage; but those who are accounted worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage, for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. (Luke 20:34-36)

More so, the marital state of a man and a woman is just a picture of the spiritual union and mystical marriage with God.

In effect, "The same Divine Revelation which tells us of God's love for us also tells us about that we cannot live merely for the human and the material."¹⁴⁰ One must also live divinely and spiritually. For this reason, religious life indicates to us what is ultimate and superior. It is proleptic. It tends towards the eschatological future of the human family through vows and the service of charity. Put in the words of Hoffman and Cole,

Religious life is built on this preeminence of the future life, a life with God most of all. It is also built on the many important needs on this earth for ourselves and for others. But whatever religious do in the earthly city they do ultimately for the heavenly city. It is in the context of this twofold mission, and in the subordination of the one to the other, that religious life has its meaning and its glory.¹⁴¹

In other words, it is for the greater good of humanity which religious life serves, that consecrated men and women sacrifice their own marital life and biological fecundity. Sometimes, they are looked at and mocked as single persons, and yet they are married to God for a greater and eternal cause which benefits and will benefit the entire humanity.

¹⁴⁰ Dominic Hoffman and Basil Cole, *Consecrated Life*, 26.

¹⁴¹ Dominic Hoffman and Basil Cole, *Consecrated Life*, 26.

MARRIED TO GOD FOR A MOTHERHOOD AND FATHERHOOD OF LOVE AND CHARITY

The vows, for consecrated persons, are like the matrimonial ring, the sign of their marriage with God. By their consecration through the vow of chastity, religious (both males and females) make themselves “alone for God alone” (“*solī Deo*”).¹⁴² This aloneness for God alone constitutes, in fact, a kind of mystical marriage with God for the sake of the Kingdom and salvation of humankind. Through the vow of chastity, they become poor of their physical paternity and maternity, in order to enrich, support and comfort human family as a whole. Hence, they obey the Father and Mother of all things, that is, the Triune God, willing to identify themselves with Him for the sake of the Kingdom.

Thus, if “the supreme vocation ...is to be always with the Lord,”¹⁴³ as John Paul II says, the supreme marriage is to be with God too. In this sense, prophet Isaiah writes: “your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called.” (Isaiah 54:5). In this same vein, the Book of Revelation speaks of “the marriage of the Lamb” with all of us as His bride (cf. Revelation 19:7, 9; Matthew 22:1-14; Luke 14:15-24).

In other words, with the religious consecration and celibacy, one must live as we said another marriage; enter into another family much precious and greater than the one of the flesh: the great family of the Kingdom of God. Thus, he or she who lives the vow of chastity and celibacy as consecration to Christ is not really single. He or she lives in another union, another nuptial life by which, as noted by Fulton J. Sheen, he or she “may be free to serve and love not just another man or woman and a few children, but all men and women in the bonds of charity in Jesus Our Lord.”¹⁴⁴ Hence, a priest, a religious (male and female) also beget; they are fecund. They beget children in labour, like Saint Paul (1 Corinthians 4:15; Galatians 4: 19); children in the Spirit, children of the Holy Spirit and for the great family of Heaven.¹⁴⁵

Because of this universal love and service of all in all, one may speak here, therefore, of a sort of “polygamy of love.” Polygamy not of the African type, not carnal and earthly, but mystical, that is, in the love Christ and the service of His Kingdom. For in Christ, though we are many, we form only one Body, the Church (1 Cor. 12:12), which is the Christ’s spouse. As such they become spouses, mothers and fathers of a great multitude including those who are biologically spouses, mothers and fathers. In that great and larger family of the Kingdom of God and because of it,

The priest is called “Father” – because he has begotten children not in the flesh, but in the Spirit. That is why the superior of a religious community of women is

¹⁴² Pier Giordano Cabra, *A Short Course on the Consecrated Life*, 17.

¹⁴³ John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Consecrated Life *Vita Consecrata* (25 March 1996), 7.

¹⁴⁴ Fulton J. Sheen, *The Cross and the Beatitudes*, 42.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Jean Paul II, Jean Paul II, *Aux Evêques, aux Prêtres. Lettres à l’Occasion du Jeudi Saint 1979*, (Paris: le Centurion, 1979), 8.

called "Mother" –She has her little flock in Christ. That too is why certain teaching orders of men are called "Brothers," and why women bound in religious life by the vow of chastity are called "Sisters".¹⁴⁶

Every celibate person, every religious person who vows chastity and lives it effectively is in love with Someone: The Eternal God who is (cf. 1John 4:8, 16) and to whom she or he is married forever. To express it, Fulton Sheen writes: "Everyone with a vow of chastity is in love, not in love with that which dies, but with that which is eternal – the love of God."¹⁴⁷ Christ becomes, therefore, the Real and True Spouse; the Companion and Friend of life of everyone religious. In Him and through Him, new links are established, no more according to carnal and human birth, but according to the new Christian birth in Christ (cf. John 1:12-13).

Noteworthy, the vow of chastity and consecrated celibacy are not made an escape from sacrifices pertaining to marital life, nor a denial of marital life itself.¹⁴⁸ No! It is rather a detachment from egoistic bonds of the flesh linked to our human nature, to our ego, for further bonds which are spiritual and superior. These bonds demand of us the same (if not more) sacrifices than of the marital state. But in this detachment for the Kingdom, there is always one and many women to love; one and many men to love; one and many children to feed and to take care of.

Consecrated life has, indeed, a parental value in the Church and in the society. When we see the maternal and paternal; fraternal and social role that religious and priests play in the lives of widows, widowers, orphans and abandoned children, we cannot but understand and appreciate this new maternity and paterernity ; fraternity and sociality in Christ of the religious. Chaste life is ideal motherhood or fatherhood when it is lived for Christ and for the sake of the Kingdom. Religious life becomes, therefore, one of the means to "saving the African family"¹⁴⁹ and to make her to effectively live as God's family in the modern world.¹⁵⁰

In fact, one can be mother without ever being in a maternity hospital. One may also have been severally to a maternity hospital, with many children begotten, but without ever truly being a mother. True motherhood is the motherhood of the heart. One is really father or mother when she or he loves and is responsible.

This is also valuable to the African conception of ancestrality, a title by which one enters the African pantheon and is crowned. In this vein, to beget many lives is not sufficient to become an ancestor. An ancestor should be one who saves lives and defends them against death and all kinds of life's violations. Moreover, to save life, to take care of and to serve life are other modes of begetting and of being mother and father. In this sense, everyone can be father, mother and child, in sofar as he or she is committed to the service of life. Finally, the

¹⁴⁶ Fulton J. Sheen, *The Cross and the Beatitudes*, 42.

¹⁴⁷ Fulton J. Sheen, *The Cross and the Beatitudes*, 44.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Fulton J. Sheen, *The Cross and the Beatitudes*, 41.

¹⁴⁹ John-Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Church in Africa *Ecclesia in Africa* (14 September 1995), 84.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. John-Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 63, 94.

greatness of a human being is when she or he is a saint – no matter how old he or she is. Sanctity is measured by the life of charity and service to humankind for the glory of God and salvation of souls.

Priests and religious are single in the eyes of human beings, but they are really spouses, fathers and mothers in the eyes of God, in His Kingdom and for His Kingdom. At the same time, those who are married in the eyes of men and women of this world can be seen as single in the eyes of God, for each human and marital fecundity which does not lead to divine and spiritual fecundity; fecundity in God, for God and His Kingdom, becomes sterile. For this reason, even the human natural family is called to respond to and to live, the spirituality of the Kingdom of God. Human natural family becomes, therefore, fecund for the Kingdom for Christ, if it engages Christ and is committed to Him. For one must not only be father or mother according to the flesh; brother and sister according to the flesh, but also according to the Spirit and the Kingdom. As Kasper notes,

It is not only physical life that is transmitted in marriage and in the family. In them also, the second birth, the social birth, the intellectual, spiritual and cultural formation of the young person is effected, and this is of fundamental importance for the edification of the human family and for the Church as well.¹⁵¹

In this sense, marital and family life is greatly deficient when it is cut off from God and from the Kingdom, just as consecrated or religious life is foundationally deficient if it is cut off from the idea of marriage and human family. In brief, God is the source of the both state of life, such that without Him, they run dry.

RELIGIOUS LIFE GIVES AND SAVES LIFE FOR THE SOCIETY AND THE CHURCH

Modern and postmodern philosophies want to kill or annihilate the idea of the father and mother; of the natural motherhood and fatherhood as designed by God the Creator from whom every family, fatherhood and motherhood on earth and in heaven are named (cf. Ephesians 3:14-15). According to the moral theologian, Marcus Ndongmo, one of their impacts in the present society is “marriage’s counterfeiting.”¹⁵² Generally, they want to extinguish the unique human nature given in two complementary dimensions (masculine and feminine) by God at creation. They want to negate human familial and natural composition.

¹⁵¹ Walter Kasper, *L’Église Catholique*, 307.

¹⁵² Marcus Ndongmo, *Sauver la Famille Africaine. Réflexion sur le Mariage comme Fondement de la Famille*. (Yaoundé: Presses de l’UCAC, 2008), 97.

However, as said above, this is not the case with religious and consecrated life and celibacy. Consecrated life and celibacy is not the negation of the human natural family, nor is it the negation of heterosexual marriage between a man and a woman as it is suppose to be.

Religious life and consecrated celibacy are not against human biological motherhood and fatherhood too. Rather, they re-affirm and redefine them within the divine project of salvation, so that all might be in Him, from Him, through Him and for Him (Romans 11:36; 1 Corinthians 15:28). In fact, while exalting virginity and chastity which are sources of a new motherhood and fatherhood in Jesus, the desert Monks energetically affirmed the value of marriage and biological parenthood.¹⁵³

As some may think, consecrated life or religious persons do not kill social life because of their state of singleness, which is biologically infecund. On the contrary, consecrated life gives life and saves life. For Dominic Hoffman and Basil Cole,

Religious life, like the supernatural life of grace itself, is not meant to crush what is good in human nature but to bring it to perfection though not by any blind demand for self-centred human perfection. This supernatural goal and perfection involves certain renunciations in the life of every Christian, even more therefore in the life of a religious.¹⁵⁴

In other words, religious life and consecrated celibacy perfect human society, in one way or another. They give vitality to human social life. Through their consecration and state of life, they sustain, protect and defend it. In this way, they participate very well in the integral human promotion of the society; they participate in their own way in the fight against the economic and social underdevelopment of their countries and of the world. Their consecration and celibacy enrich and support the existing biological fecundity, motherhood and fatherhood. In this way, in their consecration, "it must be insisted that the elements of human existence by no means be neglected."¹⁵⁵

Only the love for Christ, configuration to Him, and the service of the Kingdom can give sense to consecrated life and priestly celibacy (cf. Matthew 19:12). It is for the sake of the Kingdom that Christ Himself recommends it (cf. Matthew 19:12) as being "a sign of pastoral charity and an incentive to it as well as being in a special way a source of spiritual fruitfulness in the world."¹⁵⁶ "A sign of pastoral charity" because one becomes free for all, without any embarrassment; and this constitutes a source of great spiritual fruits for the Church and for the world. Because of this spiritual fecundity and charity that gives, saves lives and promotes

¹⁵³ Cf. Pier Giordano Cabra, *A Short Course on the Consecrated Life*, 8.

¹⁵⁴ Dominic Hoffman and Basil Cole, *Consecrated Life*, 26-27.

¹⁵⁵ Dominic Hoffman and Basil Cole, *Consecrated Life*, 26.

¹⁵⁶ Concile Vatican II, Décret sur le ministère et la vie des prêtres *Presbyterorum ordinis*, 16.

human dignity, religious persons have to faithfully keep on their commitment to the vows, despite trials and their weaknesses.

WEAK BUT COMMITTED WITNESSES

Temptations, trials and weaknesses of religious and celibate life are certainly many. But let us remain faithful to our vows to God. For if evil is easier to commit and live, and if we are more zealous to it, great and eternal is the punishment due to it if we die without repentance. But, if doing and living good seems difficult to us, as we are lukewarm about it, let us keep in mind that a great promise and reward is tied to it, if especially we rely on God's grace.

"We are all conscious of having this treasure in earthen vessels [2 Corinthians 4:7]; yet we know that it is a treasure."¹⁵⁷ It is a treasure to cherish, to preciously keep and to offer for the sake of humanity. Hence, despite inherent temptations and difficulties, we must always safeguard it as a gift for the Kingdom; we must remain committed witnesses. For, if Christ is the Spouse of the Church, our Mother, we in turn, like Christ and for Him, must become spouses for the Church, for humanity through celibacy and the priestly ministry which configures and identifies us to Christ, the very Person from whom we are what we are. In the priestly celibacy and consecrated life, there is a mystical union similar to the one of Christ with the Church His Spouse (cf. Ephesians 5:23-32).

Concerning priestly celibacy, vows or evangelical counsels in general, a double standard of life is a counter witness to the Kingdom of God of which we are already signs and premises to here on earth. We are called to become more and more conscious and responsible. What really strengthens and gives sense to the vows and promises we make is when we live them with faithfulness, commitment and joy. A religious or priest who violates his or her vows and promises becomes sooner or later a source of troubles for the Church and his / her own community. For this reason, Kasper redefines the sense of chastity and celibacy in our life and helps to understand them in relation to Christ and the Kingdom, in a world which is losing sense and values in all. He writes:

One can understand the form of celibate life freely accepted only if one does not just see its negative aspect, namely, the voluntary renunciation of something, which constitutes a part of the greater realities in human life, that is, renunciation of family and marriage. We must consider this renunciation from its positive aspect, namely, the friendship with Jesus and walking after Him; the service of the Kingdom of God and of men. Only he for whom God represents everything can renounce everything, insofar as that is humanly possible.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Jean Paul II, *Aux Evêques, aux Prêtres*, 8.

¹⁵⁸ Walter Kasper, *L'Église Catholique*, 337.

Saint Paul himself found celibacy as something good; an eschatological advantage (1 Corinthians 7: 26) for service and hope for the coming of the Lamb. That is why he chose it without however contempting the other states of life (1 Corinthians 7:27-28, 36-38), especially marriage, which he proclaimed as being a “great mystery” in reference to Christ and His Church (Ephesians 5:32). “It is only from this theological, Christological and finally eschatological perspective that it is possible to comprehend the affinity between priestly ministry and voluntary celibacy. Considered from a pure immanent perspective of the world, one must count it as senseless.”¹⁵⁹

CONCLUSION

To bear children as fruits of love in matrimonial life and for the perennial of human existence is good. On this matrimonial and heterosexual life that is open to procreation, Africa’s stand is still relevant, especially in the present current of same-sex marriage which opposes it. But the love of God and of the Kingdom of God to the point of detachment from one’s own marriage, family and children is greater. It is a great charity to human universal fraternity and family inaugurated by Jesus Christ in the mystery of Incarnation-Redemption, which engenders and defines the new humanity of man and woman. To live chastity and celibacy for the Kingdom helps us to respond to the universal call to holiness made to all – to religious and priests in particular.¹⁶⁰ Celibate’s chastity is poverty; poverty for the Kingdom in that there is a certain familial attachment which can prevent us from going to Christ and to freely serve Him. Religious chastity and celibacy is also obedience to and imitation of Christ who was single and chaste for the Kingdom.

¹⁵⁹ Walter Kasper, *L’Église Catholique*, 337.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Concile Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, chapitre V; *Presbyterorum ordinis*, 12.

SINGLE BLESSEDNESS & NEW EVANGELIZATION (1 Cor. 7,25-40)

Victor Onwukeme, MSP¹⁶¹

ABSTRACT

This is the most difficult and the most controversial passage in 1 Corinthians and it has exercised the ingenuity of scholars. There are many different interpretations and none of them is immune to objections.¹⁶² The obscurity is because we do not have the clear picture of what the Corinthian position was. It is as if we are now reduced to conjecture. In spite of the high degree of uncertainty, it is imperative to develop a hypothesis presenting the Corinthian position otherwise Paul's response will remain unintelligible.

The passage is a direct answer to an inquiry concerning spiritual marriage and single blessedness. This passage can be used to show that those who are called to single blessedness have the right to be included into pastoral plan of the Church. Although they are part and parcel of the people of God, they are often neglected in our various parishes. The paper will examine the above pericope in order to draw out the message of Paul and relate it to new evangelization.

INTRODUCTION

This is the most difficult and the most controversial passage in 1 Corinthians and it has exercised the ingenuity of scholars. There are many different interpretations and none of them is immune to objections. The obscurity is because we do not have the clear picture of what the Corinthian position was. It is as if we are now reduced to conjecture. In spite of the high degree of uncertainty, it is imperative to develop a hypothesis presenting the Corinthian position otherwise Paul's response will remain unintelligible.

The passage is a direct answer to an inquiry concerning spiritual marriage and single blessedness. This passage can be used to show that those who are called to single blessedness have the right to be included into pastoral plan of the Church. Although they are part and parcel of the people of God, they are often neglected in our various parishes. The paper will examine the above pericope in order to draw out the message of Paul and relate it to new evangelization.

INTERPRETATION

¹⁶¹ Rev. Dr. Victor Onwukeme, MSP, a specialist in Sacred Scriptures, is a member and currently the Superior General of the Missionary Society of St. Paul of Nigeria; he was a lecturer in Biblical Theology and the Rector of the National Missionary Seminary of St. Paul (NAMISEP), Gwagwalada-Abuja, FCT (Nigeria). This Paper was presented at CATHAN Conference held at Bishop Kelly Pastoral Centre, Benin City, on 7th April to 10 April 2015.

¹⁶² Jerome Murphy O'CONNOR, *1 Corinthians* (Wilmington – Delaware, Michael Glazier, Inc., 1980) 71.

Paul states clearly that he has no command from the Lord concerning virgins. He simply gives his personal opinion. Paul says in view of the impending distress, it is good for those who are single to remain as they are (1 Cor 7,17-24). In vv 27-28 Paul uses the second person singular and addresses only men: if you are bound to a wife, do not seek to be free; if you are free from a wife, do not seek marriage. But to marry is not sinful. However, if men marry, they would have to endure hardship from which Paul would like to spare them. The reasons Paul discourages people from seeking marriage are the present eschatological distress and the greater troubles thereof for those who are married.

Paul calls to mind the nearness of the end and draws from it. Christians must cultivate an attitude of eschatological restraint. The appointed time has grown short. The world as we know it is passing away. Those who have wives should live as though they had none. Those who mourn should live as though they were not mourning; those who rejoice should do as though they were not rejoicing; those who buy should live as though they had nothing. Although Paul's conviction about the shortness of time may have proved erroneous, the passing character of our individual lives recommends restraint. The transient nature of human life recommends restraint. For Paul everyone should focus on winning heaven.

Paul returns to the theme of the married and the unmarried. His statement in v 32 is radical. I want you to be free from anxieties. But he has to explain what he means. In vv 32b-34 the reference to the unmarried man is balanced by that to the husband and that to the unmarried woman and virgin by that to the wife; on the one hand there is a single mind, a complete devotion to the Lord; on the other hand there is a double concern and there are divided interests (the partner and the Lord). In the lengthy sentence of v 35 Paul as it were, excuses himself and stresses his genuine intention, his loving care.

It is very likely that Paul is answering a question posed by the Corinthians. Most notable is Paul's insistence that marriage is not a sin (vv 28 & 36). It seems that Paul was dealing with a situation in which individuals had committed themselves to celibacy in marriage. This is different from the situation envisaged in 7,1-9 where individuals expected normal sexual expression within marriage. The ascetics at Corinth would have been operating on two fronts. On the one hand they tried to persuade married couples to forego sexual relations, while on the other hand, they tried to convince engaged couples to enter into spiritual marriage.

Some members of the community at Corinth informed Paul of their opposition to spiritual marriage and may have gone on to substantiate their point by presenting the difficulties of a particular case. The framework of Paul's response is provided by his two statements: the appointed time has grown very short (v 29) and the form (the social and commercial institutions) of this world is passing away (v 31). These show that Paul believed that the Parousia was imminent (1 Thess 4,13-18) and he assumed the Corinthians to be aware of it too. The Corinthians should not imagine that the realities that make up the fabric of their present lives are going to endure for very long. This is the central thrust of vv 29-31 the individual phrases of

which should not be taken out of this context. Paul is not recommending that husbands should cease to love their wives, nor that they should put on a hypocritical show of sorrow or rejoicing, nor that they stop all commercial activity. His concern is to prepare them for the day when all these will change. He is asking for an attitude of detachment from the things which tend to absorb humanity. It is foolish to give too much importance to the impermanent.

The Corinthians should have the wit not to involve themselves in the complexities of a change of sexual status at a moment when the imminent approach of the end will bring inevitable difficulties (v 26). Paul argues for the retention of *status quo* of each individual – the married should stay married while the single should stay single (vv 27. 39-40). Those in spiritual marriage should maintain their commitment. Paul reacts against any tendency to move from the married to the single state and vice versa (7,1-16). He is not speaking of marriage as such but of marriage within the context of the Corinthian community where feelings were running high. Those who married would certainly come under attack from the ascetics and would have to waste a lot of energy in repulsing worldly troubles (v 28) and worldly affairs (vv 33-34). They would be distracted by matters that are absolutely of no importance. Equally, the newly married would have to give time to pleasing their partners (vv 33-34).

Paul's implicit condemnation of this attitude (the attitude of pleasing one's partner) is one of the most shocking statements in the letter and easily lends itself to misinterpretation. Since he made love the basis of Christian life (1 Cor 13,2). Paul cannot see involvement with another person as a distraction from the affairs of the Lord. The very next chapter highlights the supreme importance of such concern and emphasizes the barren self-deception and the hypocrisy inherent in a commitment to God which does not embody such practical concern for the other. He is thinking here of the total absorption of the newly married and what he is trying to get across (admittedly not very well) is the egocentric character of this attitude. A husband or a wife has his/her first, but not the exclusive, claim on his/her partner's love. One must remain open to others. In serving others with whom one is not emotionally involved one must be conscious of the relationship to God. Paul does not advise hatred of one's partner rather he is being realistic. His argument is that one should focus on the imminent coming of the kingdom and place this above societal status.

It would seem as if Paul glorifies the single state and this appears to be the case in vv 32-35. However, Paul equally said: Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free (v 27). Paul is against change of social status given the conditions of things at the moment. His point is that under the present conditions, one would be a fool to be pre-occupied by the impermanent. It is highly likely that the statement *the unmarried man/woman/virgin is anxious about the affairs of the Lord* (vv 32 & 34), which at first sight appears incredibly naïve, is a subtle criticism of the ascetics who were creating all the trouble. If Paul says: I want you to be free from anxieties (v 32), we are not entitled to assume that he approves of the anxiety of the single person, even if this has the Lord as object. The very term suggests a **worried care** which is out of harmony with the peace to which God calls the believers (vv 7-15).

In the last analysis, therefore, it is very hard to accuse Paul of glorifying the single state. It was his own, and he thought it the best (1 Cor 7,7), but he certainly did not make it mandatory for all (v 35). He does in fact invoke his authority in this section but then his motive is to alleviate a burden. He authoritatively states: If you marry you do not sin and if a girl marries she does not sin (v 28); and he applies this judgment to the situation of widows (v 39) but especially to a spiritual marriage in v 36 (where 'his betrothed' is literally 'his virgin'). Even though these have made a vow or promise of celibacy in marriage, if they cannot control their sex-drive they should enter into a normal married relationship without any scruple. It must be noted that Paul is not objecting to a spiritual marriage as such. This is clear from v 37. It may be the will of God for some and so they have Paul's blessing.

In order that his opinion, which he hoped would be for their benefit and the promotion of peace and order (v 35), be given due attention, he reminds them, with extraordinary mildness, that he is the one entrusted by God with the care of the community (v 25), and concludes with the massive understatement: *I think that I have the spirit of God* (v 40).

Parthenoi refers to virgins or unmarried young women betrothed in marriage who together with all the other household members involved (especially the significant males – father and fiancé) who are unsure how to proceed in view of their conversion, spirit-possession and new status as sisters to their Christian brothers. The issue which Paul is dealing with here is: Should unmarried brothers and sisters proceed to marriage in line with the established cultural norms and expectations? Should they remain as sisters and brothers? Paul advises that people should remain as they are. However, if a virgin should marry she does not sin. This is followed by series of arguments in favour of remaining unmarried, arguments which combine Jewish Christian imminent-end eschatology with motifs from Stoic and Cynic teaching on the need for the truly wise person to remain undistracted by worldly attachments and free from care in his or her mission as a messenger of God. The overall thrust of Paul's advice comes at the end: So then he who marries his fiancée does well and he who refrains from marrying will do better.

What is striking about this argument is that while it seeks to promote what will bring benefit and good order (7,35), it is far from being socially conservative since it challenges the injunction of Gen 1,28. What Paul's views express is an underlying idea that exceptional times require exceptional lifestyle. Some of these may appear conventional as with the married who remain married and maintain sexual relations but now with a degree of reciprocity between the sexes unusual for the times. Others will appear unconventional as in the case of apostle who refrains from going accompanied by a wife (9,5) or the widowed who remain single rather than remarrying or the betrothed who do not proceed to marriage but remain unmarried. What is important for Paul however, is neither conventionality nor unconventionality, but wholehearted and responsible commitment to the Lord at the turn of the ages in whatever condition and status believers find themselves. As a corollary, what is important also is resistance to pressures from ascetically minded elite to advocate and adopt only one pattern of life as legitimate. This explains why

the thrust of Paul's instruction overall is in the direction not of reducing options, but of increasing them and by introducing exceptional opinions and qualifications making them more complex, always, however, within a framework of divine calling and eschatological hope.

There is lacking what one might call systematic theology of singleness blessedness. In this passage Paul endorses single blessedness as a status in social life. He is introducing something that is new in the mentality and culture of the Corinthians and perhaps to us too. Paul encourages the Corinthians to act both freely and responsibly in this regard..

SINGLE BLESSEDNESS AND SOCIETY

In Africa much premium is placed on marriage and this does not make it easy for singles. A single in African setting is looked upon as a failure, a misfit as if such a person were cursed. Such a person is looked down in society. S/he is an object of scorn and derision. Singles feel insecure. They often face pressures from family, from friends, age group and so forth. However, singles must know that they have not committed any sin by being single. They need not succumb to society pressures. Singles should not enter into marriage because they must get married by hook or by crook. They should be involved in a relationship that gives meaning to their lives. Human relationship is rooted in the Trinitarian nature of God. God is the author, the source, the beginning and the end of relationship. Interpersonal relationship is intrinsic to our human nature. From the beginning God said: it is not good for man to be alone (Gen 2,18). David and Jonathan were great friends. Their friendship is portrayed as so intimate that some homosexuals quote the following passages to endorse their act (1 Sam 18,1-3; 2 Sam 1,26). Israelites did not tolerate homosexuality and so the above texts cannot be used as a licence to justify the practice of homosexuality today.

In some cases there is selfish love and not selfless love. In cases where eros initiated love relationship, the persons involved must go above the eros. Egg may lead one into the seminary but one does not need to remain there. Odour of delicious stew may do this but one does not need to remain at this level. Pick-up Van led Bishop Kukah's mother to suggest priesthood to him. Attraction may lead to the beginning of a relationship, eros may lead to the beginning of relationship but people should not remain at this level.

According to Blaise Pascal, *To be is to be in relationship*. Relationship sums up the essence of our being, since to be is to be in relationship. This is the reason no one is an Island unto himself. In Christ, God entered into a loving relationship with humanity. Jesus broke boundaries in his relationship. He related with Zacchaeus a public sinner (Luke 19,1-10). He stretched out his hand and touched a leper (Mark 1,40-45). He did not condemn a prostitute caught in the act of adultery (John 7,53-8,1-11) and so forth. Jesus never married but he begot children spiritually.

There are different levels of relationships. We do not relate equally with everyone. We are intimate with some people and with others we relate

professionally or formally and yet with some others we are casual. Some are so dear to us that we can give our lives for them.

Marriage is not necessary for a relationship. Family life is not necessary for a relationship. Sex is not necessary in a relationship. However, communication is necessary in any true relationship. At the heart of every relationship is communication. Women pay more attention to details while men tend to summarise. Acknowledge the differences in gender: recognising and acknowledging of the difference in gender make-up and perception will enhance human relationship. Understanding the other enhances meaningful relationship. Communication has to do with the meeting of hearts. The goal of communication is self-disclosure and in this one equally discloses one's agenda. Communication involves speaking and listening.

One needs to accept oneself and appreciate oneself. Lack of self-esteem leads to inferiority complex. It often leads to comparing oneself with others and wondering why God did not create one like this another person. A healthy dose of self-esteem is necessary for a good relationship. There is a thin line between self-esteem and pride. It is not good to feel inferior because one is single. It is better not to be married than to be married and be unhappy all one's life. There are those who are married and they are feeling: I would have been happier without a life partner.

There is need for sincerity and trust. Augustine once said: I have met many who would like to deceive but I have not met any who would like to be deceived. Sincerity, honesty and trust are key ingredients for any meaningful relationship. Falsehood, deceit, lies, dishonesty are obstacles to any true and significant relationship. Those in relationship should learn to trust and trust should develop over a period of time. Betrayal can weaken and in fact can destroy great relationships. Love and understanding are necessary ingredients in any relationship. The great commandment of love is very important if any meaningful relationship is to last (Matt 22,34-40; Gal 5,14; Rom 13,8; 1 Cor 13,4-7)

Mutual Care: There is need for mutual care and consideration if your relationship is to last. It is not a 50/50 affair but there should be fundamental goodwill. I recall a friend of mine in London, Mrs Lorraine complaining about her husband Edward and at the end Lorraine said concerning Edward: *I know he means well*. I told her: This summarises all your complaints. Once you are aware of the fact that Edward means well for you, every other thing fall into place.

FACTORS THAT INHIBIT ENDURING RELATIONSHIP

- 1) *Selfishness*: When someone is always looking for his/her own good neglecting the other, the other will not feel cared for. There should be some willingness to sacrifice for the sake of the other person.
- 2) *Betrayal*: *If an enemy had done this I could have borne it. But it is you my bosom friend. How close was the friendship between us (Ps 54)?* Caesar received so many stabs but he did not die. However as soon as Brutus, his bosom friend stabbed him: his last words were: *Et tu Brute* (Even you Brutus) and Caesar collapsed

and died. Betrayal can destroy and has destroyed a lot of valuable relationships.

- 3) *Lack of Commitment*: This can stifle relationship. Commitment has to do with loyalty and fidelity to one's relationship, to one's friends, family members, business colleagues and fellow Church members. Often times commitment is sacrificed when it gets into the way of self-fulfilment, comfort, pleasure, and personal advancement.

SINGLE BLESSEDNESS & NEW EVANGELISATION

This is a favourable time in the life of the Church. As priests and religious, we are called to live this Year of Consecrated Life intensely and to offer our contribution. Priests and religious blaze new trails and are at the forefront of ecclesial renewal. At this time the Church wants to be a sign of tenderness, compassion and mercy. She wants to build herself starting from the poorest and the weakest of her members. The relationship between the Church and culture is also being redefined. It is not just a matter of reaching out (unilaterally) to this culture but of interacting with it, getting to the core of the problems of men and women today with evangelical and charismatic resources. It is a matter of promoting true humanity, showing the power of the Gospel. In this light, the singles must not be neglected. In this passage, Paul makes it clear that being single or getting married is not what matters, rather what matters is winning heaven.

The Extraordinary Synod on the family revived a method of facing problems noting that true dialogue is needed. True dialogue is without hypocrisy. It is based on authentic listening, sincerity and discernment. It is not afraid of differences in positions and it is able to endure difficult moments. Responding to problems requires time, everyone's contribution, the implementation of sound processes, prayer and a collaborative spirit. It is also important to recognize the good signs already present in the life of the Church. Basically, seeing the road to follow is a gift of the Spirit. It is also necessary for everyone to take part in this process.

The whole Church awaits eagerly for the Synod on the family which comes up this October. The coming synod will have to deal with the following issues - Holy Communion to divorced but remarried; matters relating to cohabitation, homosexual unions, family models and the like. But this must take place within a broader framework that takes into account cultural evolutions. The concept of family is changing, and, what is more, there are various family models that come from the different contexts. There is also a tendency to challenge the very meaning of the family for society, as if it were possible to envision a society that no longer revolves around it. It will be good if the coming synod on the family equally addresses the issue of singles who are often neglected.

The pastoral perspective, which is at the heart of the Synod, must be preserved. We are going back to the spirit of the Council, where John XXIII (at the opening of the Vatican Council II) spoke of an "eminently pastoral" magisterium or where Paul VI (at the end of the Vatican Council II) explained that the spirituality of the Council

had been that of the Good Samaritan. Pope Francis encourages an image of a Church that is open and not afraid of encountering the weak, the marginalized and the neglected. He wants a Church that keeps its doors open and knows how to accompany the weak and the needy (*Evangelii Gaudium* 47). Such a Church is emerging, a Church which engages in discernment, *lives* in our time, from within the situations of life, *listening* to the heartbeats and *smelling* the atmosphere. Such a Church cannot continue to neglect the singles.

The theme of the family challenges us to re-write all the chapters of pastoral care, to deepen the relational dimension of pastoral care, to think of pastoral care in terms of offering support and accompaniment, paying special attention to the weak and the neglected and creating networks of relationships. Briefly, it is about a new way of being Church. Within this framework, the singles can no longer be left out. The widows should not be left out. The divorced but remarried are still members of the Church in spite of their irregular situation. They deserve some pastoral care from the Church.

It is necessary to promote reciprocity and co-responsibility among priests, religious and laity. The journey will be easier if we join forces and face the challenges together, for the mission, and a mission that is decentralized (on everyone's life and on the action of God who is at work in everyone's heart).

CONCLUSION

Parishes should have programmes which bring together all the singles. There is a Latin adage which says: *Pares cum paribus facillime congregunt* (birds of the same feather flock together). People with similar interests, educational background, social status, religious affiliation and so forth are likely to have fruitful and understanding relationships. It is the same with people with similar character and personality traits as well as status who tend to develop a better understanding of one another. Such will not only enable them to share their problems (problems shared are half solved), but will equally enable them to meet and chart ways to new relationships some of which sometimes lead to marriage. In our parishes we have CWO, CMO, the Youth programmes but there is none for the singles. It is high time the Church carried out inculturation in this area and paid pastoral attention to many of them in our various parishes and other places of assignment.

THE PLACE AND ROLE OF THE FAMILY IN THE FORMATION AND MISSION OF PRIESTS AND CONSECRATED PERSONS

Rev. Dr. M. Nkechinyelu EZEANYINO, DDL¹⁶³

ABSTRACT

The family, which is the first cell of Society and the first school of humanization or civilization, occupies the most important and indispensable place in the formation and mission of priests and consecrated persons. This its place informs its role which is the proper up-bringing of children, that is, the holistic physical, spiritual, psychological, moral, social, and cultural formation of these children from whom will emerge priests and consecrated persons.

An environment imbued with love of God and human beings which constitutes a community of persons is necessary for such holistic formation.

Families have to teach their children both spiritual and moral virtues that will help them become real human beings capable of living responsibly in this post-modern age.

It is the responsibility of families to give their children an education commensurate with their religious belief in such a way that when the children grow up, they will not depart from it.

They will take special care to nurture vocations to priesthood and religious life whenever they see their sign in their children. Parents have to live exemplary lives in accordance with the Gospel values so as to inspire the desire for spiritual things in their children.

Families have the duty of supporting priests and consecrated persons with prayers, material and moral encouragement both while they are in formation, and even more while on mission. By so doing, they will be fulfilling their role as agents of evangelization.

1. INTRODUCTION

The family, among all the other human Institutions like the Society, the Church, Schools, and so on, occupies the first and most important position in the life and development of persons. This is because a person begins his life from the family where this life and its potentialities have their nurture; and that same person “goes forth from the family in order to realise in a new family unit his particular vocation in life”¹⁶⁴, and, finally, from this family, whether as biological or religious, the person goes back to his/her Creator to render an account of his/her stewardship. This “new family unit” could either be another natural family by means of marriage; a Diocese or Religious Congregation for Priests and Consecrated persons; or even a single life-style but as a member of other Associations. Here lies the need for us to examine the Place and Role of the Family in the Formation and Mission of Priests and Consecrated Persons.

¹⁶³ Rev. Sr. M. Nkechinyelu EZEANYINO is a member of the Daughters of Divine Love Congregation. She has a doctorate in Philosophy from the Urban University, Rome. She is a one-time translator and broadcaster with the Vatican Radio Corporation, Rome, English-Africa Department.; and a one-time general councillor and secretary general of her Congregation. Sr. Nkechi lectured in the Philosophy Departments of SS. Peter & Paul Major Seminary, Bodija, Ibadan, and Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu, for years. She is presently a part-time lecturer with the Spiritan International School of Theology, (SIST), Attakwu, Enugu.

¹⁶⁴ Pope John Paul 11, Letter to Families. 1994 Year of the Family, no. 2.

Because of this inalienable role that the family plays in the life, growth and death of its members, it becomes imperative for us to clarify, even if in a very skeletal form, the concept "Family", as well as the concepts "Formation", "Mission", and "Priests and Consecrated persons". This will enable us to situate our presentation in its proper perspective. Then the Role of the Family in the Formation and Mission of Priests and Consecrated persons will be presented in three parts, namely: the Early Development and Growth Stage; the Formal Formative Stage; and, finally, the Ordination/Consecration and Mission Stage. These are simply the developmental stages of the life, formation and mission of the people concerned. The conclusion will then wrap up all our discussions.

CLARIFICATION OF TERMS

(a) Family

This stands for *"a group of parents and their children; one's spouse and children; a group descended from a common ancestor; household; one's own flesh and blood ..."*¹⁶⁵. The Free Encyclopedia defines family, in the human context as *"a group of people affiliated by consanguinity, affinity, or co-residence. A nuclear family, also referred to as a 'conjugal' family - husband, wife, and unmarried children who are not of age"*¹⁶⁶. The Catechism of the Catholic Church sees family as *"a man and a woman united in marriage, together with their children"* (CCC 2202). What interests us more here is the nuclear family which is the nucleus or the first cell of the Society. From the African perspective, however, family embraces both nuclear and extended since the upbringing and formation of children, though primarily the duty of the nuclear family, is equally the responsibility of the extended family, and even the clan, bearing in mind the principle of subsidiarity. Moreover, the extended family and others can as well be relied upon for the sustenance of the mission of Priests and Consecrated Persons.

(b) Formation

This is the process of helping people develop, that is, moulding or building up the character and potential of a person. The person's physical, spiritual, psychological, moral and cultural dimensions are given particular attention in this process. This implies the formation to mature and responsible human beings capable of total self-giving in every sphere of life, and particularly in imitation of the Lord Jesus, for Priests and Consecrated Persons, who they are called to follow. *"For formation to be complete", therefore, "it must include every aspect of Christian life. It must, therefore, provide a human, cultural, spiritual and pastoral preparation which pays special attention to the harmonious integration of all its various aspects"*¹⁶⁷.

¹⁶⁵ Lorna Gilmore, ed., Collins English Dictionary and Thesaurus, Essential Edition. Glasgow: Harper Collins Publishers, Second Edition, 2006, p. 300.

¹⁶⁶ Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, modified 11 March, 2012.

¹⁶⁷ John Paul 11, Post-Synodal Exhortation, VITA CONSECRATA. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996, no. 65.

(c) Mission

This simply means *“a specific task or duty; a task or duty that a person believes he or she must achieve”*¹⁶⁸. The specific task here is that of evangelisation whether in active or contemplative religious life. Just as the Apostles of old, Priests and Consecrated Persons are called and are being sent to evangelise and carry out charitable and social works in the name of Christ, Who is the Evangeliser *par excellent*?

(d) Who are Priests and Consecrated persons?

“Every high priest is taken from among human beings and is appointed to act on their behalf in relationships with God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins;...” (Heb. 5:1). Here we see that a priest is a human being just as every other human being, but with the special mission of being a mediator between God and men. This is the mission that specifically belongs to Christ, into which He gratuitously incorporated ordinary human beings for the continuation of His mission on earth. By virtue of this incorporation, through the Sacrament of Holy Orders, the priest becomes *“another Christ – an Alter Christus”*, thereby, becoming a mediator between God and people. *“Through the Sacrament of Holy Orders, the priest shares in the priesthood of Jesus Christ in a unique, public way. The profound invitation to the priest, therefore, is that he would represent Jesus Christ in his personal life and in his public ministry”*¹⁶⁹.

The Priest is not only an *“Alter Christus”*, but he also acts in the person of Christ – *“in persona Christi”*. The Vatican 11 Fathers stated clearly that *“Priests by the anointing of the Holy Spirit are signed with a special character and so are configured to Christ the Priest in such a way that they are able to act in the person of Christ the Head”*¹⁷⁰. Hence, as Christ handed over His mission to the Apostles, these in their turn incorporated their successors, the Bishops, in their ministry of consecration and evangelisation. The Bishops, therefore, by the authority entrusted to them, ordain priests as their co-workers for the continuation and expansion of that apostolic mission that Christ entrusted to the Church¹⁷¹.

Consecrated Persons

These include men and women who are consecrated to God for the continuation of Christ’s mission on earth. To consecrate means to *“make sacred, dedicate to a specific purpose;*

¹⁶⁸ Lorna Gilmore, ed., Collins English Dictionary and Thesaurus, Essential Edition, op. cit., p. 523.

¹⁶⁹ Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria, I Chose You. The Nigerian Priest in the Third Millennium. Lagos: Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria Publication, September 2004, p. 9.

¹⁷⁰ Vatican 11 Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 7 December 1965, no. 2.

¹⁷¹ Cf. Ibid..

*devote, set apart*¹⁷². This consecration takes place in their various Religious Communities or Congregations, through the profession of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience, for the purpose of following Christ more closely in their lives and with ardent charity. These consecrated men and women *“who are called by God to the practice of the evangelical counsels, and who make faithful profession of them, bind themselves to the Lord in a special way. They follow Christ who, virginal and poor (cf. Mt. 8:20; Lk. 9:58), redeemed and sanctified men by obedience unto death on the cross (cf. Phil. 2:8). Under the impulse of love, which the Holy Spirit pours into their hearts (cf. Rom. 5:5), they live more and more for Christ and for His Body, the Church (cf. Col. 1:24). The more fervently, therefore, they join themselves to Christ by this gift of their whole life, the fuller does the Church’s life become and the more vigorous and faithful its apostolate”*¹⁷³.

It is good to mention here that there are priests who are also consecrated persons because they belong to Religious Congregations. They are referred to as Religious priests. Consecrated men and women, because they belong to Religious Institutes or Congregations, are also known as Religious men and women, and they live what we call Religious Life – the life described as *“Sequella Christi”* – the following of Christ.

Priests and Consecrated persons, therefore, are those who by virtue of their vocation, are closely knitted to the person of Christ and His mission, and as such are expected to live up to the demands of their vocation as lights of the world and the salt of the earth, (cf. Mt. 5:13-16).

And because Priests –*Alter Christi*, and Consecrated persons should be icons of Christ, obedient, chaste, poor, loving, compassionate, et cetera, they deserve a formation commensurate to their vocation and mission, and this formation has to start from the cradle which is the family. This is in consonance with what St. Pope John Paul 11 once wrote that *“the formation of future priests (and consecrated persons)... is considered by the Church one of the most demanding and important tasks for the future of the evangelisation of humanity”*¹⁷⁴. Such being the case, therefore, that task should be made lighter by the contribution of the family with the proper upbringing of their children.

2. THE FAMILY AND HER ROLES

The role of the family in the formation and mission of Priests and Consecrated persons can never be over-emphasised. That role is more urgent as well as demanding in our present day society because there are a lot of negative forces militating against the proper upbringing of children today. These include: the demon of divorce which attacks and corrodes the stability of family life, and it is on the increase in this post-modern age; the so-called “Reproductive Health

¹⁷² Lerner Gilmour, ed., Collins English Dictionary and Thesaurus, Essential Edition, op. cit., p. 165.

¹⁷³ Vatican 11, Decree on the Up-to-Date Renewal of Religious Life, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 28 October 1965, no. 1 (emphasis mine).

¹⁷⁴ John Paul 11, *Pastore Dabo Vobis*, no. 2, (Bracket mine).

Programme” that propagates false birth-control methods like contraception and abortion; the mentality of consumerism by which materialism is idolised; as well as economic challenges which lead to the inordinate quest for wealth. Here both husband and wife are in pursuit of money, thereby, leaving the care of their children to house-helpers, and this, no doubt, contributes to the corrosion of the foundation of the family. This quest for wealth at times leads to long separation between husband and wife, the husband living in another country for a long period of time, for whatever reason. Let it be clearly stated here that the people around whom the children grow have a great influence on the development of their character and personality. If they are entrusted mostly to the house-help, the latter automatically plays parent to the former (the children). Hence, the need for parents, particularly mothers, to devote quality time to their children, especially from infancy to adolescents. Parents who sacrifice the humanisation of their children on the altar of money should heed the wisdom of an ancient, pagan philosopher Aristotle, who said that *“household management attends more to men than to the acquisition of inanimate things, and to human excellence more than to the excellence of property which we call wealth”*¹⁷⁵.

Besides, there is the challenge of anti-Christian culture occasioned by the nihilistic mentality of this age. This is the age where many have lost the sense of the sacred, for, according to the father of extreme nihilism, Friedrich Nietzsche, “God is dead.” And the consequence? – everything is permissible. Man has to become god unto himself. This anti-Christian/Cultural/Moral ideology brought in its wake all other godless ideologies, mentalities and associations which are menacing our contemporary society, and no less the family which is the first cell of the society. Here is the origin of the secret cult phenomenon to which both children, adults, highly and lowly placed in the society, are victims. The effects of Pentecostalism are no less influential. And children who lack basic human and Christian formation easily fall prey to these inhuman ideologies.

In the face of all these contemporary challenges, there is great need for the upbuilding and strengthening of Christian families so that they take up their proper place and role in the formation of the present and future generations among whom will emerge Priests and Consecrated Persons. It is heart-warming to know that the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) is in the forefront of the campaign for the moral formation of children. It presented an elaborate programme with the discussion on the “Importance of the Family in the Society”, during the International Day for the Family which was celebrated on the 15th day of May, 2015. Again, their commentary after the national news of July 5, 2015, was titled “Improving the Moral Development of Children through Parental Censorship”. In that commentary, parents were advised to monitor the programmes their children watch in the social media, know their peer groups, establish a daily routine for them, and make sure

¹⁷⁵ Aristotle, “Politics” in *The Complete Works of Aristotle, The Revised Oxford Translation*, Edited by Jonathan Barnes, Vol. Two, Bollingen Series LXXI.2. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, Fourth Printing, 1991, 1259b17.

they are trained to take part in the household chores, that is, giving them proper home-training, et cetera¹⁷⁶. Moreover, the South-East Zonal Stations of the same FRCN has a jingle which runs thus: *"Izunte umu ntakiri dika osi kwesi, g'eme ka enwee echi g'akamma – Bringing up little children as expected, will yield a better tomorrow"*. All these point to the all-important fact that families need to buckle up in their role of populating the society with humanised persons.

A. Early Development and Growth: We said earlier that the place of the family in the formation and mission of Priests and Consecrated Persons is indispensable and irreplaceable. This place on its part determines its roles which are equally indispensable and, in some cases, irreplaceable. This role of the family starts right from pregnancy till death. Hence the first and primary role of the family is that of bringing into existence, by virtue of their divinely-assigned role as husbands and wives, the candidates to priestly and religious vocations. Unless children are born, we cannot talk of vocations of any sort. From here, other subsequent roles take off.

i) The need for making the family a peaceful, loving, and homely environment becomes imperative before and during *pregnancy*. Psychologists are of the view that the environment impacts on the baby in the womb. And if families are to breed humanised persons, they have to be such as could be designated ideal, where God and each individual member are given their proper places – a family that is really a community of persons. The family, therefore, has the fundamental role of being the school of love because it is love that specifies the essence and role of the family, bringing out its identity. To the extent to which the family remains faithful to its being the school of love, to that extent will it foster the community of persons that it is. *"... Without love the family is not a community of persons and, in the same way, without love the family cannot live, grow and perfect itself as a community of persons. The children reared in a loving environment (family) will no doubt grow into loving individuals capable of the life and sacrifice that vocation to the priestly and religious life demands"*¹⁷⁷.

ii) In this case, the family becomes the most influential school of humanisation or civilisation of its sprouting members. According to Samuel Smiles, *"... homes, which are the nurseries of children who grow up into men and women, will be good or bad according to the power that governs there. Where the spirit of love and duty pervades the home, there we expect an issue of healthy, useful and happy beings, capable of following the footsteps of their parents, of walking uprightly"*¹⁷⁸.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. FRCN Network News, Commentary, 10.00p.m., 5th July, 2015.

¹⁷⁷ John Paul 11, Redemptor Hominis, no. 10.

¹⁷⁸ Samuel Smiles, Character. Helps to Personality Growth (Abridged). Bandra, Mumbai: Better Yourself Books, 1996, pp. 29-30.

As the primary place of humanisation, the family has the indispensable role of introducing their children to the life of faith and morals. It is in the family that children are introduced to the life of prayer because *“by reason of their dignity and mission, Christian parents have the specific responsibility of educating their children in prayer, introducing them to a gradual discovery of the mystery of God and to a personal dialogue with Him”*¹⁷⁹. They do this by their practice and faithfulness to *Family Prayer*. As the domestic Church, family prayer should have a privileged place in the life of the family. The parents’ example and faithfulness to it will surely inspire their children to the desire for heavenly things, for *“inspired by the example and family prayer of their parents, children, and in fact everyone living under the family roof, will more easily set out upon the path of a truly human training, of salvation, and of holiness”*¹⁸⁰.

From family prayer, they gradually introduce them to participation in the Eucharistic celebration, preparing them, in co-operation with the Christian community for the reception of the Sacraments, and to other devotional prayers, especially the recitation of the Holy Rosary.

The family should be the principal school of moral and social education of children. The social virtues which are necessary for every society, and the rudiments of morals with which they can be truly humanised and so be able to discern their vocation are first assimilated from the family. *“In the family, moral virtues are taught, starting from the very first years of life, the spiritual heritage of the religious community and the cultural legacy of the nation are transmitted. In the family one learns social responsibility and solidarity”*¹⁸¹. Hence the foundation for all spiritual, religious, ethical, social, and cultural values necessary for the development and wellbeing of the children are laid in the family.

Families (parents) have the basic right and duty to give their children proper sex-education, as well as follow it up in the schools where they enrol them. This is in view of developing a true understanding of the meaning of the body and its function in human maturity – education to chastity. And when children indicate their wish for priestly or religious vocation, parents *“will devote special attention and care to education in virginity or celibacy as the supreme form of that self-giving that constitutes the very meaning of human sexuality”*¹⁸².

The exemplary life of parents in fostering and encouraging vocations to priestly and religious life cannot be overestimated. Christian parents who, by their words and deeds, live according to Gospel values inspire their children to embrace those values. *“We must remember that if parents do not live the values of the Gospel, the young*

¹⁷⁹ Pope John Paul 11, *Familiaris Consortio*, The Family in the Modern World, 1982, no. 60.

¹⁸⁰ Vatican 11, Pastoral Constitution On the Church In the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, 7 December, 1965, no. 48.

¹⁸¹ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 2005, p. 121; CCC 2224.

¹⁸² Pope John Paul 11, *Familiaris Consortio*, op. cit., no.37.

man or woman will find it very difficult to discern the calling, to understand the need for the sacrifices which must be faced, and to appreciate the beauty of the goal to be achieved. For it is in the family that young people have their first experience of Gospel values and of the love which gives itself to God and to others.”¹⁸³ St. Pope John Paul 11 had earlier stressed the indispensability of the role the exemplary life of parents plays in the moral formation of their children. For him, children raised in a family that lives in accordance with the moral norms imperceptibly imbibe that type of life and allows it to direct them¹⁸⁴. In the thoughts of Nwaobilo, “if godly parents produce godly children, they will in turn produce godly children”¹⁸⁵, and such children will, by the grace of God, live godly lives, and from among them will emerge godly vocations to the priesthood and religious life. An Igbo adage has it that “*ihe agwo muru, agharo ito ogologo* – whatever is begotten by a snake is always longish”, implying that like begets like.

It, therefore, follows that the foundational human and spiritual formation of children is an inalienable right and duty of the family. According to the Vatican Council 11 Fathers, “*The role of parents in education is of such importance that it is almost impossible to provide an adequate substitute. It is, therefore, the duty of parents to create a family atmosphere inspired by love and devotion to God and their fellow-men which will promote an integrated, personal and social education of their children*”¹⁸⁶. This duty of both human and spiritual education of children is the gravest obligation incumbent on families (parents), an obligation which is naturally recognised by reason.

The family as the first cell of the society and the cradle of humanisation or civilisation of its members, the children, has the very important role of providing the basic necessities of life – food, clothing and shelter, for their children. This role is usually taken for granted but we deem it proper to remind ourselves that it is the family which lives up to this expectation that produces healthy and well-formed individuals, capable of living up to their respective vocations and responsibilities in the society. Health of body and mind, therefore, is indispensable in the formation and mission of *Priests and Consecrated persons*.

B. Formal Formation

This is the period of formal education. It is the responsibility incumbent on the family to see that their children get the best possible education. First of all, the parents should choose, for their children, schools where integral education of the pupils is the norm. In this case, minor seminaries, juniorates, mission and good private schools become best options because of the fallen standards of our public

¹⁸³ John Paul 11, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation VITA CONSECRATA,, op. cit., no. 107.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. John Paul 11, Letter to Families, op. cit., no. 5.

¹⁸⁵ Ann O. Nwaobilo, *Effective Parenting*. Nigeria, Port Harcourt: Gitelle Press Ltd., Reprinted 1012, p. 26.

¹⁸⁶ Vatican 11, Declaration on Christian Education, *Gravissimum Educationis*, 28 October, 1965, no. 3.

schools. Only in such institutions is there the possibility of guaranteeing the continuation of the basic human and spiritual formation already initiated in the family. Even while in such schools, their supervisory role should not be mitigated. Hence, St. Pope John Paul II opined that “families, and more specifically parents, are free to choose for their children a particular kind of religious and moral education consonant with their own convictions. Even when they entrust these responsibilities to ecclesiastical institutions or to schools administered by religious personnel, their educational presence ought to continue to be constant and active”¹⁸⁷.

When the children are in school, it is the duty of the family to provide for all their living and school needs, while at the same time making sure that it instils the discipline of simple life-style and accountability in the children. It is part of their formation that children should be able to distinguish between their needs and their wants – a discipline that portrays mature human beings capable of responsible living in the society and in priestly and religious life.

Besides the provision of school needs, families have to play a very important, loving and interested supervisory role in their children’s progress. It is their inalienable right to be monitoring their children’s school progress as well as engaging them in dialogue through which they will be able to decipher the direction of the children’s formation. In other words, they need to intensify their role of accompanying their children in their formative stages.

The same role is expected of families all through the school formative years of their children, from their nursery, primary, secondary and tertiary levels; and in the case of candidates to priestly and religious life, till their ordination or religious profession level.

C). The Mission Proper

It is only after ordination or profession that the stage of mission proper begins. It could be mission *ad intra* or *ad extra*, that is, within the person’s country of origin or outside the country. The important thing is that one is considered mature enough to launch into the mission of evangelisation proper. To embrace this mission, there is need for professional preparation, either formally or informally.

At this stage, families, both nuclear and extended, have the role of continuously supporting the mission of the Church through their children. They do this, first and foremost, by consistently praying for their children as well as for all missionaries, bearing in mind that “*unless the Lord builds the house, in vain do the builders labour*” (Ps. 127:1). This we refer to as “*Family Prayer Apostolate*”. Our Holy Father Pope Francis also reminds us that prayer is the source of the fruitfulness of the mission¹⁸⁸.

¹⁸⁷ Pope John Paul II, Letter to Families, op. cit., no. 16.

¹⁸⁸ C.f. Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life And Societies of Apostolic Life, Year of Consecrated Life, REJOICE. A Letter to Consecrated Men and Women (A message from the teachings of Pope Francis). Nigeria: St. Paul Publication, 2014, p. 25.

It is not uncommon to hear people telling priests and consecrated persons that their prayers are more effective, being special friends of God, by virtue of ordination or religious consecration, and rightly so. However, their need for people's prayerful support cannot be over-emphasised. This is because of the hydra-headed challenges that buffet them in their efforts to "*live lives worthy of their vocation*", as well as carry out their missionary activities effectively.

We must be aware that the devil expends more time, energy and tactics on priests and consecrated persons because it encounters more resistance from them. This is to show us how serious and urgent it is to be praying for our priests and consecrated persons. There is no doubt, however, that priests and consecrated persons have the responsibility of universal intercession for the children of God; after all, "*they have been taken from among human beings to act on their behalf in their relationship with God ...*".

Besides, families, especially those who are well-to-do, have the responsibility of supporting the mission of priests and consecrated persons financially and materially through their Dioceses and Religious Congregations, or even personally since they are mature and are conversant with the life they have, by the grace of God, embraced. Even, the not-too-well-to-do can as well make sacrifices for the work of evangelisation. Therefore, "*each one should give as much as he has decided on his own initiative, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver*", (2Cor. 9:7).

Moreover, no one will ever be more generous than God.

It is a well known fact that those who contribute more for the support of the "Third World" or Developing Missions today are said to be old, retired and not-too-wealthy people who imitate the widow in the Gospel according to Mark, Chapter 12:42. We recall also that it was the families and friends of early missionaries who supported them massively, financially and otherwise, for the success of their mission in our land. Archbishop Charles Heerey's sister, Mrs. Hasset, was said to have contributed financially towards the building of the Holy Trinity Cathedral, now the Basilica of the Most Holy Trinity at Onitsha¹⁸⁹. And just as "*the faithful of the Christian Village depended very much on the charity of the missionaries*"¹⁹⁰, of Bishop Joseph Shanahan's days, so do the people of our poor mission lands depend on our missionaries for food, clothing, medicine, school needs for their children, et cetera. It is part of the missionary activity not just to give people fish, but also to teach them how to fish. In this case, the establishment of skills acquisition centres, and the empowerment of those who pass through them, become an indispensable means of evangelisation. And these, no doubt, need finance. Therefore, our missionaries in some African countries and in other poor countries of the world need finance and materials for the effective carrying out of their missionary work. Their families and friends are hereby called upon to encourage and support them.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. Mary-Noelle Ethel Ezeh, I.H.M., Archbishop Charles Heerey and the History of the Church in Nigeria, 1890-1967. Bandra, Mumbai: St. Paul Press, 2005, p. 15.

¹⁹⁰ Mary-Noelle Ethel Ezeh, I.H.M., Archbishop Charles Heerey ..., op. cit., p. 37.

Priests and Consecrated Persons equally need moral support from their families. This is in the form of healthy pieces of advice and encouraging words when the going gets tough. Though their Dioceses and Congregations are there for them, yet the role of their family members is very effective in boosting their morale.

3. CONCLUSION

The family as the first cell of the Society, the first school of humanisation or civilization, where the formation of character and personality are given indelible foundation, has an inalienable responsibility of giving its young members proper home training – human and spiritual – that will make them truly human beings. The precarious nature of our technological age makes this responsibility more urgent and indispensable, especially as it concerns the formation and mission of priests and consecrated persons.

The life-style of some priests and consecrated persons leaves the impression that either they lack some basic home formation or that their families constitute clogs in the wheels of the life they are called to live. Let it not, therefore, be thought that *“for some priests (and consecrated persons) the whole idea of going into the priesthood (and religious life) is, after all, a self-serving conspiracy between them and their parents for no other purpose than economic and, therefore, temporal gain”*¹⁹¹. Families should rather see to it that their priests and consecrated persons get the necessary help, advice, and encouragement that they need from them, for effective living and mission work. Here, the extended family members should be involved. They should desist from unnecessarily distracting them from their resolve to following in the footsteps of Christ.

We appreciate and encourage the formation of Associations of Parents of Priests and Religious as obtains in some Parishes and Dioceses. That is an appropriate avenue for enlightening families on their roles in the mission of their sons and daughters who have taken to a priestly and religious vocation. Fr. Nwatu is of the opinion that the get-together of such families should be *“a forum for them to consider ways of helping their sons (and daughters) both materially and otherwise, to become better priests (and religious) according to the mind of Christ; to be instructed on their obligations to their children – the obligation of discouraging the incidence of bringing home all kinds of ill-gotten goods and/or money, ...”*¹⁹².

Families are, therefore, called upon to contribute their quota at seeing that their priests and consecrated persons are faithful to the life they have been called to live. Families should always rejoice and thank God for blessing them with genuine vocations, rather than taking pride in the material benefits – prestige and monetary – that they bring to them. Christ’s teaching on Divine Providence becomes more apt here, to *“set your hearts on his kingdom first, and on God’s saving justice, and all these*

¹⁹¹ Felix Nwatu, *The Catholic Priesthood In Nigeria Today: The Wheat and the Cockle?* Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Publishing Company Ltd., 2010, p. 47. Bracket mine)

¹⁹² Ibid. Bracket Mine.

other things will be given you as well", (Mt. 6:33). Moreover, it is an abomination which carries with it grave consequences to offer something to God with the right hand, and turn around to take it back with the left hand, thereby playing Ananias and Sapphira, (c.f. Acts. 5:1-10).

To assist families play their role in the formation and mission of priests and consecrated persons, we suggest what we call "**Family Evangelisation and Re-evangelisation**". This is a situation where parishes will organise instructions to families for the effective parenting of their children. Resource persons should be men and women who are seen as ideal couples, as well as those with special professions like psychologists (child psychology). It is our belief that such a forum, besides the normal Marriage Course or Instruction, will offer young couples an opportunity to learn the art of family life and proper child-upbringing – human and spiritual. It will also be an avenue for enlightening parents on the vocation and life of priests and consecrated persons. We may not be too far from the truth by saying that some parents are ignorant of the significance and implication of the vocation and life of priests and consecrated persons.

We need to re-emphasise the fact that every Christian family should be responsible for encouraging and nurturing vocations to the priestly and religious life. This is one of the apostolates of the family, as the Second Vatican Council Fathers have it in number 11 of the *Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People, Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 18 November, 1965. Although the work of fostering vocations devolves on the Christian community as a whole, yet "*the greatest contribution is made by families which are animated by a spirit of faith, charity and piety and which provide as it were, a first seminary (novitiate) ...*"¹⁹³. The era of European missionaries now over, it is a duty incumbent on Africans, and more so Nigerians, to become missionaries not only to ourselves, but also to the whole world. And these missionaries will not fall from heaven but will come from Christian families. Although we have already started, yet the harvest is plentiful but the labourers are still very few, (cf. Mt. 9:37). Since the work of evangelisation is the responsibility of every baptised Christian, all hands must therefore be on deck to keep the flame of spreading the Good News always aglow, to the greater glory and honour of God, and the salvation of the children of God.

¹⁹³ Vatican 11, Decree on the Training of Priests, *Optatam Totius*, 28 October, 1965, no. 2.

CONSECRATED LIFE AND EVANGELIZATION OF FAMILY LIFE IN NIGERIA

Sr. Margaret Fagbamigbe, SSMA¹⁹⁴

ABSTRACT

The author took a cursory look at Consecrated life and how they could impact the family life by their life of service. Consecrated persons are people called by God and haven been inspired by the Holy Spirit, they responded generously to this call of service in order to participate in the saving mission of Christ. They are people, among others, who are propelled by charity to serve the family life, albeit, they have their roots in the family. Family life in Nigeria is in need of renewal in all its ramifications and the consecrated persons are challenged to doggedly embrace the evangelization of the family life with the conviction that when the family is well, all the individuals in the society will be hearty. The work of Evangelization of the people is not for the priests alone and more so that this work calls for concerted efforts of consecrated persons. The paper will examine consecrated life briefly and expose how consecrated persons can participate in the evangelization of the family life in collaboration with minsters of the church through witness of life, Marriage preparation, marriage enrichment or on-going catechesis, paying attention to family matters which include the many forms of abuse ranging from sexual abuse to alcohol and substance abuse and battering of persons while not neglecting the issue of family planning. When the family life matters are well attended to, the church will grow not only in numbers but also of sound minded people.

INTRODUCTION

The topic is germane in our time when family life is undergoing manifold sufferings and the root cause of these sufferings is what the Bible traces to lack of knowledge. How can the people know unless there are people who will teach them?¹⁹⁵ The consecrated persons are called by God to participate in the mission of Christ and it is a bounding duty which cannot be ignored but that through the actions of men and women all may be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. Every consecrated person comes from a family. It is as if each one is challenged to go back and have a share in the work of healing his/her root in and by the work of evangelization. The church asserts that Evangelization means carrying forth the good news to every

¹⁹⁴ Sr. Margaret Fagbamigbe, SSMA, is a member of the Sisters of St. Michael the Archangel. She just finished her Masters Programme in Theology from Dominican Institute, Ibadan. As at the time of writing this paper in June 2015, shewas the Superior General of her Congregation. She would have finished her term of office by September 2015.

ENDNOTES

¹⁹⁵ Cf. Romans 10:14-18

sector of human race so that by its strength it may enter into people's hearts and renews the human race. The aim is to effect interior transformation of persons. Evangelization is the origin of the church for she exists to preach the Gospel so that sinners may reconcile to God and so that the sacrifice of the Mass, the memorial of Christ's death and resurrection may be perpetuated. The consecrated persons exist in the church for a special purpose first of all to be a sign of holiness of the church and also to be a sign of the future life to come.¹⁹⁶ The work of evangelization is too numerous for one sector of priests to embark upon. By the work of charity which they undertake many souls are saved.

THE CONSECRATED LIFE

Consecrated life is a permanent state of life recognized by the church, entered freely in response to the call of Christ to perfection. It is characterized by the profession of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience.¹⁹⁷ The laity state of life is distinguished from those in the consecrated life and from clergy who receive the Holy Order.¹⁹⁸

The Church Law¹⁹⁹ describes Consecrated life as a life consecrated through the profession of the counsels in a stable form of living in which the faithful follow Christ more closely under the action of the Holy Spirit and are totally dedicated to God who is loved above all things. The law expatiated further that by that special title, "consecrated", they are more dedicated to seek the perfection of charity in the service of God's kingdom. That precisely describes what the consecrated persons do in the church. They serve as an energetic organ within the church and pursue evangelization of the people in collaboration with the ministers of the church so that the Kingdom of Christ may extend to the whole world.

Studies reveal that the life dedication is not restricted to one historical period but it existed in pre-Christian and non-Christian history in communities such as Pythagoreans, and Buddhists (as far back as 6th century B.C.). Similar life-style appeared in Judaism before the Christian era among some Essenes monks of Qumran. At that time, some men and women in various cultures chose to set their lives apart and dedicated their lives with activities devoted to meeting the needs of daily life in view of a particular transcendent end.²⁰⁰

In Buddhism, the end in view is freedom. For the Jews, the dedication was in preparation for messianic era. For the Christian men and women, dedication of their

¹⁹⁶ Cf. Paul VI, *EvangeliiNuntiandi*, the Evangelization in the Modern World, (Dec 8, 1975), # 18-20.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. Second Vatican Council, The Pastoral Constitution On the Church in the Modern world, *LumenGentium*. (21st November, 1964) # 44.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. Second Vatican Council, *LumenGentium*. # 31

¹⁹⁹ Code of Canon, Pub. Collins for Theological Publications (Bangalore, India, 1983), # 573.

²⁰⁰ Cf. The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality (1995), s.v. "Religious Life." P. 817

lives is fundamentally a phenomenon of hope, that is, one experiences a dissatisfaction with what one now has and entertain, with confidence, hope in something better which is more than what is present, here and now.²⁰¹

The Vatican Council II²⁰² describes consecrated life as a way of following Christ in a singular mind of renouncing every other thing of this world in order to love Christ above all other things. A consecrated person lives the life of a religious. A religious, we know, binds himself/herself to God through the evangelical counsels by a sacred promise. By taking this bond, one is totally dedicated to God by an act of ultimate love, and one is committed to the honour and service of God under a new and special title- "consecrated."

The mission of such consecrated persons consists in making Christ present to the world through the personal witness of their lives and that precisely is the primary task of the consecrated life.²⁰³ The Pontiff, John Paul II, avers that the consecrated persons are called to contribute to the saving mission of Christ. The specific contribution of the consecrated persons both men and women to evangelization is to give the witness of a life given totally to God and to their brothers and sisters in imitation of Christ the Saviour. The church is saying to them that they have the task of making Christ present even among the non-Christians.²⁰⁴

Pope Paul VI²⁰⁵ imagined what the world would be without the religious; he thought the world would be suffocated in the whirlpool of the ephemeral; the charity which animates the entire world would grow cold; the salvific paradox of the Gospel would be blunted out and the "salt" of faith would lose its savour because the world is undergoing secularization. But thanks to the sign which the consecrated life stands for, which is to remind the entire world that we have a life, better than this profane world -- our life in heaven.

In consecrated life, the proclamation of the Gospel to the whole world finds fresh enthusiasm and power says John Paul II.²⁰⁶ The pontiff asks that the consecrated persons must be always ready to proclaim the gospel and must be faithful to Christ, the church and to their institute as well as to the men and women of our time.²⁰⁷ They are models for all Christians, a model of the "*sequela Christi*," the

²⁰¹cf. The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality (1995), s.v. "Religious Life." P. 817.

²⁰²Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*.# 44.

²⁰³Cf. John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, The Consecrated Life, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation (25th March, 1996) # 72

²⁰⁴Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* # 44 and 46.

²⁰⁵Cf. Paul VI, *Evangelica Testificatio*, (29th June, 1971), # 3

²⁰⁶Cf. John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, The Consecrated Life, # 105.

²⁰⁷Cf. John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, The Consecrated Life, # 110

following of Christ, an example of how the bride must respond with love to the love of the Bridegroom.²⁰⁸

CONSECRATED LIFE AS COLLABORATIVE AGENT OF EVANGELIZATION

The Consecrated Life is a vibrant organ of the church and the persons are specially trained to share in the saving mission of Christ. The distinctive training they received in the way of charity disposes them to work assiduously and collaborate with the ministers of the church. The consecrated life is a way of participating in the sacramental nature of the people of God and in the mission of the church. The consecrated life places all the graces of its life, its Gospel witness and unique apostolic works at the service of the Gospel.²⁰⁹ They have the duty of working for the implanting and strengthening of the Kingdom of Christ in souls and for spreading it to the four corners of the earth.²¹⁰

EVANGELIZATION OF THE FAMILY LIFE

There is that understanding that this evangelization to the family life consists of three moments:

Proclamation of the Gospel which begins at home and continues in many ways through homily and reading of the word of God; initiation into the body of Christ which takes place when a new baby is born and subsequently initiated into the faith of the parents; and the On-going maturing in faith or On-going Catechesis which must not be neglected after the reception of the sacraments.

The priority is to animate leadership, to foster mature discipleship and to promote vibrant community of faith. The families, together with other church members, provide foundation for making a lifelong and on-going communion to Jesus, engaging people in a journey of faith, instilling hope with compassion and mercy and transforming the world into an encounter of God's Kingdom as each person seeks to grow in holiness and charity.

The family is the center of evangelization because this is the place where faith is first encountered, lived, sustained and passed down.²¹¹ At different moments in the Church's history and also in the Second Vatican Council, the family has well deserved the beautiful name of "domestic Church." This is the first church for the child. This means that there should be found in every Christian family the various

²⁰⁸Cf. Pope John Paul II, "On the Dignity and Vocation of Women," *Mulieris Dignitatem*, (August 15, 1988) # 16 and 31

²⁰⁹ Cf. Roman Curia, *Lineamenta*, on "Consecrated Life", A Preliminary Study for the Synod of Bishops, (December 31, 1993), #27.

²¹⁰ Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, # 44

²¹¹Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*# 11.

aspects of the entire Church. Furthermore, the family, like the Church, ought to be a place where the Gospel is transmitted and from which the Gospel radiates.²¹²

The family life in Nigeria has gained much attention from the pastoral offices of various dioceses up till now. There are different committees in process of renewing the family life and each one is fortified and imbued with credible pastoral services. In almost all the dioceses in Nigeria, there are Family Apostolate services and many of the agents of evangelization for the sector are trained to organize seminars and marriage enrichment concurrently with family planning at different times. However, family life in Nigeria faces formidable storms and challenges. It is a known fact that the family in the church and in the society is buffeted with all forms of anomalies such as polygamy, divorce, selfishness, hedonism and many more.

THE TERRAIN OF FAMILY LIFE IN NIGERIA

1. Partisan Politics

In Nigeria, 'party politics' is the order of the day. This is the direct involvement in a political party; the intention of which --despite public declarations to the contrary--, in practice, is often not to serve the Country or the State or the Local Constituency which they represent but is all in a bid of reaping where they did not sow. An average politician joins a political party to acquire money illegally while he/she seeks any appointment or soliciting for 'contract' legally or otherwise all in a race to embezzle money within a shortest possible time. There are so many abandoned projects that could be avenue of creating lucrative jobs for the populace, but unfortunately, many heads of families who are responsible are jobless.

Moreover, the ideology of a political party sometimes mars the character of a person. Worse still, heads of families quarrel over a position in a political party, husband against the wife, brothers against brothers. Such feuds divide families, church societies and sometimes lead to killings of members of the same family, cousins and in-laws. The underlining issue is selfishness and unrepentant and unpatriotic attitudes which threatens the holistic growth of families in Nigeria.

2. Abuse

Family life is beset with various abusive issues ranging from drugs, to sex, to violence to alcohol. These serve as cantankerous weapons against the progress and peace of family life in Nigeria.

INTERVENTION OF THE CHURCH

²¹²Cf. Paul VI, *EvangeliiNuntiandi*, the Evangelization in the Modern World,(Dec 8 1975), #71.

The Church being a good mother is always laboring for the sanctification of her own. The Church needs to provide an education which teaches critical thinking and encourages the development of mature moral values.²¹³ The mandate of Jesus Christ to the Church is: "Go, make disciples of all nations and baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and I am with you to the end of days."²¹⁴

To fulfil this mandate, the Church is in need of pastoral agents such as Consecrated men and women. They are called by God in order to enjoy a special gift of grace and in order to contribute each in his/her own way the saving mission of the church and members of these families enjoy many helps towards holiness of life.²¹⁵ The contribution that can be made to the apostolate of family life by men and women religious and consecrated persons in general finds its primary, fundamental and original expression precisely in their consecration to God. They are witnesses to that universal charity which through the chastity they embraced for the Kingdom of God dispose them to the service of God and to the works of the apostolate.²¹⁶

In any organized pastoral work, consideration for the pastoral care of the family is supreme. The apostolate of the family must be imbued with spiritual and material welfare. The religious must also collaborate with other Christian families to plan for rich spiritual programmes. This is in a way of fostering sense of solidarity and to stimulate people to perform works of charity for one another and for others with a spirit of openness which will make Christian families into a true source of light and a wholesome haven for other families.²¹⁷

Pope Francis in his encyclical noted that we can see deficiencies which need to be healed by the Gospel: machismo, alcoholism, domestic violence, low Mass attendance, fatalistic or superstitious notions which lead to sorcery, and the like. Popular piety itself can be the starting point for healing and liberation from these deficiencies.²¹⁸

Concretely, apostolate of the family life varies: consecrated persons could visit the families, look after the sick, foster relationships of respect and charity towards one-parent families or families that are separated; they can offer works of teaching and preparing young ones for marriage and help them towards responsible parenthood.

²¹³Cf. Pope Francis, *EvangeliiGaudium*, #64

²¹⁴ Matt. 28:20

²¹⁵ Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, # 43.

²¹⁶ Cf. John Paul II, *FamiliarisConsortio*, November 1981, # 74.

²¹⁷ Cf. John Paul II, *FamiliarisConsortio*, # 72.

²¹⁸ Pope Francis, *EvangeliiGaudium*, #69.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE CONSECRATED LIFE TO EVANGELIZATION OF FAMILY LIFE IN NIGERIA

The contributions of the consecrated life in the evangelization of family life are manifold. Specifically they can help in the following ways:

1. Witness of life
2. Marriage preparation.
3. Marriage Enrichment: on-going catechesis
4. Attend to family matters: abuse
5. Teach Family planning according to the mind of the church.

1. Witness of life

Religious Institutes of Contemplatives and Active lives contribute greatly to the evangelization of the world.²¹⁹ It is expected of them to live their lives in a religious manner so that they might bear an outstanding witness among Christians and non-Christians to the majesty and love of God and in union with Christ. They are challenged to be present to the people so that their forms of life bear witness to the Gospel in a manner adapted to the mentality and circumstance of the people.²²⁰

Albeit Christians by the virtue of sacrament of baptism, the consecrated persons are dedicated to God and by the example of their lives in wherever they live, they have the obligation to manifest the new person which they put on in baptism and to bear witness to Christ; they should establish relationship of respect and love and be identified with what is good, noble and beautiful by sincere dialogue so that people might learn the riches of the Gospel message;²²¹ religious men and women play an indispensable role in planting and strengthening of the Kingdom of Christ in souls by prayers and by active apostolate.²²²

Consecrated men and women are disciples of Christ and they follow the Master wherever He goes in order to offer the people an authentic Christian witness and work of salvation even in places where they cannot preach Christ fully; they are challenged to bear witness to Christ and this they are obliged to do by their life and their words in the family, in their social group and in the sphere of their profession. They must be seen the new men and women created according to God in justice and holiness and truth. They must give expression to their newness of life in their own

²¹⁹ Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Ad Gentes Divinitus*, (7 Dec. 1965), # 40

²²⁰ Cf. *Ad Gentes Divinitus*, #40^b

²²¹ Cf. *Ad Gentes Divinitus*, #11

²²² Cf. *Ad Gentes Divinitus*, #15

society that is in keeping with the traditions of their own land. They are challenged to be familiar with their culture, purify it, guard it and develop it in accordance with present-day conditions and perfect it in Christ so that the faith of Christ and the life of the church will not be something foreign to the society in which they live; but will begin to transform and permeate it.²²³

2. Marriage Preparation

Intending couples must adequately prepare for their marriage to ensure a stable relationship and this preparation could help them live well in their matrimonial homes. There is an axiom that says “To fail to prepare is to prepare to fail.” This maxim cuts across every sphere of our lives. When so many marriages fail or run into serious problems, we have to look inwards and ask what is happening about preparation for such an important state of life, a state of life that is meant to be stable and indissoluble. When celebrated marriages collapse or when youths opt for trial marriage, we must ask what is responsible for these acts and enquire what the consequences are. Could it be that people are too busy that they do not have time for adequate preparation or could it be that the pastoral agents do not prepare the intending couple well in the way of catechesis?

For the Catholic Church, preparation for marriage is of prime importance so that the “I do” of the spouses may be a free and responsible act and so that the marriage covenant may have solid and lasting human and Christian foundations.²²⁴ This preparation need not be postponed. It begins right at the youthful age. The church maintains that it is imperative to give suitable and timely instruction to young people so that they will be able at a suitable age to engage in honourable courtship...²²⁵

Intending couples prepare for marriage for so many reasons. It could be to establish what is important in their lives and how they want to express these things. But for a peaceful relationship to be established among them before and after marriage there are values to be inculcated and it is imperative that they imbibe them.

Marriage preparation has to be seen and put into practice as a gradual and continuous process. It includes three main stages: *remote, proximate and immediate preparations*.

2.1. Remote preparation

²²³ Cf. *Ad Gentes Divinitus*, # 21

²²⁴ Cf. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, (Nairobi: Paulines/St. Paul's, 2005), # 1632

²²⁵ Cf. Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents Vol. 1, Flannery Austin, (ed.) (Dublin: Dominican Publication, 1975) # 49 par. 3

This preparation begins in early childhood. This is family training where children are led to discover their strength and weaknesses, a time when authentic human values are instilled both in interpersonal and social relationships, formation of character; manner of approach with the opposite sex, catechetical formation with exposition to vocations to marriage and priesthood and religious life.

2.2. Proximate Preparations

This phase involves specific preparation for sacraments, renewed catechesis for Christian marriage and thorough study of the nature of conjugal sexuality and responsible parenthood, financial management, notion of housekeeping and many more. Other things that must not be neglected are: repentance and its efficacy, teaching of pious doctrine and virtuous actions, Value of good conscience, and Purity. All these sound pious and spiritual but that is the essence of teaching the intending couples because if one neglect the pious and spiritual things, the marriage will seek after mundane and profane things only and lay aside the spiritual journey that should be concurrent with their marital life. The important thing is to seek for ways of imparting these values; how to teach them is the crucial thing.

2..3.Immediate preparation

The immediate preparation involves the celebration of the sacrament of matrimony in the months and weeks preceding the wedding. This involves the deeper knowledge of the mystery of Christ and the church and of responsibility of Christian Marriage.²²⁶

3. Marriage Enrichment

Basic marriage catechesis must not end with the reception of the sacrament of matrimony. Faith formation must continue which could be given inform of seminar/workshop for the newly wedded couples. When the man and the woman are well prepared for marriage, their faith will be formed; they are in the better position to welcome Christ the Chief Bridegroom into their homes. In such a home, the faith is more likely for be strong and the couple are more like to pass on the faith to the next generation.

Marriage enrichment is the on-going catechesis for the family life. The family ought to be instructed deeply in the mystery of Christ which include the practical techniques that could help them in their difficulties; all according to the spirit and dictates of the church.

Furthermore, theological investigations that could explain facts of life and the word of God should be encouraged. This is done through seminar/workshops so

²²⁶ Cf. John Paul II, *FamiliarisConsortio*, # 66.

that experts are invited to explain and enlighten their minds in lieu of everyday life experiences on how the family life, custom and culture of the people are interrelated and how they are to be understood in the light of the Gospel. This is a way to shed light on faith and culture of the people.

Functional marriage enrichment programme is necessary in Nigeria where people's faith are dwindling and where some people feel they must support and protect themselves against one another with one form of syncretic ideology or the other. For some people, faith is a given gift separated from the culture. Many have adopted the idea of drifting between faith and the praxis and that is the level of their understanding.

Moreover, our people in Nigeria are in need of more conviction of faith and trust in God and this cannot be done in a hurry or in a wishy-washy way. The pastoral agents, particularly the religious, men and women must be trained to take up this responsibility in collaboration with the priests in different parishes.

4. Attending to Family Matters: Abuses

In the second part of the *Gaudium et Spes*, some more urgent problems are listed and marriage and family is among the list. The Document states that the well-being of the individual person of both human and Christian society is closely bound up with the healthy state of conjugal and family life. Therefore, pastoral agents, religious men and women must be properly trained to deal with family matters and to nurture the vocation of married people in their married and family life by different pastoral means, by preaching of the word, by liturgy and other pastoral and spiritual assistance. Marriage and family life ought to be strengthened sympathetically and patiently in their difficulties and comfort them in charity with a view to the formation of truly radiant families.²²⁷

Abuses of all sorts abound in marriage and family life. Battering of persons with any available object is rampant among families. Parents often convince themselves that beating of children is the only discipline they could use. The right translation of the Proverb 22:15 adds whip of instructions to the injunction of disciplining a child and not just spanking with rod.

Many parents often quote: "spare the rod and spoil the child." When beating gets to the peak, the stubborn child gets used to being beating and gets all the more stubborn. But the parents must look into another direction of counseling their wards with spiritual talk and sometimes use Psycho-Spiritual direction to help a child that seems to be obstinate.

Battering among the spouses is appalling in Nigeria and in anywhere in the world. This is a matter that calls for marriage counselling before it gets out of hand.

²²⁷ Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, # 52

When spouses begin to have wrangling among themselves, they must sue for peace and for amicable dialogue before it gets out of hand. Often, when they lack respect for one another, when they do not treasure one another, they will be quarrelling regularly. A lack of proper marriage counselling/ marriage preparation could be responsible. Sometimes, the couples do not know where to go for help. When there is a functional marriage apostolate in the parish, the problem and the cases will be minimal. The consecrated women and men must be available for the couples in their parish in collaboration with the parish priest.

Husband and wife quarrel over sexual intercourse. Conjugal love and the use of sex ought to be part of marriage preparation/ instructions. The intending couple ought to be taught that marriage is not merely for procreation of children but it also encompasses an indissoluble character of the man and woman who are joined together in holy matrimony. This demand that mutual love of the partners be properly shown, grow and mature.²²⁸ According to Paul VI, the facts are, as experiences shows, that new life is not the result of each and every act of sexual intercourse.²²⁹ The husband needs to understand that his wife may be tired sometimes and therefore may need to be patient with her until she is healthy enough to fulfil her conjugal obligation. Love is fully human, a compound of sense and spirit and not a merely question of natural instinct or emotional drive (that seeks satisfaction by all means). It is an act of free will that husband and wife together attain their human fulfilment through a love that is total, faithful, exclusive, and creative.²³⁰ It is the responsibility of the consecrated men and women who are espoused to Christ to teach the husbands and wives other ways which they could express their love for one another in days when the woman is not ready for sexual intercourse.

Furthermore, drugs/alcohol and substance abuse is also common now. Little do the families realize that they will become poorer if the users continue to indulge the self. A functional marriage apostolate and an adequate marriage counselling can help the individual. Consecrated persons must not shirk their responsibility in helping such families.

Married people should be taught to realize that in their behaviour they may not simply follow their own designs and fancy but must be ruled by conscience. In any conflict of marriage, faithfulness is imperiled and the good of the children suffers; courage to accept more children and their education are endangered.²³¹ Consequently, the family that should be a school of human

²²⁸ Cf. Second Vatican, *Gaudium et Spes*, #50

²²⁹ Cf. Paul Vi, *Humane Vitae*, (July 1968), #11

²³⁰ Cf. Paul Vi, *Humane Vitae*, #9

²³¹ Cf. Second Vatican, *Gaudium et Spes*, #51

enrichment would be turned to a platform of deformation of the young one's character.

Therefore, the consecrated persons, men and women, among others, should devote themselves effectively to the welfare of marriage and family life. Through their concerted efforts, they will help the families to overcome obstacles to their life and make provision for their advancement.²³²

5. Teaching of Family Planning

Obviously, the couple would desire to express their mutual love often. Some couple will get to the point where they could no longer increase the number of children. The issue of family planning comes in. On family planning, the stand of the church is very clear:

When it is a question of harmonizing married love with the responsible transmission of life, it is not enough to take only the good intention and the evaluation of motives into account; the objective criteria must be used, criteria drawn from the nature of the human person and human action, criteria which respect the total meaning of mutual self-giving and human procreation in the context of true love; all that is possible only if the virtue of married chastity is seriously practiced.²³³

The consecrated women are mostly in charge of this singular apostolate in many dioceses. They ought to teach the married couples the basic truth of Christian doctrine of marriage which declares that the direct interruption of the generative process already begun and above all direct abortion even for therapeutic reasons are to be absolutely excluded as lawful means of controlling the birth of children.²³⁴ Other things to be avoided are: direct sterilization, whether of man or woman, permanent or temporary; sexual intercourse to prevent procreation, whether as a means or as an end; sexual intercourse which is deliberately contraceptive.²³⁵

The Church is a good mother and a diligent teacher. She teaches that human life is sacred and everyone must recognize that fact and keep to it.²³⁶ Paul VI reiterates many documents of the Church which states that when the couples have reasons to space births whether from physical or psychological condition of the

²³²Cf. Second Vatican, *Gaudium et Spes*, #52

²³³ Cf. Second Vatican, *Gaudium et Spes*, #51

²³⁴Cf. Paul VI, *Humane Vitae*, #14

²³⁵ Cf. Paul VI, *Humane Vitae*, #14^b

²³⁶Cf. Paul VI, *Humane Vitae*, #13

husband or wife or from both or from external circumstance, the Church teaches that the married couples may take advantage of the natural cycles immanent in the reproductive system and use their marriage at precisely those times that are infertile, and in this way control birth.²³⁷ The Church is teaching the couples that there are certain limits beyond which it is wrong to exercise human power over one's body and its natural functions. This limit is set so that no one, private or public authority can lawfully exceed.²³⁸

The true faith being taught by the church, she affirms that the right and lawful ordering of the births of children presupposes in husband and wife first and foremost that they fully recognize and value the true blessings of family life and that they acquire complete mastery over themselves and their emotions.²³⁹

Conclusion

The consecrate persons being collaborators in the work of evangelization must be treated as people of repute and accord them the respect that is due to them. Having dedicated their lives to God, they must live up to the standard and fulfil their dedication in humble service to the people and serve as models to everyone in the family and inspire the young ones to desire to dedicate their lives to God. The work of evangelization will never end and therefore, consecrated persons should be adequately trained to take up special topics in family life so that wellness of the family life will be promoted at all times. When family life is assisted to find solution to their problems, the Church will grow not only in number but also of sound minded persons which will in turn have a ripple effect on the global society.

²³⁷Cf. Paul VI, *Humane Vitae*, #16

²³⁸Cf. Paul VI, *Humane Vitae*, #17

²³⁹ Cf. Paul VI, *Humane Vitae*, #21

CATHOLIC CELIBACY: A CHALLENGE TO TIV FAMILY AND CULTURE

Tersoo Gwaza, S.J.*

ABSTRACT: *We live in a world that is characterized by sex and sexual activities. Some of the secular songs that we listen to and the movies that we watch daily, incontrovertibly, substantiate this claim. Consequently, for some, particularly the youth, it is inconceivable, unthinkable, and absurd for a normal human being who is physically, emotionally, socially and psychologically balanced to think of celibacy, let alone to embrace it in perpetuity. However, the charism of celibacy was manifested clearly and fruitfully in the life of Jesus Christ who lived a perfect celibate life. Moreover, celibacy enables priests to emulate the perfect priesthood of Christ. Thus, celibacy is a necessary option despite its challenges to our global village and cultures.*

INTRODUCTION

According to Daniel F. Hoye, "To live celibate love chastely in a secular world amid an alien value system is no small challenge. But neither is the living of conjugal chastity within the exalted vocation of Christian marriage. Hence Christian life, married or unmarried, requires the discipline of Christian chastity to be lived in a fully Christian way. When that discipline is self-imposed and chosen by the priest in the context of the charism of celibacy, it can flower in a unique kind of spiritual growth and a unique unfolding of the life of the Spirit."²⁴⁰ Thus, in this essay, I will present a theological reflection on the venerable tradition of Catholic celibacy in the Latin Church. I will identify the scriptural, ecclesiastical, and traditional basis of Catholic celibacy. I will also scrutinize some of the setbacks to Catholic celibacy and highlight its challenges to Tiv family and culture. I will argue in support of Catholic celibacy, despite its challenges to Tiv family and culture. I will conclude that Catholic celibacy is a necessary option among many choices, because it enables Catholic priests to imitate and share in the perfect priesthood of Jesus Christ who lived a celibate life.

The Tiv people are located in the middle belt of Nigeria, West Africa. The total population of this ethnic group is approximately six million. The issue concerning the migration of Tiv people is not yet resolved, even by Tiv scholars. Some scholars say the Tiv people migrated northwards from the Bantu of the

* Tersoo Gwaza, SJ, is a Nigerian Jesuit. He holds B.A. (Hons) in Philosophy and Humanities from Arrupe College, Jesuit School of Philosophy and Humanities (University of Zimbabwe). He worked as a pastoral agent, Coordinator, and teacher of religion at St. Joseph Catholic Church, a Jesuit Parish/Tutorial Centre, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria. He is currently pursuing another degree in Sacred Theology (final year) at Hekima University College, Jesuit School of Theology, Peace Studies and International Relations (Catholic University of Eastern Africa), Nairobi, Kenya. He has published several articles in different academic journals.

²⁴⁰Daniel F. Hoye, *A Reflection Guide on Human Sexuality and the Ordained Priesthood* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1973), 11.

Southern Africa, through the Congo region of Central Africa, across the mountains of Cameroon to the Benue valley, during the 16th or 17th century. Some trace the origin of Tiv from *Swem*, a place (hill) located in Cameroon.²⁴¹ However, the issue of migration of the Tiv people is not the center of the discussion; it is a topic to be considered in the future.

DEFINITIONS

Etymologically speaking, the word celibacy is derived from a Latin word "*Caelibatus*" which means a state of being unmarried from "*Caelebs*" which means unmarried. "It includes within its concept two distinct moments: first, canonical incapacity to receive the sacrament of marriage, and second, a prohibition of any sexual intercourse."²⁴² Thus, the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* defines celibacy as "the canonical state of abstinence from marriage freely undertaken for the purpose of dedicating one's life totally to God's service in the clerical state."²⁴³ This form of celibacy that emphasizes "renunciation" of marriage and sex describes Catholic celibacy. It is a non-marital state of life that excludes sexual relationship, taken up as "a non-negotiable condition" for being an ordained priest in the Western Catholic Church.²⁴⁴

CATHOLIC CELIBACY IN THE LATIN RITES

The validity of clerical celibacy is anchored on the scripture, the teachings, and the traditions of the Catholic Church. In Matthew 19: 12, Jesus Christ sanctions celibacy embraced "for the sake of the kingdom of heaven." In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul explicitly endorses celibacy for the kingdom of God. He writes: "Actually I would prefer that all of you were as I am" (I Cor. 7:7). Recall that Paul was celibate for the sake of God's kingdom. Furthermore, Paul writes, "...an unmarried man concerns himself with the Lord's work, because he is trying to please the lord. But a married man concerns himself with worldly matters, because he wants to please his wife" (1 Cor. 7:32-33). These scriptural passages constitute strong biblical foundation for celibacy in the Roman Catholic Church, and they are replicated in the teachings of the Church.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that both professed virginity and consecrated celibacy "enable [clerics] to give themselves to God alone with an

²⁴¹ J .S. Ggenga ,*Eschatology in Tiv Traditional Religious Culture: An Interpretative Enquiry* (Nsukka: Chuka Educational Publishers, 2005), V-V11

²⁴²George H. Frein, *Celibacy: The Necessary Option* (New York: Herder and Herder Inc., 1968), 66.

²⁴³*New Catholic Encyclopedia Vol. 3. Celibacy, Canon Law of. San Francisco*(McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967), 366.

²⁴⁴ Marc Oraison, *The Celibate Condition and Sex. Trans. Leonard Mayhew*(New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967), 121.

undivided heart in a remarkable manner.”²⁴⁵ In addition, it asserts that ordained ministers in the Latin Church, except permanent deacons, are chosen from celibate men who choose celibacy for the sake of the kingdom of God.²⁴⁶

The age-long traditions of the Latin Church further support the contemporary practice of celibacy among the clerics. Stanley Jaki refers to Pope Gregory VII’s assertion of the traditional legacy of the ecclesiastical celibacy. He observes: “Gregory insisted that he did not invent those orders. He was proclaiming them as decrees of the ancient fathers taught to them by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.”²⁴⁷

Unquestionably, the first generations of priests were married clergies. Examples of St. Peter, the first pope, who was married (Mk. 1:30) and a chain of married priests who lived between the first and third century AD,²⁴⁸ substantiate this claim. However, the practice of clerical celibacy manifested itself all the way through the early years of the Church. This followed from the values posited on celibacy even during the early centuries. Wilhelm Bertrams observes that, “the obligation of clerics to celibacy was formed by the custom of the early church giving priority to unmarried candidates for orders.”²⁴⁹ The early fathers of the Church showed great respect for celibacy of the clerics because, “from the earliest period, the Church was personified and conceived of by her disciples as the Virgin Bride and as the pure body of Christ [...] and it was plainly fitting this virgin Church should be served by a virgin priesthood.”²⁵⁰

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ECCLESIASTICAL LAW OF CELIBACY

Historically, the Council of Elvira initiated the first move for an ecclesiastical law of celibacy in 306 AD. It decreed that: “The bishops, priests and the deacons [...] abstain from conjugal relations and not to procreate children.”²⁵¹ It placed a penalty of expulsion from clerical order on those who defy the rule. Similarly, the Council of Carthage in 419 reinforced the decree of the Council of Elvira. It ordered bishops, priests, and deacons to abstain from sexual intercourse in accordance with the apostolic traditions.²⁵²

²⁴⁵*Catechism of the Catholic Church. 2nd ed.* Citta del Vaticano(LiberiaEditriceVaticana, 1997), 2349.

²⁴⁶*Ibid.*,1579.

²⁴⁷ Stanley, L. Jakk, *Theology of Priestly Celibacy*(Front Royal: Christendom Press, 1997), 14.

²⁴⁸ Michael, H. Crosby, *Celibacy: Means of Control or Mandate of the Heart?*(Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 1996), 42.

²⁴⁹Bertrams, Wilhelm *The Celibacy of the Priest: Meaning and Basis.* Trans. P Byrne. (Westminister: The Newman Press, 1962), 46.

²⁵⁰*New Catholic Encyclopedia Vol. 3.* Celibacy, Canon Law of.(San Francisco: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967), 369.

²⁵¹Michael,H. Crosby *Celibacy: Means of Control or Mandate of the Heart?* (Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 1996), 42.

²⁵²*Ibid.* 45.

It is essential to note that during these epochs, priests were still getting married. Thus, the Council of Nicaea 325 A D attempted banning priests from marrying but a dissenting voice from Paphnutius, one of the bishops in the council, stopped the move. He warned that such a law might serve as an occasion for incontinence, because “we are not angels but men.”²⁵³

The Second Lateral Council that Gregory VII led in 1139 placed a perpetual ban on married clergy. This followed from Gregory’s attempt to reform the Church, given the prevalence of moral laxity in the twelfth-century Church. In the same line, the Council of Trent (1563) reinforced the decrees of the preceding councils by invalidating marriage contracted by priests. It further placed *anathema* “curse” on any one who argues in favor of married clergy.²⁵⁴

The latest council of the Church, Vatican II, reiterates the law of clerical celibacy. In its *Decree on the Training of Priests*, the council declares that priests “renounce marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven [...] and hold fast to their Lord with that undivided love which is profoundly in harmony with the New Covenant.”²⁵⁵ However, the Council allowed the ordination of married men as deacons, who would not be ordained priests or bishops. Thus, the contemporary Church continues to embrace the discipline of clerical celibacy derived from the scripture, the teachings of the Church along with its long-standing traditions.

CHALLENGES OF ECCLESIASTICAL LAW OF CLERICAL CELIBACY

In recent times, clerical celibacy has met strong attacks. Critics level numerous arguments against it, recommending married clergy instead. I will examine a few of those criticisms. Firstly, critics argue that ecclesiastical law of celibacy contradicts natural law. According to this criticism, “it is unnatural for men to be celibates,” as men are created with sexual natures which need to be gratified.²⁵⁶ Michael Crosby supports this line of reasoning when he writes that ecclesiastical celibacy is “an imposition of superhuman demands on priests.”²⁵⁷ These critics attribute sex scandals among Catholic priests to the Church’s law of clerical celibacy. They draw connection between pedophilic and homosexual priests with clerical celibacy, arguing that repression of natural mode of sexuality leads to its expression through abnormal or unconventional means.²⁵⁸ The critics “are

²⁵³ *ibid.* 44.

²⁵⁴ *ibid.* 49.

²⁵⁵ *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*. Ed. Austin Flannery, O.P. (Dublin: Pillar Books, 1975), 715.

²⁵⁶ Benedict XVI. “5 Arguments against Priestly Celibacy.” <http://www.catholiceducation.org/articles/facts/fm0014.html>

²⁵⁷ Michael, Crosby *Celibacy: Means of Control or Mandate of the Heart?* (Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 1996), 10.

²⁵⁸ Marc Oraison *The Celibate Condition and Sex*. Trans. Leonard Mayhew. (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967), 142.

convinced that a married priesthood would remove the occasions for infidelity, waywardness and distressing defections which hurt and sadden the whole Church. These also maintain that a married priesthood would enable Christ's ministers to witness more fully to Christian living by including the witness of married life, from which they are excluded by their state of life."²⁵⁹

This kind of criticism seems to reduce human beings to mere sexually gratifying creatures, which is a limited understanding of human beings. For human beings possess innate freedom and moral power to make decisions on which desires to gratify or not. Schillebeeckx supports this line of thought with the following words, "We choose something and the result is that we leave marriage aside, either for mainly practical reasons or because psychologically we are no longer vitally interested in marriage."²⁶⁰ In fact, it is possible that priests are able to channel their sexual energies into executing productive projects. Moreover, one may be mistaken in drawing a parallel between clerical sex abuses or sexual maladjustment with clerical celibacy. Such casual connection lacks logical validity and soundness since unconventional sexual behavior is not particular to the clergy. Married persons also exhibit such conduct.

Secondly, critics contend that the Church's celibate law contain internal contradictions. The reason is that, while, on the one hand, it requires celibacy from priests, on the other hand, the Church admits married Anglican and Lutherans priest converts into the Catholic Church.²⁶¹ Hence, they question why celibate laws should not be removed so that all priests could marry.

The discipline of celibacy is one of the unique traits of the Latin rite of the Catholic Church. The Anglicans and Lutherans have their distinctive traditions, and so it may be unreasonable and unconventional to require celibacy of Anglican or Lutheran priests who convert to Catholicism. However, those admitted are required to remain chaste and not to remarry in the event of their wives' death.²⁶²

Critics further allege that the celibate conditions for priesthood is responsible for rapid decline in the number of priests in the Church. They state emphatically as follows: "the maintaining of priestly celibacy in the Church does great harm in those regions where [there is] shortage of the clergy—a fact recognized with sadness and deplored by the Council [...] Thus the disquieting decline in the ranks of the clergy is attributed by some to the heavy burden of the obligation of celibacy."²⁶³ Crosby also alludes to the sharp drop in the figure of priests in

²⁵⁹http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_24061967_sacerdotalis.html

²⁶⁰George H. Frein *Celibacy: The Necessary Option*. (New York: Herder and Herder Inc., 1968), 75.

²⁶¹Michael, H. Crosby *Celibacy: Means of Control or Mandate of the Heart?* (Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 1996), 74.

²⁶²Benedict XVI. "5 Arguments against Priestly Celibacy." <http://www.catholiceducation.org/articles/facts/fm0014.html>

²⁶³http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_24061967_sacerdotalis.html

America. He blames the celibate law for such decrease. He affirms "...a change in the celibacy laws would bring in more candidates for the priesthood."²⁶⁴

It is contestable that the decrease in priestly vocation in the West results from celibacy laws. The experience in African societies, Nigeria in particular, where marriage receives immense values, yet priestly vocation is on the increase despite celibacy laws counters the above criticism. The dwindling priestly vocation in Western Europe and North America possibly results from the extreme secularization of these societies rather than celibacy law. Thus, evangelization of these societies may see the reversal of shortage of priestly vocation in the West.

Notwithstanding the comments in support of Catholic celibacy, one could argue that Catholic celibacy remains a great challenge to Tiv family and culture.

CATHOLIC CELIBACY, A CHALLENGE TO TIV FAMILY AND CULTURE

Akighirga Sai notes that in Tiv culture, the institution of marriage is held in high esteem because of its nature of procreation and the continuation of family name. "If it were not for the family, many men would not marry; their relationships with women would be entirely promiscuous. But because of it, every Tiv when he reaches manhood sets his heart on taking a wife and producing a son to carry on his line, that his heritage may not pass to another."²⁶⁵

Akighirga argues that "The Tiv practice of [getting married] may be due to a variety of causes, but there is one main reason, namely the desire to found a family. However successful in life a man may be, if he has no heir to his house, to the Tiv, he is a useless person and a standing butt for their scorn."²⁶⁶ The Tiv people could easily say, "What sort of a man is so-and-so without children? Who is there to carry on his line when he dies?"²⁶⁷ David Mailu confirms the Tiv notion on this matter, stating: "In Africa, a child is not merely a child but a great event. Childlessness is not merely an unfavorable incident, but a calamity. And, as one anthropologist puts it, to an African, marriage is not an event, but a process that, if normal and blessed, culminates in the birth of a child."²⁶⁸ Janis Simpkins reinforces Mailu's view when he writes: "In African society, marriage was seen as a process and the birth of a child as an event. Childlessness was not just unfortunate, but a 'calamity' [...] To have no child was like having only one hand. Children were kind of an 'insurance

²⁶⁴Michael, H. Crosby *Celibacy: Means of Control or Mandate of the Heart?* (Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 1996), 60.

²⁶⁵Akighirga Sai, *The Tiv Tribe as Seen by One of its Members*. Trans. Rupert East (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), 312.

²⁶⁶*Ibid.* 312.

²⁶⁷*Ibid.* 312.

²⁶⁸David G. Mailu, *Our Kind of Polygamy*. (Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya Ltd, 1988),3.

policy' for old age."²⁶⁹ Furthermore, as the Luo community in Kenya puts it, "to have a child is to have a mirror for looking at your back."²⁷⁰ Similarly, a person's worth in Tiv culture depends on the number of children he or she has. The children will succeed him or her and continue with the family name. A typical Tiv man or woman would say, "I have children therefore, I exist" which is similar to Descartes popular axiom "I think, therefore, I am." Consequently, for a Tiv person, "your child is a reflection of yourself in whom you see, study, understand and realize yourself."²⁷¹ The birth of a child is the "first stamp of fulfillment of the requirements and expectations of maturity."²⁷²

In addition, Akighirga states emphatically: "With regard to sexual intercourse, it is impossible for a Tiv to remain continent for a month or so, unless he is prevented by some serious illness or other unavoidable cause."²⁷³ Consequently, Catholic celibacy remains unacceptable to many Tiv people. In fact, to a conservative Tiv person, Catholic celibacy is unthinkable, inconceivable, and absurd. A Tiv man who embraces clerical celibacy is as good as dead, because he has no children to bear his name when such a person joins his ancestors. Catholic celibacy might be acceptable in the West based on the popular notion that many Westerners do not value family life compared to Africans, and the Tiv people in particular.

MY CONTRIBUTION

Despite the setbacks to celibacy of the clerics and its challenges to my Tiv family and culture, I still think that celibacy is momentous in the Church today. As a gift from God, celibacy frees the priest to devote himself with undivided heart to God and the Church. This is exemplified in the laudable works Catholic priests do in difficult circumstances. A priest is habitually ready to move from one rural community, city, state, and nation to another—thanks to his celibate status. He is ever disposed to attend to the needy, the sick, the oppressed, and the hungry in society, at any hour of the day and night. This might be impracticable if priests were married, because the well-being of his family is the primary responsibility of a married man. Having said that, it is also tempting to ask, what about Anglican and Lutheran priests who are married? Are they not responding to the afore-mentioned needs? The answer is: yes, they are! In fact, one may argue further that they respond better than Catholic priests do. However, the challenges that confront some Anglican and Lutheran priests are enormous compared to Catholic priests who are unmarried.

²⁶⁹ Simpkins Janis , *A Theological Reflection on the Kingdom of God and Polygamy in Kenya*. (Nairobi: CUEA Press, 1999), 67.

²⁷⁰ David G. Mailu , *Our Kind of Polygamy* . (Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya Ltd, 1988),5.

²⁷¹Ibid. 5.

²⁷²Ibid. 6.

²⁷³Akighirga Sai , *The Tiv Tribe as Seen by One of its Members*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), 314.

In July 2014 during my Pastoral Fieldwork at a Girls' Secondary School in Kenya, the daughter of an Anglican priest shared with me some of the distasteful experiences that her family had with the Anglican Communion. I would have loved to share some of her lamentable and repugnant experiences in order to authenticate my claim. Unfortunately, for the sake of confidentiality, I would not be able to do so. Regrettably, her family remains in perpetual desolation. I tried to persuade her to forgive the Anglican Church and move on, but she said, "It is very difficult to let go of the hurt." I empathized with her and family and promised my prayers and moral support for her and family.

At the end of her disheartening story and conversation, I then mentioned to her that many people suggest that Catholic priests should get married like the Anglican priests to avoid scandals and accusations that critics level against some Catholic priests. She responded retorted: "Catholic priests are better off compared to the Anglican priests who are married." She emphatically said, "Even if the Catholic Church allows priests to marry, I would advise you to remain unmarried because the troubles those Anglican priests who are married experience are greater." She continued, "In fact, some youths in the parish do everything possible to make sure that they impregnate a daughter of an Anglican priest to bring shame to the family." Thus, she concluded that it is better for Catholic priests to remain unmarried. I was moved by her story and advice. However, I was careful not to take her advice seriously, given the fact that she is a young girl. Then, a married Anglican priest reinforced her advice about celibacy. He said, "I want to make it clear that although a married man myself, I have a profound respect and regard for celibacy and that I think it would be a sad thing indeed if, to all intents and purposes, celibacy were to disappear from the life of the Church."²⁷⁴ These profound words of a well-experienced Anglican priest reaffirmed my former student's advice. Consequently, celibacy remains for me a necessarily option. Because "In human life there are many possibilities and many vocations; marriage is only one of them, although it is very important and very vital; but it is not necessary. It is possible to remain unmarried and yet to come to real human fulfillment and to lead a fully human life."²⁷⁵ Actually, "From among the many human possibilities we can make a choice which pushes the possibility of marriage to the background"²⁷⁶ despite the vital role that marriage plays in the continuation of family name, tribe, and culture as Akighirga rightly noted.

Moreover, from my experience of growing up as a Tiv boy up to the age of twenty-four when I left Tiv land to join the Jesuits, I can categorically and emphatically state that some Tiv men were not married, yet they were not Catholic priests; neither were they intended to become one. In fact, some traditional healers

²⁷⁴George H. Frein, *Celibacy: The Necessary Option*. (New York: Herder and Herder Inc., 1968), 97.

²⁷⁵*Ibid.* 75.

²⁷⁶*Ibid.* 75.

or “witch doctors” as some people mistakenly call them were often celibate in Tiv culture. I cannot dispute the fact that some traditional healers were or are still married. However, there are some rituals or medicine that require sexual abstinence to authenticate the medicine or render it more potent. Moreover, the Tiv men who were involved in tribal battle with other tribes because of land disputes or taking away their wives and daughters forcefully in marriage were warned strongly not to have any sexual intercourse during the fight. Those who defied the orders were not allowed to participate in the battle, or were killed in the cause of the battle by the opponents. Those who heeded their advice were able to avoid bullets and machetes. They always survived the battle and returned home safely. This practice of abstinence from conjugal activities was to enable men to be physically and spiritually strong to win the battle. Do these findings imply that legitimate sex in marriage or sexual activities have negative impact on married men? Theologically speaking, the answer is no. However, culturally speaking, like the Tiv people, the answer might be yes. This could be another topic for future research. Thus, these claims are contestable and might sound irrational to some; however, they hold some elements of truths in them for some traditional Tiv people. Little wonder, some of these practices are carried out till date in some parts of Tiv land. Therefore, it is tenable to maintain that the practices of celibacy for some traditional healers in Tiv culture and their abstinence from sexual activities during important events in Tiv tradition demonstrate that there is a virtue in celibacy.

It is of little surprise that Jesus Christ was a celibate. Actually, celibacy enables priests not only to share in the perfect priesthood of Christ but also to acquire spiritual “Capital” to use the words of St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits. Celibacy enables priests to be focused on the mission, and to continue from where the High Priest Jesus Christ had stopped. Christ performed so many miracles during his lifetime on earth. The dead came back to life (Jn. 11:43-44). The blind were able to see (Mk. 8:25). The lame were able to walk (Jn. 5:8). The lepers were cleansed (Mk. 1:40-42). By touching of his garments, the twelve years of haemorrhages ceased (Mt. 9:20-22). The hungry were fed (Lk. 9:16-17). Christ was always connected with the Father without any distraction or undivided attention, thanks to his celibate life. Thus, celibacy helps priests to be focused, ready to serve at all times as mediators between God and humanity with undivided attention as their master, Christ, did during His ministry here on earth.

Evidently, and very crucial, “Christ, the only Son of the Father, by the power of the Incarnation itself was made Mediator between heaven and earth, between the Father and the human race. Wholly in accord with this mission, Christ remained throughout His whole life in the state of celibacy, which signified His total dedication to the service of God and [humanity].”²⁷⁷ In addition, “This deep concern between celibacy and the priesthood of Christ is reflected in those whose fortune it is to share in the dignity and mission of the Mediator and eternal Priest;

²⁷⁷http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_24061967_sacerdotalis.html

this sharing will be more perfect the freer the sacred minister is from the bonds of flesh and blood.”²⁷⁸

Finally, celibacy expresses the unique role of the priest as a representative of Christ. As Christ offered himself to the world, the priest is called to offer his entire self to the Church and to emulate Christ, who lived a perfect celibate life.

CONCLUSION

This essay has attempted a theological reflection on clerical celibacy. I demonstrated that the renunciation of marriage for the sake of the kingdom of God, among Catholic clerics, derives from the sacred scripture, the ecclesiastical teachings, and the long-standing traditions of the Roman Catholic Church. Although, a number of objections are raised against clerical celibacy, in challenges from Tiv culture, I support this practice because celibacy frees priests to devote their entire lives to the service of God and the Church. Therefore, I hope the position that clerical celibacy is the necessary option, and preferable among many choices, because of the vital roles that Catholic priests play in the life of the Church. Moreover, celibacy enables priests to share in the priesthood of Christ who lived a perfect celibate life.

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²⁷⁸ Pope Paul VI, Encyclical *Letter, Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* (On The Celibacy Of The Priest), June 24, 1967, N.21.

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**REDISCOVERING THE JOYS OF OUR CONSECRATIONS:
*Look to the Past with Gratitude, Present with Passion and Future with Hope***

Daniel Mary Onyeayana, CMF.²⁷⁹
Claretian Community, Ibadan

All Superiors of different Religious Congregations
My dear brothers and sisters in the Lord's vineyard,
I say a very good morning to you all.

INTRODUCTION

Our Holy father Pope Francis in declaring this year of grace a year for consecrated life wrote to us Consecrated persons a thought provoking apostolic letter in which he called on each one of us to live up to our identity; by living a joyful life for that is the shape of our calling. He also highlighted three aims of the year consecrated life which we are to focus in order to rediscover our essence in the church. These are: "Look to the past with gratitude, live the present with passion, and embrace the future with hope". These three captions hold the key to our rediscovering the joy of our vocation as consecrated persons.

A BRIEF PANORAMIC EXPLORATION OF THE CONCEPT OF JOY

Joy can be defined as a pleasant feeling and satisfaction that normally manifest itself in our external activities, a feeling of great happiness, or deep contentment. Is the emotion evoked by well being, success or good fortune or by the prospect of possessing what one desires. As such one can boldly say that joy is the emotion of great delight or happiness as a result of achieving something great. Seeing yourself doing what you greatly valued can also be a source of joy.

Joy is a concept with diverse meanings because the act of expressing joy is not only an act for the human person but also for animals. Generally speaking joy could be seen as a gift (call it spiritual or natural), is also a state of mind depending on one's point of view. Succinctly, joy is a state of pleasure, and satisfaction that is manifested externally. It may take the form of a reaction, that is to say as a result of a passing event such as a good news, great time spent with members of our family or friends, or winning an award or celebrating the victory of favourite team. In this sense the joy express here is momentary.

²⁷⁹ Rev. Fr. Daniel Mary Onyeayana, CMF, a Claretian Priest, and Lecturer in Theology at Ss. Peter and Paul Catholic Major Seminary, Ibadan (Nigeria). This Paper was delivered by the author on May 1, 2015, to consecrated persons at Ibadan, Oyo State (Nigeria) at one of Seminars organized by the *Association of Consecrated Persons* in the Catholic Archdiocese of Ibadan, during the celebration of the Year of Consecrated Life.

From a philosophical point of view, joy is a state of the soul in which the human person feels satisfied. Is the feeling of the soul that completely transforms its contents. In most cases philosophers have juxtaposed joy along side with happiness. And so from Aristotelian view point, happiness is a fundamental and lasting sense of joy and serenity that results from achieving personally meaningful and rational values.

For the progressive psychologist, like María Prieto Ursúa, a Spanish psychologist joy is defined as a positive emotion. These emotions are from daily habits and virtues and personal efforts. From this point of view therefore we can deduce that joy is part of our daily activities that manifests itself when we are happy with what we have done. This is in line with the thought of St. Augustine that affirms the mind experiences joy when all difficulties are surpassed.

From this brief panoramic exploration of joy, it can easily be postulated that the qualities of joy are: joy is expressive meaning when one feels it, it cannot be hidden. It is easily noticed. Another quality of joy is that is contagious, the joy of someone leads to the joy of another person.

Also joy is transparent, meaning it can be communicated. Finally, joy is therapeutic, this indicates that joy renews our confidence, gives us sense of belonging. As such is not only a property that is internal but also external. May we now focus our attention on the joy of being a consecrated person.

THE JOY OF BEING A CONSECRATED PERSON

The holy Papa recalled the old saying that; “where there are religious there is joy”. (cf. Apostolic letter of His Holiness to all consecrated people on the occasion of the year of consecrated life). In a more Christian sense joy is more than feeling good at all time. By so doing, Rick Warren defined joy as “the settled assurance that God is in control of all the details of my life, the quiet confidence that ultimately everything is going to be alright, and the determined choice to praise God in every situation”. (*Daily Hope* with Rick Warren, rickwarren.org).

First and fore most consecrated persons are Christians and so Pope Francis affirms that a Christian is never bored or sad. Rather, the one who loves Christ is full of joy and radiates joy. By our dedication as Consecrated person, we are epitome of JOY. The joy that speaks for itself, of the goodness of God that we serve, the joy that exude from our life style, and that fulfil the words of the psalmist “*Ecce quam bonum et quam jucundum habitare fratres in unum* (Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity) Ps 133:1.

We are called to radicalize and transform the world with our joyful state of life. The church we belong is the church that seeks for the joy of all, and so in the words of Pope Francis we cannot think of a church without joy, and our joy is rooted in announcing to all and sundry the name of Jesus.

HOW CAN WE AS CONSECRATED PERSONS REDISCOVER OUR JOY

The triple exultation of the pope clearly lead the way on our each and every one of us can rediscover our joy. By saying rediscover it means we have let go the joy of being a consecrated person.

The first step is when we reflect of our past as religious men and women we should not do that like the hypocrites who Pope Francis said they do not believe in the forgiveness of Jesus and the Joy of being a Christian. Rather our past should be embraced with a heart fill with gratitude to God for all the great achievements of our founders and founderesses. The Pope remarked that "all our institutes are heir to a history rich in charismas. At their origins we see the hand of God who, in his Spirit calls certain individuals to follow Christ more closely, to translate the Gospel into a particular way of life, to read the signs of the times with the eyes of faith and to respond creatively to the needs of the church".

Without any iota of doubt, nothing builds our joy as consecrated person like celebrating with great gratitude the heroic act of our founders and foundresses. "Telling our story, recounting our history, gives us the platform to praise God and to thank him for all his gifts".

In the light of celebrating our past with immensurable joy, we are at the same time invited to have recourse to God's mercy by confessing our own weakness in order to experience the joy of bearing witness to the word of God.

It naturally follows that commemorating our past and celebrating it enables us to be reinvigorated to live the present with passion. This lies on our apostolate and the ability to be opened to the challenges of the gospel. The pope challenges us to reflect "whether the Gospel is truly the manual for our daily living and the decisions we are called to make. The Gospel is demanding, it demands to be lived radically and sincerely, it is not enough to read it (even though the reading and study of Scripture is essential), nor is it enough to meditate on it (which we do joyfully each day). Jesus asks us to practice it, to put his words into effect in our lives".

Living the present with passion also challenges our fidelity with Jesus. As we still in love with Him as we were on the first day of our profession, can we still boldly proclaim "Lord you have seduced me and I allowed myself to be seduced" (cf Jer20:7). Living the present with passion also called for great introspection along the line of our mission if it is still in the spirit of our founders and foundresses. Are we close and in touch with the people we minister to identifying ourselves with their joys and sorrows?

Living the present with passion cannot be meaningful if we do not bring to life, the vision of our founders and founderesses who longed to build a community that replicate the first community of Christ disciples in Jerusalem that was characterized by their style of evangelical living to be of one heart and one soul and to rejoice in the Lord's presence".

Living the present with passion, underline the fact that our radical witness to the Gospel in this present time must present us as people in the world but not of the world. In his Apostolic Exaltation; *Evangelii Gaudium* the pope note that, "an evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral let

us recover and deepen our enthusiasm that delightful and comforting joy of evangelising even when it is in tears that we must sow (cf. P.10).

Therefore our communion must be visibly noticed, and commitment demonstrated. To sum it up, living the present with passion automatically makes us herald of the good news this is joy in its holistic nature.

EMBRACE THE FUTURE WITH HOPE

A hopeless consecrated person is faithless religious. The fear of the future is accepting defect and not realizing the fullness of our potentialities. Our hope must be in Lord for he is the one who knows our futures and he made heaven and earth. The future of consecrated life in our nation is the one full of hope and prosperity. Is a promising one that should however be handle with utmost care. The future will not be the good things we hope for if we neglect and trash the experiences of the aged and ignore the vigour of the youth.

CONCLUSION

Rediscovery our Joy, as consecrated person gives us the opportunity to inflect the whole world with the joy of Christ. It gives us the privilege to bring Easter in the lives of those that seem to know only lent. In other word rediscovery the joy of being a consecrated person is not only for our salvation but also for the salvation of all.

As consecrated people we can discover our joy thus; By being a communality oriented person. (Pope Frances address to married couples caught my attention and can be applicable to our community living, that living together is an art, a patient and beautiful art). Our institutes or congregation lay great emphases on the value of living together. The joy that living together underlines our commitment to our calling, this does not come easy but it is not impossible.

We can also rediscover our joy as consecrated persons by celebrating ourselves and our fellow religious. Each and every one of us must learn how to appreciate the members of our community. We should note that each person deserve to be celebrated and prized.

Rediscovering our joy as consecrated persons also consists in accepting the limitations the strength of those we share the same vows. By so doing we are adhering to the exaltation of St Paul that "those who are strong ought to bear with the qualms of the weak" (cf. Rom. 15:1).

Consecrated persons are not only custodian of joy but also heralds of joy. As joyful people we should use this gift for the service of all and embrace the fact that we called to serve. By joyfully serving others we spread the joy of serving the Lord and one another. With this attitude our past will not hurt us, the present will be lived with passion and the future will not be scaring.

Is a known fact that joy shared is joy multiply. And so living a joyful life is *conditio sine qua non* for the growth of vocation in our different congregations. A joyful consecrated person is a happy person and he or she is one on fire with God's love and wish to spread it where ever he or she goes.

May the Lord make us partakers of the real joy of Christ Amen.

Thanks for listening.

RELIGIOUS LIFE AND THE FAMILY(THE REALITY, EXPECTATION AND CHALLENGES):

WATER OF BAPTISM AND BLOOD TIES

Sr. Rita Akin-Otiko, SSL²⁸⁰

A Paper presented at a Seminar for Consecrated Persons on June 27, 2015, gathered at the Community of the Oblates of St. Joseph, Ibadan (Nigeria) and organized by the Association of Consecrated Life, Ibadan. The Seminar aimed at reflecting on some aspects of the reality, expectation and challenges of Consecrated life in Nigeria today.

ABSTRACT

Religious life is a response to the love of God in both a personal and communal way. The personal and communal ways reflect the understanding and commitment of an individual to the three vows of poverty, obedience and chastity. As Africans, we are not individuals without family ties: the family bond is a strong value we uphold. This fact sometimes impinges on how well one is able to live and be committed to the freely chosen and embraced religious life. This paper tries to examine the gray areas of living the religious life within the context and demands of the natural family.

“But the one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and his interests are divided. The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband. This I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is appropriate and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 7: 33-35).

The above exhortation of St. Paul is very apt as we reflect on ‘Religious Life and Family’ during this year of consecrated life. Religious life is a response to the love of God in both a personal and communal way. The "Yes" to the invitation of love is personal while its expression is inherently communal. This "yes" is lived and shared with others of presumed like minds and intent. Each Religious, like the disciples of our Lord, accepted the invitation freely. Even though the invitation sounds compelling, the response is always given in absolute freedom. “For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it” (Matthew 19: 12).

The communal essence of the consecrated life is synonymous with that of the biological family. The main difference is the fact that biological families are not chosen, whereas a free, calculated and well informed choice is fundamental to belonging to a religious community. Biological ties fall within the natural bonds

²⁸⁰ Rev. Sr. Rita Akin-Otiko is a member of the Congregation of St. Louis, and lives and works in the Catholic Archdiocese of Ibadan as a teacher.

between persons, while the union of consecrated persons is profoundly spiritual. Since the former is outside one's scope of choice, its attendant consequences are usually less challenging than the latter, which interestingly enough has, during initial formation, had its predicted expectations rehearsed umpteen times before its actualization.

Religious persons strengthen this noble and eternally rewarding course by taking the three vows of poverty, obedience and chastity. The vow of poverty is based on mutual sustainability, whereby all the members of a community ensure that no member lacks and no member hoards; balance is mutually maintained regarding temporal goods. The vow of obedience instructs and directs mutual collaboration whereby power is for empowerment and not domination; mutual growth in freedom and not 'they' versus us'. Finally, the vow of chastity is about relatedness, whereby all things are in healthy and respectful relationship with an expected understanding that all are one regardless of their different affiliations. In this situation, it is understood that Christ is the Leader.

With members of one's biological family, the religious is invited to a life of Christian consecration through baptism, but different from members of their biological family they are invited to a more perfect way of life. Jesus taught this in Matthew 19:16-22 when the rich young man went to Him and asked Him, "*Teacher, what good thing must I do to receive eternal life?*" (v.16). In response, Jesus said, "*Keep the commandments if you want to enter life*", a demand expected of both religious persons and members of their biological family. The rich young man was not satisfied with the basic demand and said to Jesus, "*I have obeyed all these commandments, what else do I need to do?*" (v.20). Then Jesus introduced that distinguishing element that separates the family bond from religious bond, he said "*If you want to be perfect (religious life), go and sell all you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have riches in heaven; then come and follow me*" (v. 21). This defines the relationship we have with members of our biological families and religious communities.

With the sacrament of Baptism we become members of the body of Christ, children of God. With religious life, we enter into a perfect way of life which is a deeper sign of the reality of baptism. The mission of baptised persons, is essentially to bring God's love to the world by inviting people into the salvation wrought by Christ, either directly by our words or indirectly and often more effectively by actions. Consecrated persons are therefore called to be witnesses to Christ in an intimate way, leaving all that can distract and follow Jesus in a more intimate way. The Lord wants His followers to be completely focused on Him and His mission. He would not even have families distract His chosen ones, more so, consecrated persons. "*If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters--yes, even their own life--such a person cannot be my disciple.*" - Luke 14: 26. Pope John Paul the II in the Jubilee year (2000) had this to say to consecrated persons, "*Invited to leave everything to follow Christ, you, consecrated men and women, no longer define your life by family, by profession or by earthly interests, and you choose the Lord as your only identifying mark. Thus you acquire a new family identity. The divine*

Teacher's words apply particularly to you: "Here are my mother and my brethren" (cf. Mk 3: 35). The invitation to renunciation, as you know well, is not meant to leave you "without a family" but to make you the first and distinctive members of the "new family", a witness and prophetic example for all whom God wishes to call and bring into his house."

Unfortunately, among a significant number of consecrated persons, the expressed desire of Christ and Saint John Paul II are fast becoming a mirage. There is a difficulty in selling all that is possessed, in order to follow Jesus. Like the rich young man, many become sad at the reality of the demands of religious life. The rich young man knew that he was not called to a perfect way of life and so the Bible says, "he went away sad, because he was very rich" (v. 22). Today there are religious who have not left their possessions to follow Jesus Christ and some others have in fact acquired possessions while following Jesus Christ. This is weighing heavily on the relationship that exists between the religious' families and their communities.

There are some families that cannot plan activities that will require spending money without their religious sibling at the helm of affairs and most discomfoting still, as the major financier. This we often witness at family celebrations such as weddings and funerals. One is not unaware of the fact that families are different and economy wise, fingers are not equal. The religious must be able to stay focused and true to the fact that He who has called will take care of his/her biological family. This does not entirely exclude support from the religious family (not the individual religious, him/herself) which is a vital aspect of the vow of poverty that no religious' family lacks when they are in genuine and dire needs.

The vow of poverty also demands a proper care for every member of the religious community. It is sad to note that there are members of religious communities who have left everything to follow Jesus but still depend on their families for basic essentials and sometimes, expenses that are beyond the easy reach of members of their biological families, such as sponsorship through tertiary institutions which includes monthly allowance. When Jesus invited his followers to leave everything and follow him he meant that he would take care of their necessary needs. If congregations cannot support membership, why found them?

Leaving everything to follow Jesus allows us to totally trust superiors through the vow of obedience. This must become visible in the issue of conflict resolution among consecrated persons in communities. For conflicts resolution, many turn to their biological families rather than resolve differences using the apparatus of the religious communities. Reports are made to members of biological families who naturally take sides with their own, despite the fact that they have little or no understanding of the sacrifices that go with religious life. Usually, the opinions of members of the biological families compound matters and the situation festers. This is nothing but turning away from following Christ. It is important to examine and put in place practical and productive conflict resolution strategies in religious communities.

Having strong ties with biological families breaches the principle of religious life. There exists some unfavourable situations, where members of biological families are brought into religious communities or are made to depend financially on the

religious communities without the agreement of all the members of the community and worse still, they are made to over stay their welcome to the discomfort of the *bona fide* members of the community. How effective are boundaries in communities?

The lack of total commitment to following Christ make some religious to hold members of their biological family in confidence over grave matters that require the attention of their communities. These matters are such that ought to be handled by communities, not families. A big example is related to health issues. In situations like these, family members are involved until things get out of hands and the religious communities are brought into the already complicated scenario. If the situation goes awry, who bears the brunt?

A distraction from following Christ results in consecrated persons not merely financing family celebrations but worse still, using community funds to train their siblings or their nephews/ nieces. In some circumstances related to this, the community members of these religious have been denied the same gestures which they extend to their own families. Worse still are those who fearlessly take returns from apostolates meant for their congregations to their families. Even more incomprehensible are situations where consecrated person build structures for theirs and their families' comfort. This is the opposite of what Jesus told the rich young man, go sell all you have and follow me, these examples show people following Christ in order to acquire possession. What does the vow of poverty really signify?

It is important to note that following Jesus Christ entails giving up what is rightfully ours for the sake of the kingdom. It is a common thing today to have religious persons who against communal agreement would rather celebrate important Christian feasts such as Christmas and Easter with biological families rather than religious families. While our families share in our successes and/or failings, our communities are sometimes left to wonder what is going on in our lives. Where is *home* for the consecrated person?

St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians, Chapter 7 verse 34 -- which says "*The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband*" -- buttresses the importance of the vow of Chastity in this discourse. It will not be out of place to recognise the fact that, when the Religious maintains a seemingly indispensable relationship with their family, there is such distraction that does not afford them the joyful communion which persons of like calling are supposed to share with their community which represents the body of Christ their Spouse.

One of the most challenging situations is when members of the same community live as co-tenants or worse still, strangers. Shared prayers, meals and recreation are obsolete in some communities. Celebration of important landmarks in one another's lives is more of family affair than the joyful and shared responsibility of the community. What is our understanding of communion/community?

These examples could go on and on.

Without being judgmental, the truth is that religious who find it difficult to bond with their communities do not understand the life they have freely chosen to

live and so they are not living it consciously. Consciousness, as we know, precedes being. In this state, one lives a life of routine with neither depth nor authenticity. While the individuals hardly share a decent length of time with their communities, they often find that the time they spend chatting or visiting with their families is insatiable.

Culturally, consecrated persons in a country like Nigeria will more likely than not find it difficult to restrain from the temptation of tilting the scale of support towards their families rather than their communities because as Africans, family bond is a strong value we uphold. Also, there is more certainty of survival in religious communities than many families can boast of. It progressively seems that now more than ever, the future of true religious life seems so bleak in this country, especially with the level of corruption, high unemployment rate, disregard for the rule of law, widening gap between the rich and the poor, escalating inflation, seemingly untameable crime rate, terrorism, insurgency and in religious circles, dichotomy between belief and practice, many families are clinging to their vowed siblings for sustenance.

Religious communities need to become aware of the tension between loyalty to blood ties and commitment to the bond of consecrated life. There is need for greater sensitivity in addressing it. Strategies to curb this fast pervading problem have to be quickly installed so that it is stopped before it becomes too difficult to manage. Formation houses need to accommodate this in their curriculum. The religious' biological families are the first "world" that needs to be "woken up" by educating them on the implication of the religious life. The religious also must be willing to detach appropriately from their families as it has been discovered that some actually offer unsolicited assistance to their families especially when in positions that affords them such opportunities.

In conclusion, whatever the case may be, the religious must always keep focused on the Lord Who called. There is need to believe in divine providence and trust that God is able to do infinitely more than one can ever ask or imagine. While it may be quite challenging for the religious to place the bond of religious community above family ties, remembering that their response to Christ's invitation to this life of perfection means constantly staying focused on Him and His mission within the sanctuary of community should be helpful.

**RELIGIOUS FORMATION:
A CALL TO A RADICAL FOLLOWING OF CHRIST**

*Emmanuel N. Ogu, OP (Ph.D)*²⁸¹

INTRODUCTION

Vocation is fundamentally the following of Jesus in his radical way of life unto the cross, in his total self-abnegation and self-sacrifice, in the use of freedom that is totally for the other person which is nothing else than pure self-giving.²⁸² Thus, vocational discernment and formation would have to centre on the potential capability of an individual to respond honestly and generously to the call to radicality, to what Jesus, himself, described as non-conformity to the values of this world (Jn. 11-16).

We should always go for suitable candidates no matter how few, who can be a creative minority, genuinely responding to the call to radicality and sacrifice. Correspondingly, they assume a lifestyle so totally free, so emptied of worldly attachments, a life so totally enamoured by the Lord Jesus. The call to religious life and the response to this call are to be seen as a gift of God for a specific mission in the Church and in the world. Hence, there is a need for us to go for suitable candidates.

DISCERNMENT AND SCREENING OF VOCATION

Wise and prudent vocational recruitment, discernment and formation are absolutely necessary.²⁸³ The Church has often encouraged making proper use of medical and psychological tools in the screening of candidates to the priestly and religious life. It is, of course, imperative that psychological assistance has to be based on a Christian anthropology that is consonant with the teachings of the Church. The candidate's intellectual ability, marked with an enthusiasm for intellectual life, should be of an acceptable degree. Thus, screening should involve formal psychological testing, in-depth interview based on the behavioural patterns of the candidate, a review of candidates' personal history, his/her family background and relationships, over an initial exploration of conscious and unconscious motivations, and so on. The screening procedure is done so as to ascertain as far as possible the candidate's functional ability, availability for formation and suitability for priestly and religious life, and also to verify if the candidate is humanly healthy, psychologically whole and, has the capability of being committed to Christian discipleship. Though, candidates are not expected to be completely mature at the beginning of their formation, but the above-mentioned procedure is a demand

²⁸¹ Rev.Fr. Emmanuel N. Ogu, OP (Ph.D) currently teaches at the Dominican Institute, Ibadan; he is also the Student-Master of the Dominican Student brothers in formation for his Order.

²⁸² Benedict xvi, *Deus Caritas Est.*, Nos. 6 & 12.

²⁸³ Pastoral Dabo Vobis, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*. The Directory of the life and Ministry of Priest; *Perfectae Caritatis, Renovationis Causam, Evangelica Testificatio, Vita Consecrata*.

accepted of the entire process of priestly and religious formation, both at the initial and the on-going level.

FORMATION TO MATURITY AND RADICALITY IN CHRIST

Initial and on-going formation should aim at a holistic and a radical formation of vocation. Candidates for the priesthood and religious life are to have an integral, human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral formation. The integration of all these aspects is very important to prevent disintegration or compartmentalism and reductionism. Besides, formation should be understood as a gift not only of instruction but, most importantly, as an integral education of the candidates. Thomas Aquinas takes this idea of integral education a step further, by asserting that "the purpose of education is to lead the child to the perfect state of man." This is the essential purpose of education and what it does to the candidates.

The essential goal of vocation formation is the integral maturity of a candidate who is being formed in the pattern of Christ's own authentic humanity so that the candidate might participate in Christ's mission of salvation through self-sacrificing love. With regard to what human formation of religious is all about, Finkler defines maturity "as a manner of thinking, feeling, being and acting suitable to the age and situation of the normal person."²⁸⁴ Subsequently, maturity according to the Council Fathers should be evident, especially in a candidate's stability of mind, and in one's ability to make weighty decisions, and in their sound evaluation of the person and events. Integral human formation necessarily involves self-transcendence and mission. This apostolic and pastoral goal, including *missio exterios*²⁸⁵ is a fundamental dimension of vocation and its formation. This entails forming one with a goal and a view of a true knowledge of religious life in general and in particular.

The spiritual formation of the candidate is very essential. O'Malley affirms that authentic spiritual formation permeates all personal and human dimensions including the celibate state of life, seeking Christ in others and growing into human maturity, that is, into the image and likeness of God that we are all created to be. Sasi and Costello avow that "spiritual formation aims at a personal relationship with God, through which one is able to engage in pastoral ministry as well as in a pastoral charity, discovering the deep meaning of poverty, celibacy and obedience. It lays emphasis on prayer and contemplation and thus enriched in the awareness of God's presence."²⁸⁶

Thus, a formation process in a community context, a context of communion is imperative; if our brother and sister are the sacrament of acting with Christ, if love is the Christian's "way," if in the mutuality of love there is the possibility of experiencing the Trinitarian God, then the community is the privilege place for living the Christian vocation in all its fullness. Billy affirms that community life gives

²⁸⁴ Finkler, "Maturity in Religious Candidates" *Visa Bulletin* 64 (1984): 28.

²⁸⁵ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, No. 44

²⁸⁶ Sasi Vincent et Costello Timothy (2010) *Formation and Transformation*. Asian Trading Corporation: Bangalore, India

a taste of God's triune love.²⁸⁷ This is why the Eucharist, the builder of communion, is central to formation. Simultaneously, the community context requires the collaborative effort of the whole community of formators, priests, religious and communities where candidates have pastoral experiences. Thus, the specific identity of the religious life will be appreciated in all its dimensions: personal, mystical, ecclesial, and apostolic, and that it be radical and credible.

Moreover, we can assert that the aforesaid would imply an integral education of the candidate. For education addresses itself to the whole person, with regards to the person's sensibility, affectivity, sexuality, moral sense, community and social sense. Also it enables the candidate develop and come to fulfillment by having his whole behaviour shaped by the values. Specifically, education here would be to render those in formation open to the truth of what it means to be a religious. Hence, the formator has to know and understand the young people he is forming. Since, the role of the formator is to assist the candidate to regain his or her self-direction.

Finally, it is the Holy Spirit, the principal formator, who enables all other formators in the formation of candidates to the priesthood and religious life, not simply by teaching and exhortation, but by the *sine qua non* of human formation – the witness of authentic discipleship, that of radicality and sacrifice. For the active enlivening, integrating and uniting work of the Holy Spirit, the giver of charisms, and vocations is highly needed. As part of the formation programme, formators need to co-operate with the Holy Spirit in the aspects of healing and the correction of all the negative things and make provisions for all the deficiencies which may be carried in the candidates' hearts end which may spill over into affective relations and community life.²⁸⁸ Since candidates are more likely to be bound to the order of the world, which they believe to be their world, they need the help of formators who must take the initiative with certain fairness and love for them to help them break through these obstacles. This is why the education of a candidate should embrace all the human dimensions (e.g. intellectual, human and spiritual) in view of helping the young person towards a religious life that is radical and authentic. Thus, in pursuing the educative dimension of formation, which consists in helping young people respond wholeheartedly to their religious vocation, our young people need also to see their formator imitate Christ in a radical way. For through that, the young people would be impelled to commit themselves to the same act they experience their formators witness.

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RELIGIOUS OBEDIENCE IN THE CONSECRATED LIFE: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE LITURGICAL LIFE OF THE CHURCH

Emmanuel Chinedu Anagwo²⁸⁹

Catholic Institute of West Africa, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the Message for the Year of the Consecrated Life by Pope Francis against the backdrop of religious obedience in the era of rampant liturgical disobedience. Religious obedience is a dominant concern of the modern society which has great liturgical implications. The article is not just scratching at the surface of filial obedience expected of all worshippers. It takes one right into the deepest recesses of one's person as a consecrated man or woman. It adopts exploratory cum narrative approach as a method of achieving this objective. The work gives a working definition of terms used and the theological basis of religious obedience. It is established in the work that the implication for the liturgical life of the Church is anchored on the filial obedience to the liturgical norms and laws. It is discovered that the Church and modern society really need the consecrated men and women in order to follow Christ closely especially with regard to obedience. If the consecrated persons in the Christian families of worshippers take seriously their vow of obedience, their lifestyle and example will facilitate their obedience to the liturgical norms thereby setting examples for others to follow. It further argues for the enrichment of African cultural values of obedience in the light of respect for elders and authority. The consecrated person should integrate these cultural values to their religious vow and live them out in the liturgical life of the Church.

1. INTRODUCTION

On the vigil for the first Sunday of Advent, celebrated on November 29, 2014, Pope Francis, among other things, stated in the Message for the Year of Consecrated Life that: "After consultation with the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and for Societies of Apostolic Life, I have chosen as the aims of this Year the same ones which Saint John Paul II proposed to the whole Church at the beginning of the third millennium, reiterating, in a certain sense, what he had earlier written in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*: "You have not only a glorious history to remember and to recount, but also a great history still to be accomplished! Look to the future, where the Spirit is sending you in order to do even greater

²⁸⁹ Rev. Dr. Emmanuel Chinedu Anagwo is a Catholic priest from Nnewi Diocese, Nigeria. Currently, he lectures in the Department of Sacred Liturgy, in the Catholic Institute of West Africa. His postal address is: P.O. Box 499, Port Harcourt, River State, Nigeria. E-mail: ecana2011@gmail.com; ecana2011@yahoo.com. Mobile +2348034072064.

things" (No.110).²⁹⁰ There are some obvious landmarks in the life of the Consecrated persons. It is inspiring to realize that the life of consecrated men and women which was so prevalent in the early Church is still an integral part of our religion today. Nowadays, however, it is the subject of scrutinies, controversies and debates. As such, the life of consecrated men and women (Religious Brothers and Sisters) from different institutes of religious life and societies of apostolic life has been subjected to a lot of questioning in the contemporary society.²⁹¹ Close scrutiny follows all practices of religious style of family life that hitherto have been shielded from public gaze and introspection. Traditional religious practices such as: the evangelical counsels, the three vows, the common life, the prayer patterns and exercise of piety and penance, the apostolate and ministries, the formation and training given to members, the media and recreational facilities etc., have been questioned and criticized. For instance, does religious obedience not constitute obstacle to human development, personal fulfilment and liturgical life of the Church? Why must one obey at the first instance? Why are there rampant tendencies today towards liturgical disobedience? Why are some consecrated persons flag bearers of liturgical disobedience? Is there any theological value for religious obedience? Has African custom any cultural heritage to be harnessed?

It is against this backdrop that the article examines religious obedience of the consecrated persons in the observance of the liturgical norms and laws of the Church. Historically, obedience characterized the new dawn of consecrated life in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. That time was coincident with the rise of individualism in its various manifestations. Evidently, religious obedience is a dominant concern of the modern society which has great liturgical implications. This article is not just scratching at the surface of filial obedience expected of all worshippers. It takes one right into the deepest recesses of one's person as a consecrated man or woman which contradicts the worldly value of selfish individualism. It explores into one's consecration to the Lord, the witness of life one bears in the manifestation of faith in the person of Jesus Christ through the evangelical counsel of obedience and its liturgical implication for the liturgical life of the Church. Our searchlight on religious obedience is a journey on the road to Emmaus by a new generation of consecrated persons, a journey into the authentic spirituality for the consecrated persons, a study with rich spiritual dimension to be of a greater service in building the Christian families of worshippers. Pope Francis

²⁹⁰ Pope Francis, *Message for the Year of Consecrated Life* (Vatican City, November 29, 2014). The Year of Consecrated Life started on 30th November, 2014, the first Sunday of Advent, and would conclude with the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple on 2nd February, 2016.

²⁹¹ Anthony A. Akinwale, "The Challenge of Religious Life Today" in *The Catholic Voyage*, Vol. 9 (January 2012) 10.

avers, "The joys of the Gospel fills the heart and lives of all who encounter Jesus. With Jesus Christ joy is constantly born anew."²⁹²

2. THE NATURE OF RELIGIOUS OBEDIENCE AND CONSECRATED LIFE

It is important to delineate the basic terms involved in this study for the purpose of clarity and better understanding. The terms will be explained not necessarily from their dictionary or encyclopaedic meanings, rather more from their contextual study. The terms to be considered are *religious obedience* and *consecrated life*. We begin with the nature of religious obedience. We need to understand who a religious is. A religious binds himself or herself to the congregation by the act of professing a vow. The 1983 Code of Canon Law defines a vow as a deliberate and free promise made to God, concerning some good which is possible and better. The virtue of a religious requires that it be fulfilled.²⁹³ The three vows professed by the religious are the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience.²⁹⁴ This work is primarily concerned with the vow of obedience.

The word obedience comes from the word "*ob-audire*", which means "to hear." It designates the willingness to hear others and to do their will. Obedience refers to hearing God and obeying the divine will which manifests itself in the will of other persons in authority.²⁹⁵ And so, religious obedience is that general submission which the religious vow to God, and voluntarily promises to their superiors, in order to be directed by them in the ways of perfection according to the purpose and constitutions of their order. Accordingly, the canonical legislation states that the evangelical counsel of obedience, undertaken in the spirit of faith and love in the following of Christ, who was obedient even unto death, obliges submission of one's will to lawful superiors, who act in the place of God when they give commands that are in accordance with each institute's own constitution.²⁹⁶

²⁹² Pope Francis, *Evangelium Gaudium, Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World* (Vaticana: Libreria Editrice, 2015) nr. 1.

²⁹³ *The Code of Canon Law* (London: Collins Liturgical Publications, 1983) Canon 1191 § 1.

²⁹⁴ Canon 573 § 2.

²⁹⁵ John W. Crossin, "Obedience" in *The New Dictionary of Theology* Joseph A. Komonchak et al (eds) (Bangalore: Theological Publications, 1996) 720.

²⁹⁶ Canon 601.

Let us consider consecrated life (rendered in Latin as *vita consecrata*) which is a vocation like marriage and diocesan priesthood. Both men and women can choose to dedicate their lives to Christ as a way to seek an intimate relationship with him. These men and women give witness that they are called to be ultimately united with Christ. They live the truth that only Christ can satisfy the deepest longings in a person's heart, and witness that this union provides a deeper joy than the secular world can give. They are members of a community who work together as a team in response to a common call from God to serve the people to whom he sends them.²⁹⁷

Essentially, consecrated life is the act by which lay persons or clerics wholly dedicate themselves to God, to his service and to the Church. As earlier stated, in Pope Francis' Message of the Year of the Consecrated life which he addressed to all Christians, not only the religious, since all are radically consecrated to God by the virtue of Baptism and are sanctified and set apart for Him to be witnesses of His love and mercy to one another and to the people around them.²⁹⁸ However, strictly, consecrated life in the Church is made by and effected by means of evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. Accordingly, Canon Law states, "consecrated life through profession of evangelical counsel is a faithful form of living through which the faithful follow Christ more closely."²⁹⁹ It is a stable form of living by those faithful who feel called to follow Jesus Christ in a more exacting way recognized by the Church. Consecrated life is a response to the divine call by God, to that special call to a union of life with him, which eventually is concretized in a special mission. Consecrated life is a charism (charisma) and charism means a free gift, a spiritual capacity resulting from God's grace.³⁰⁰ Charism of the consecrated life focuses on how consecrated life fosters an intimate and joyful communion of life with Christ, in the school of his generous service of God and neighbour. Charism

²⁹⁷ Anthony Ikechukwu Kanu, "Quitte Non Pays: On Consecrated Persons and the Challenge of Family Obligations in Contemporary Africa" in *Building and Sustaining the Christian Family in Nigeria (Jos Studies)* Vol. 23 (June 2015) 46.

²⁹⁸ Pope Francis, *Message for the Year of Consecrated Life* 1.

²⁹⁹ Canon 573.

³⁰⁰ Emmanuel C. Anagwo, "Charisms According to St. Paul (1 Cor 12:4-11): Implications for the Nigerian Church" *CATHAN A Searchlight on Saint Paul Proceeding of 24th Conference of the Catholic Theological Association of Nigeria (CATHAN)* Cyril Obanure & Sylvia Nwachukwu (Makurdi: Aboki Publishers, 2010) 426.

instils an attitude in consecrated persons as they are gradually conformed to Christ, learn detachment from externals, from the tumult of the senses and from all that keeps them from freedom and being grasped by the spirit.

Consecrated life in the Church is effected by means of the evangelical counsels. The religious are consecrated by the fact of their assumptions of the evangelical counsels. Therefore the counsels constitute the exact manner of living consecration to God. The charism of a consecrated life connotes that special gift which the Holy Spirit makes to the Church. Accordingly, the canonical legislation stipulates that the consecrated life constitutes the divine gift, which the Church has received from the Lord and which by his grace she always safeguards. The institutes of consecrated life are like Jewels that adorn the Church equipping her for every good work. They are variety of gifts from the Lord to the Church. Although, all the baptized with their different gifts are consecrated and called in different vocations of life but the consecrated life is the fullness of baptismal consecration. It is a free gift from God to individuals and to the Church. It also requires a docile heart towards receiving these free gifts of God. In this article therefore *consecrated life* (also used interchangeably with words like *religious life*) is used to denote a stable form of living whereby the candidate follows Christ more closely by the public profession of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience.

3. THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS OF RELIGIOUS OBEDIENCE

The theology of religious obedience brings out the close connection between religious obedience and the Paschal Mystery of Christ.³⁰¹ In that framework, the obedience of Jesus is the core and theological foundation of religious obedience. In Christ, the self-willed world learns the beauty of obedience. "My food is to do the will of he who sent me and to accomplish his work" (John 4:34). His whole life is the source and summit of religious obedience. The whole life of Christ on earth was spent in searching and doing the will of His Father. His obedience is intimately linked to his acceptance to be the Son of God made-man for the remission of humankind's sins. Everything that happened in the life of Jesus Christ was linked to the gradual unfolding of the will of the Father throughout the salvation history. The mission of Jesus consisted in no other thing but the fulfilment and realization of the will of God. Therefore the central goal of all followers of Christ consists in continuing the search for, and fulfilling the will of the Father in the world.

With crystal clarity, the Second Vatican Council's document, *Perfectae Caritatis* describes how religious obedience points out its object: the total dedication of one's will, its motive, sacrifice of self offered to God, its strength and value; greater stability and security in union with God's salvific will; its example: Jesus Christ, its

³⁰¹ John Paul II, *The Consecrated Life Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Vita Consecrata* (Vaticana: Libreria Editrice, 1996) nr.24.

expression: submission to superiors as representative of God, its social dimension: the service of others; its ecclesial dimension: stricter obligation to serve the Church and lastly its end to attain to the stature of fullness in Christ (cf. Eph 4:13).³⁰² Religious obedience makes the consecrated persons to enter decisively into God's divine plan of salvation in communion with Christ. It is normal that it should lead to Christ.

Unfortunately, religious obedience has come to be associated with the slavish submission to the will of others that constitute obstacle to human development, personal fulfilment and liturgical life of the Church. For Albert Nolan, "It has often come to mean acting like a robot or a dog that has been trained to just obey. The vow of obedience has too often kept some religious childish and immature."³⁰³ But one must remark that it should not be understood in this manner. Instead it should be a powerful means of witness against selfish individualism and in favour of the common good. In this way, the vow of religious obedience can become another sign of the future world whereby we believe in and hope for, a world that fights for the interest of the common good of the whole human race and the people of God.

Thus Vincent Pelletier avers: "In the spirituality of obedience, the issue is not whether I must say "yes" to whatever I am asked to do, but to see how this request and saying "yes" is an opportunity for me to die to self and give off myself for the other in love and service by saying "yes" and see that I am deepening my personal relationship with the Lord through self-giving."³⁰⁴ For instance, a sister or brother may be asked by his/her superior to do something that he/she finds very difficult or challenging. He/she might be asked to start a new local community and apostolate. As a "good brother/sister" who keeps the Rule, he/she can take up the challenge and use his/her gifts and talents and do his/her best, as a prove that he/she is "obedient." Conversely, he/she might take this request of his/her superior to his/her personal prayer to God.

Accordingly, St. John Paul II states that by the practice of the evangelical counsels, the consecrated person lives with intensity the Christological and Trinitarian dimensions of the whole of Christian life. For him, "Obedience, practised in imitation of Christ, whose food was to do the Father's will (cf. John 4:34) shows the liberating beauty of a dependence which is not servile but filial, marked by a deep sense of responsibility and animated by mutual trust, which is a reflection in

³⁰² Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae Caritatis*, (Decree on the Up-to-date Renewal of Religious Life) [henceforth PC] in Flannery, A. ed. *Vatican Council II*. Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1987) nr. 14.

³⁰³ Albert Nolan, "Religious Life as a Prophetic Witness" in *Grace & Truth: A Journal of Catholic Reflection for Southern Africa*, Vol 31, No.2 (August 2014) 12.

³⁰⁴ Vincent Pelletier, "Reflection on Religious Obedience" in *Specific Challenges to Evangelization in Africa-4 (AFER: African Ecclesial Review*, Vol. 49, Numbers 3 & 4, September-December 2007, 29.

history of the loving harmony between the three Divine Persons.³⁰⁵ This means that the vow of obedience of the consecrated person is rooted and practised in imitation of Christ. It is a vow practised freely, not in servitude but in service, not slavishly but animated by love of Christ and his Church. The vow of obedience of the consecrated person reflects the obedience of the Blessed Virgin Mary who in freedom obeyed the word of God that she should be the mother of Jesus Christ. The vow of obedience is evangelical because it is rooted in the gospel and life of Christ.

In her celebrated book, *Consecrated Life in the Church: Discipline and Praxis*, Gerard Nwagwu affirms that the vow of obedience is founded on the "example of Christ who was obedient to the Father until death, death on a Cross (Phil 2:8)."³⁰⁶ According to her, "obedience always involves interior suffering and spiritual martyrdom and tearing apart, exactly because it is a sacrifice of the will, the dearest to a person. It is a spiritual martyrdom; an annihilation of oneself; a tearing apart of that self that often leads to pride, arrogance."³⁰⁷ She listed the characteristics of the evangelical vow of obedience as obedience that is sustained by faith and love, obedience in imitation of Christ, and obedience done with regard to the submission of one's will to lawful superior. Consecrated life is a stable life under obedience to a superior.³⁰⁸ Earlier she remarked that the aim of obedience to the religious men and women is to ginger themselves to their observance, with their whole energy, conviction, goodwill, creativity, and initiatives. It has its foundation in Christ, makes one's faith strong in God, sustained by love, and it is a submission of will to God through those in authority.³⁰⁹

To learn therefore from the obedient Christ, obedience really means the readiness and humble submission based on faith in the acceptance of what has been ordered as an expression of love and will of God.³¹⁰ It is the disposition to do the will

³⁰⁵ John Paul II, *The Consecrated Life Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Vita Consecrata* 21.

³⁰⁶ Gerard Nwagwu, *Consecrated Life in the Church: Discipline and Praxis*, (Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt, 2013) 167.

³⁰⁷ Nwagwu, *Consecrated Life in the Church: Discipline and Praxis* 167.

³⁰⁸ Nwagwu, *Consecrated Life in the Church: Discipline and Praxis* 167-169.

³⁰⁹ Nwagwu, *Consecrated Life in the Church: Discipline and Praxis* 155-157.

³¹⁰ Canon 601.

of God within the context of a specific religious community. This does not exclude the possibility of discussion, of stating one's opinion but it does mean, first of all, the readiness to serve, to set aside one's personal wishes, if need be, for the good and needs of the strive to the kingdom of God. It is a lifestyle that should be lived in season and out of season, whether favourable or unfavourable which sometimes may be painful and characterized by "difficult commands."³¹¹ Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life states accordingly, "The task presented to consecrated life by the historical landscape at the end of the twentieth century has required boldness and courageous inventiveness."³¹² But it comes with blessings if accepted by the consecrated persons in line with the example of the obedience of Christ. So, in faith and love, the consecrated persons submit their will to that of their legitimate superiors in accordance with the rules and regulations of the Institute. By so doing, they will be of greater service in building the Christian family as the Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* articulates and underscores the tripartite benefits accruing therefrom, namely, the edification of the Church, the benefit of humankind and the needs of the Church.³¹³

4. INSTANCES OF LITURGICAL DISOBEDIENCE

Granted that filial obedience to the liturgical norms is expected, what beholds the worshipping community today is what Mauro Gagliardi calls the phenomenon of "liturgical disobedience."³¹⁴ A recent development, or lack thereof, has brought confusion in the liturgical celebrations of the Church. A startling observation shows that some consecrated persons felt that they can disregard liturgical norms and laws. This liturgical disobedience is easily observed in some parishes in Port Harcourt Diocese, Nigeria when readings are introduced as "A proclamation from the...." instead of the conventional way, "A reading from the...." Again, some champion liturgical aberrations whereby extraneous gestures like waving of hands after

³¹¹ Dominic Hoffman with Basil Cole, *Consecrated Life Contribution of Vatican II* (Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2005) 173.

³¹² Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Keep Watch To Consecrated Men and Women Journeying in the Footsteps of God* (Vaticana: Libreria Editrice, 2015) nr. 5.

³¹³ Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* (The Constitution on the Church) [Henceforth LG] in Flannery, A. ed. *Vatican Council II*. Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1987) nr.42.

³¹⁴ Mauro Gagliardi, "Observance of Liturgical Norms and "Ars Celebrandi" in <http://www.zenit.org/article-29850?1=english> accessed on 4th June, 2015.

dismissal mandate, the usurpation of the role of ordinary ministers of Holy Communion instead of the faithful observance of the norms guiding the exercise for extraordinary ministers, late-coming and rowdy exchange of kiss of peace are introduced and done by both the consecrated and non consecrated persons. According to Kevin Orlin, dictating the manner of reception of the Eucharist and ignoring rules for reception of the Eucharist are listed among the ten most common liturgical disobedience and controversies among all Christ's faithful, consecrated persons not excluded. Others are disregarding the prescribed text of the Order of Mass, interrupting the Mass, omitting the penitential rite, replacing or omitting the homily. Still others are dictating posture, holding hands during the Our Father, performing aliturgical dance and closing the holy water fonts at some seasons.³¹⁵

Be that as it may, one may rightly state that these abuses have deteriorated because mentality has been formed in many by which the liturgy with the exception of the words of the Eucharistic consecration can be subject to all modifications "pastorally" considered suitable by the priest or the community. This situation induced John Paul II himself to request the Congregation for Divine Worship to prepare a disciplinary Instruction on the Celebration of the Eucharist, published with the title "*Redemptionis Sacramentum*" on March 25, 2004. "*Ecclesia De Eucharistia*" published earlier indicated that the reaction to formalism is one of the causes of the "liturgical disobedience" of our time.³¹⁶ "*Redemptionis Sacramentum*" points out other causes, among them, a false concept of liberty and ignorance.³¹⁷ The latter in particular refers not only to knowledge of the norms, but also to a deficient understanding of the historical and theological value of many eucharological texts and rites: "Finally, abuses very often find their foundation in ignorance, given that in general that is rejected whose profound meaning is not understood, nor is its antiquity known."³¹⁸

Elsewhere, we argued that a cursory glance into the observance of liturgical norms in Africa, and Nigeria in particular, shows the tendency towards liturgical disobedience by some of the celebrants and participants. Indeed, elements of liturgical abuses continue to trail liturgical and para-liturgical ceremonies in recent years. And they are deadly threat to the pursuit of liturgical renewal advocated by the reformed liturgy of the Second Vatican Council. In spite of the fact that Christian

³¹⁵ See Kevin Orlin Johnson. "The Ten Most Common Liturgical Abuses And Why They are Wrong" in <http://www.catholic.com/thisrock/1999/9901feal.asp> accessed on 10th June, 2015.

³¹⁶ John Paul II, *Ecclesia De Eucharistia (The Church of the Eucharist)* (Awka: Fides Communications, 2003).

³¹⁷ Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Redemptionis Sacramentum (On Certain Matters to be Observed or to be Avoided Regarding the Most Holy Eucharist)*, (Okpuno: Fides Communications, 2004) 7.

³¹⁸ Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Redemptionis Sacramentum* 8.

worship is guided by a set of laws and legislations in the quest to arrive at the *ars celebrandi*; they are wantonly bypassed by some of the clerics and the lay faithful in the bid to make the celebrations 'more interesting' to the detriment of liturgical norms. A known adage holds, "order is the first law in heaven." And our earthly liturgy is a miniature of the heavenly liturgy.³¹⁹

Religious obedience is strongly canvassed for towards the liturgical norms in a theological and historical understanding, in addition to the text of the ecclesiology of communion. The instruction rightly states that the mystery of the Eucharist is too great for someone to allow himself to treat it with his own personal choice, which would not respect either its sacred character or its universal dimension.³²⁰ When gestures, postures, texts, rites, etc are arbitrarily introduced, they do not bring about renewal, instead they harm the true right of the faithful to liturgical action which is the expression of the life of the Church according to her tradition and discipline. To complicate the situation, they introduce in the very celebration of the Eucharist elements of discord and deform it. For instance, some consecrated persons who decorate the altar and liturgical environment make use of excessive aliturgical colours like orange, yellow, etc. that have no liturgical or sacred meanings.³²¹ More often than not, the sanctuary areas are filled with flowers, without aesthetic value, as if one is in a traditional shrine, thereby dismantling a ritual that is already lacklustre.

Again, waving of hands, done by both the consecrated and non consecrated persons, is common in Pentecostal worship, in order to acknowledge divine presence, cheer up, to mention but a few purposes. But the gesture of waving hands is not a Catholic tradition; as such, it has no liturgical symbolism when used at the end of the Eucharistic liturgy or blessing of the faithful with the monstrance at the Eucharistic Benediction. Elsewhere we argued that the practice of waving hands in worship to mark the end of the celebration is liturgically inappropriate.³²² Fabian C. Okafor corroborates our position that some people wave their two hands facing the altar. One does not know whether they are waving bye-bye to the priest or to whom.³²³ He rhetorically and pungently puts it: "This is one of those Pentecostal led-

³¹⁹ Emmanuel C. Anagwo, "Liturgical Norms and Good Governance: The Imperative of the Rule of Law" in *Areopagus: Journal of Church & State Relations*, Vol 3, Number 1, (October 2013) 25-26.

³²⁰ Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Redemptionis Sacramentum* 11.

³²¹The liturgical colours are white, red, rose, green, purple and black (See *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2003) nr. 346).

³²²Anagwo, *Hundred Questions and Answers on the Mass Vol II*, 72.

³²³Fabian C. Okafor, "Some Innovations in the Eucharistic Liturgy: Effect of Pentecostalism" in *New Trends in Faith and Practice From Crisis to Confusion* (Nsukka: Afro-Orbis Publications, 2006) 86-87.

by-the spirit innovations which probably should not be stopped for fear of quenching the spirit. This action is an abuse. It is spreading and has to be discouraged by the Authority."³²⁴ In fact, Bishop Hilary O. Okeke admonishes that, "Priests should discourage the people from waving their hands or performing other gestures not approved as they reply "Thanks be to God" at the end of the Mass."³²⁵ This sort of thing puts the liturgy into a climate of theatrical representation and is in stark opposition to the notion of a ritual that has been handed down through the ages.

5. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE LITURGICAL LIFE OF THE CHURCH

As the Church celebrates the Year of the Consecrated Life, the evangelical counsel of religious obedience has significant implications for the theory and praxis of the liturgy and invariably would address some pertinent questions, leading to the promotion of liturgical obedience. For instance, how would we understand the religious obedience of the consecrated persons for the liturgical life of the Church? Would their understanding go against the expectations of the Church in the quest to worship God? How would the religious obedience of the consecrated person be a model of liturgical obedience? Applying religious obedience to liturgical life of the Church makes the consecrated persons to possess the characteristic feature of Christ's mission, vision and passion: "I came not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me" (John 6:38). Anthony A. Akinwale collaborates and opines that, "The religious has no identity and no mission without Christ the Head and his body the Church."³²⁶ Doctrinally, both the priest and the lay faithful owe obedience to Christ and his Church in matters of faith, morals and liturgical discipline. Since our concern is with the liturgical life of the Church, we must categorically state that neither the priest nor the lay faithful are lords and masters of the liturgy. Both must receive it as a gift through which by actively, fully and consciously participating, they enter into communion with Christ and the Church, and benefit from an increase of grace. This fundamental obedience of the liturgical assembly to Christ and the Church is the basis for other forms of filial obedience with the assembly. In a way, the priest owes obedience to the faithful since he has a solemn mission to lead them in prayer and worship according to the mind of the Church. Similarly, the faithful have a corresponding right and duty to pray and worship in communion with the universal Church. Thus the priest is called to direct the faithful in the Church's

³²⁴Fabian C. Okafor, "Some Innovations in the Eucharistic Liturgy: Effect of Pentecostalism" 86-87.

³²⁵Hilary O. Okeke, "Notes for Liturgical Celebrations" in *The Christian Outlook*, 8.10 (June 13, 2009) 6.

³²⁶ Akinwale, "The Challenge of Religious Life Today" 11.

liturgical worship. The lay faithful, in turn, have an obligation to obey him insofar as his direction corresponds to Church's mind as expressed in the liturgical books or in the dispositions of legitimate Church authority. Meanwhile, when it concerns acts of private devotion, the priest, as teacher, is called to guide and guard the faithful to a solid spiritual life. In this way, he may sometimes be required to warn them against certain devotional practices that deviate from sound doctrine or that are prone to confuse this flock regarding the priority of the sacramental life.

It has always been the cherished tradition and custom of the Mother Church that the liturgical norms regulate how the public worship of the Church is to be carried out. In the words of Austin Echema, "The norms are based on the teaching and guidance of sacred Scripture, of the Apostles, of sacred Tradition, of definitions of solemn Councils of the Church and of the entire prayer history of the Church."³²⁷ Liturgical worship is not a private function, but celebration belonging to the Church. "No other person, even if he be a priest, may add, remove or change anything in the liturgy of his own authority."³²⁸ The evangelical counsel of obedience cuts across all spheres of life, most especially as it motivates obedience to the Church in all ramifications. Caroline Mbonu rightly argues that "Obedience is not necessarily action counsel, that is, what I do? How should I do it? Rather, obedience seeks to ask the question, what is the community saying? How can we achieve it?"³²⁹ The evangelical vow of religious obedience is primarily to promote the value of the community. Mbonu further states that, "The basic assumption is that a person taking the vow of obedience in a particular community is already committed to its goal."³³⁰ The Church is a community of all communities and liturgy is its ultimate goal. The reformed liturgy of the Second Vatican Council stresses that the liturgy is the summit to which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the fount from which all her power flows.³³¹ The evangelical vow of religious obedience requires

³²⁷ Austin Echema, "The Importance of Liturgical Norms in the Eucharistic Celebration: The Nigerian Experience" in *The Nigerian Journal of Theology*, Bisong Kekong & Ukwuegbu Bernard (eds), Vol 29 (June 2015) 63.

³²⁸ Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, (The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy) [Henceforth SC] in Flannery, A. ed. *Vatican Council II*. Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1987) nr. 22.

³²⁹ Caroline N. Mbonu, "Celebrating the Year of Consecrated Persons: A Reflection on the Vowed Life Foreground on Matthew 5:48" in *The Nigerian Journal of Theology*, Bisong Kekong & Ukwuegbu Bernard (eds), Vol. 29 (June 2015) 7.

³³⁰ Mbonu, "Celebrating the Year of Consecrated Persons..." 11.

³³¹ SC 10.

the faithful to be committed to this lofty goal of the Church and to obey liturgical norms in order to achieve this goal.

An outstanding implication of religious obedience of all Christian faithful, especially the consecrated persons, therefore is the right to enjoy the celebration of a true liturgy and especially the celebration of the Holy Mass which should be exactly as the Church has desired and established it, as written in the liturgical books and in the other laws and norms. The consecrated persons have the right to have the holy sacrifice of the Mass celebrated for them in keeping with all the teaching of the Magisterium of the Church. The liturgical community has the right to have the celebration of the Most Holy Eucharist carried out in such a way that it seems truly as a sacrament of unity, excluding absolutely all the defects and gestures that can manifest divisions and factions in the Church. There is no exaggeration therefore if we affirm that liturgy is everything for the Church. It is the soul and life-wire of the Church. Thus proper celebration of the liturgy which is in keeping to its norms and laws are very dear to the Church. The evangelical vow of religious obedience which the consecrated person professes gives him/her the proper disposition to keep liturgical norms which invariably leads contemporary human beings into personal contact with the Father in the quest to actualize the *glorificationis Dei, sanctificationis populi* (glorification of God and the sanctification of the people).

6. ENRICHMENT WITH AFRICAN CULTURAL VALUES OF OBEDIENCE

Christian worship can also integrate African positive (cultural) values as a way of incarnating the vow of religious obedience. Basically, African cultural values that easily rub off on religious obedience are the respect for elders and authority. Africans in general and the cultures in Nigeria in particular take the value of respect seriously. There is the handing over of tradition and wisdom from the old to the young through oral tradition by Africans. In fact, young people are expected to ask questions and listen to the elders who explain to them the history, customs, traditions, culture and values of their people. It is common practice that a typical African family gather in the evening. In some cases when there is moon light, the father would be telling the children stories about their culture. The oldest member of the family has a higher status than the youngest within that hierarchy. Children from the tender age are taught how to respect and obey their parents and elders. In the words of William Conton quoted by Oliver Onwubiko, "Africans generally have deep and ingrained respect for old age, and even when we can find nothing to admire in an old man, we will not easily forget that their grey hairs have earned them right to courtesy and politeness."³³² There are duties, obligations, rights and

³³² See Oliver A. Onwubiko, *African Thought, Religion & Culture* (Enugu: SNAAP Press, 1991) 28.

privileges. Parents have the duty to discipline, protect and educate their children and bring them up to be well behaved. For instance, a young boy is not expected to look at a young girl while an elder is around. If he does that, it smacks of disrespect to the elder. On the other hand, children have to obey their parents and respect those who are older.

Meanwhile, when the community has gathered for social occasions, elders are first given seats before the young ones. This is because authority resides in the elder, the king or chief of the village and his cabinet. This scenario takes place even if the elder, king or chief comes late. A younger person immediately gets up for him to sit. It is also the elders that pray at gatherings and in most cases, the eldest man is employed to lead such prayers. Their blessings and courses are taken very seriously. According to Jude A. Asanbe, "The Yoruba believe that old age co-terminates with wisdom. In fact, it is generally regarded as an exception for anyone to attain old age without being wise. So, the family head has to be a man of great wisdom, a wisdom derived from experience and deep knowledge."³³³ Consequently, elders are respected for many reasons. Firstly, they are believed to be the teachers, directors of the young and custodians of the tradition. The Igbo would say: "He who listens to an elder is like one who consults an oracle." The oracles are believed to give the infallible truths. Thus elders are also believed to say the truth and their words and instructions are heeded to and for the promotion of good behaviour among the young.

In the African culture, obedience and respect are seen as values and fundamental moral duties which help people to live with one another. The sense of obedience calls for the responsible submission and dependence to the will of Supreme Being mediated through the community in dialogue, mutual respect and matured vision of reality. In this culture, life is shared and responsibilities are never a personal affair but communitarian concern. No one lives for oneself alone and the misconduct of an individual affects all, so also is applicable to the religious who vowed obedience. Failure in this vow affects the community at large. Thus, the consecrated persons are under oath to observe the rules governing their promises as any default may result to instant death or other punishments as may be melted out by the gods or deities in question. Some of these vows are taken for life or for a specific period of time, depending on the purpose for which the vow is taken. All in all, the African consecrated persons should not find it difficult in living out the vow of religious obedience because obedience is a fundamental value in the African traditional society.

7. CONCLUSION

³³³ Jude A. Asanbe, "Canonical Perspective on Seniority Among the Yoruba and Its Implications for Priestly Life" in *Bodija Journal: A Philosophico-Theological Journal*, (June 200/2006) 117.

In the light of the discussion above, we have attempted to establish that the consecrated life is a gift which the Father has given to the Church and the modern society. In this way, the most characteristic traits of the life of his Son Jesus, the chaste, poor and obedient one (see Matt 8:20; Phil 2:8), and the unfathomable riches of his mystery (see Eph 3:8) might be present in the world and might draw everyone toward the kingdom of God. That accounts why we have no hesitation to assert that for religious obedience to be translated into the liturgical life of the Church, the consecrated persons must listen attentively to God through the demands of the liturgical norms and laws. No living human community survives without some rules. Christ, before returning to the Father formed a community of disciples; later to become the Church. However, unlike the civic community regulated by legal codes, Christ's liturgical community is led by the filial law of love. The agape that Jesus calls us to transcends the world of mere expression and explosion of passion or emotion. It is a higher form of filial obedience which shows our appreciation of God's goodness towards all. In this regard, Pope Francis states, "So I invite every Christian community to experience this Year above all as a moment of thanksgiving to the Lord and grateful remembrance for all the gifts we continue to receive."³³⁴

The Church and the modern society really need the consecrated men and women in order to learn and follow Christ closely especially with regard to obedience. If the consecrated persons are serious with their vow of obedience, their lifestyle and example will seriously facilitate their obedience to the liturgical norms thereby setting examples for others to follow. One of the cardinal difficulties we have in obedience to the liturgical norms emanates from the fact that there are few role models we can look up to for direction. The lacuna can be filled by the consecrated men and women as flag bearers of liturgical obedience. This is clearly in line with the teaching of Pope Francis, "I am counting on you "to wake up the world", since the distinctive sign of the consecrated life is prophesy."³³⁵ By their exemplary life to the liturgical norms, it will make the liturgy an occasion for an encounter with Christ whose priestly office we exercise in the liturgy. It then follows that obedience to the liturgical norms as kept by the Church, which is the body of Christ, is obedience to Christ himself since the Church exercises that priestly office in His name.

Finally, it is the opinion of this paper that there is a very close similarity between religious obedience and obedience to the liturgical norms. For the consecrated men and women there should be no conflict between the two: obedience in the consecrated life should overflow into the liturgical life of the Church. Moreover, from the African perspective, the African consecrated persons should not

³³⁴ Pope Francis, *Message for the Year of Consecrated Life 1*.

³³⁵ Pope Francis, *Message for the Year of Consecrated Life 2*.

find it difficult in living out the vows of obedience because obedience is one of the fundamental moral values in the African traditional society which helps people to live with one another. The African traditional culture has a priceless cultural heritage related to the vow of religious obedience. The consecrated persons should integrate these cultural values to their religious vow and live them out in the liturgical life of the Church. Thus the split between faith and culture would be reduced if faith could be made to seek understanding and expression more in the philosophy and wisdom of the African people than in Greek and Western categories.

**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.**

Rev. Fr Festus Ejiofor, MSP.
Bursar General,
Missionary Society of St Paul of Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

This article aims at portraying the fact that the finance and economic growth of any religious institute is the responsibility of all the members of the institute including the candidates in the institute's formation house. The formation house is the ideal place to inculcate the idea in the candidates and future members of the institute. *Institute* here refers to any Consecrated Religious Institute in the Catholic Church such as Religious Congregations, Religious Orders, and Societies of Apostolic Life. *Members* of the institute imply those who have made their Profession of Vows, Make the Commitment or Taken the Oath of membership. The *Candidates* are those still at their initial formation – that is those who are yet to Profess the Vows, Make the Commitment, or Take the Oath.

The Finance and economy of a consecrated religious institute are officially and primarily entrusted to the Superior and the Bursar of the institute. However, the Superior and bursar alone may not be able to bring about any meaningful financial and economic growth if the other members of the institute do not contribute their quota towards encouraging the growth.

The financial and economic demand of a religious institute increases as the members of such institute increase in number. This makes it difficult if not impossible for just the Superior, the councillors and the bursar alone to meet up with the demands of the institute without the support of other members.

FORMATION OF CANDIDATES TO ENHANCE ECONOMIC GROWTH

For other members of the institute to truly and generously contribute to the financial and economic growth of the institute they have to first of all see it as their individual and communal responsibility. And this idea has to be ingrained in the formation programme. That is to say that at the formation of a candidate one should be made to understand that it is part of his/her responsibility to provide some things for the institute or community and to manage the already provided things well. If this is not done, then it will be very difficult to convince such person to be economically responsible or fruitful to the institute after profession, especially after final profession.

For example, if in a formation house all the needs of the candidates are provided; such as good meals, toiletries, cosmetics, transportation money when going home and when coming back to the formation house, books, entertainment equipments, frequent parties, and so on, and if the formators are using expensive things for themselves and for their community, then the candidates will find it difficult to understand when any one says the institute is in need. Such formation makes the

candidates to believe that, to be a religious is to live in affluence. Such candidates begin to see their biological families and biological relations and friends as those who are truly in need rather than the religious community or institute they belong to.

On the other extreme, when the candidates in the formation house are made to pay fees, it is also counterproductive. For instance, when candidates are asked to pay formation fees, that will make some of them to go begging for money from people and family members. The candidates will wait till after profession to begin to pay back such money over a hundred fold to the family member, friends, and relations. At this point the candidate is like a politician who begged and borrowed money for campaign and after winning the political post, he/she has to pay back the money with huge interest, even if it means using public fund to do that and also save some for himself/herself.

CANDIDATES' CONTRIBUTIONS TO ECONOMIC GROWTH

If providing all the candidates needs in formation house and on the other hand tasking the candidates heavily to pay for their formation may most likely not help the candidates or the professed members to join in building up the institute's finance and economy, what then should be done? There should be a middle course, for virtue is said to lie in the middle. There is great need for the candidates under formation to make both material and spiritual contributions in the institute while still in formation. But these contributions should be strictly voluntary. The formators have to encourage it.

MATERIAL CONTRIBUTION BY CANDIDATES

The material contributions from the candidates may include things like hand towels and liquid soap for wash hand basin, moping stick, liturgical materials like sacred linens, food items and so on. Some of the candidates are from a family of farmers. They can almost painlessly give from their family farm produce to the institute. The candidates can make farm in the compound and also engage in skillful work like painting of the compound when needed. These can cut down the expenditure of the formation house on labour cost. But, they need to be encouraged to do that. The institute may not depend on such generosity from the candidates, but it is necessary. It helps the candidate to see the institute as their home and see themselves as stake holders in it. Thus the candidate can willingly bring things from their family or buy some little things for the community when coming back from a journey. It could even be a little quantity of groundnut. Or bread for the community. When one contributes generously to ones institute, one feels truly like a member of it. However the formators have to be careful of those candidates who will try to use material donations to buy their way through formation. So those who contribute such material gifts to the institute or community should be appreciated but not 'worshiped' or seen as sacred cows.

Experience has shown that those who generously and sincerely contribute material things in the community do not complain much for any lack in the community. Such

persons also are more disposed to sacrificial life and manage whatever is available. They also avoid waste. But those who do not contribute materially to the institute are often complainants and wasteful of the institute's resources while they are very economical with their so called personal properties. You can sometimes hear them saying "this thing is not a community property. It is my personal thing, so nobody should touch or destroy it for me." In other words one can touch or destroy the community or institute's properties but not the person's personal property.

SPIRITUAL CONTRIBUTION BY CANDIDATES

Spiritual contribution is also very important. This includes praying for the central administration of the institute, praying for the formators and individual members of the institute especially those in a more challenging apostolate. Such prayers can be done during the community prayers when possible, and during one's private prayers. Thus, the candidates have to be formed to be generous in their prayers. They have to often pray for the needs and well being of the institute. When one is generous to be praying sincerely and devotedly for the good of the institute and her members, such person will likely be very prudent in using materials or finance of the institute.

The candidates need to see the formation house and the institute as their home and family in which they also have the obligation to help sustain. The formation has to be such that those devoted to their apostolate are held in high esteem. This will help the candidates to begin to appreciate hard work and look forward to a fulfilled apostolate after profession, rather than looking forward to acquiring lots of personal properties because he/she sees those who acquired such things been hailed by others.

PROFESSED MEMBERS' RESPONSIBILITY FOR FINANCE AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

With such formation in simplicity, generosity, and seeking fulfilment in the apostolate one embraces the professed life with more focus on the goal of the institute which is also his/her personal goal. This focus on the spirituality and apostolate of the institute helps a professed member to be less focused on personal material possession. Such a member becomes less expensive to maintain. Thus, members need to avoid unnecessary distraction of personal material acquisitions and religious politicking to be able to concentrate on vocation. When one focuses more on the primary apostolate assigned to him/her, then one becomes less demanding of the material things from the congregation and one will now put in even personal possessions into the apostolate. Also the professed member who is well formed to be simple, generous to the institute, and spiritually sound will not hesitate to make his/her returns to the institute rather than thinking he/she is doing the Superior and bursar a favour. Likewise, the Superiors, Councilors, Bursars, Project coordinators, and so on, have to be less expensive as well.

Therefore, it is important for every member of the congregation to remember that the institute is not a personal property of a member or some members of the institute. Rather, everybody, including the Superior General, Councilors and Bursar General are all MEMBERS of the institute. They also applied to be admitted into the religious institute just as every other person. So, no member of the institute should waste the institute's property or money thinking he/she is punishing the Superior or Bursar. Also, the Superior and the Bursar should not waste the institute's resources. And no one should withhold any information that can help to boost the economy or the finance of the institute with the thought that he/she does not want the Superior and council or the bursar to succeed, or thinking "They will not listen to me because they are in charge". Every member need to just air his/her opinion and suggestions with love, humility and prudence. Then leave the rest to the Holy Spirit and to those whom the Spirit has chosen to temporally pilot the affairs of the institute.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, when a proper formation is given and well received candidates will naturally contribute to the economic growth of the institute. The members need to put into practice the formation given to them and live a simple life while focusing on the spirituality and apostolate of the institute. This will minimize unnecessary expenses by the institute and the financial returns from the members will increase, thereby, improving the finance and economy of the institute. I believe every consecrated religious institute is given the opportunity to get all the economic and financial resources they need to carry out their apostolate. It is only left for the members to be sincere in making their remittances and use their God given wisdom to find out the numerous opportunities surrounding them, without losing focus of their apostolate and spirituality. Thus it is the responsibility of every Professed Members and the candidates in formation to contribute to the Finances, and economic growth of the Religious Community or institute.

THE HEALING MINISTRY OF JESUS, THE HEALING MISSION OF THE CHURCH IN LAGOS: GIVE CARE AND LOVE TO THE SICK

Sr. Theresa Afareha, EHJ³³⁶

³³⁶ Rev. Sr. Theresa Afareha, a member of the Congregation of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus Sisters, is by profession a Nurse. She is currently the Health Coordinator of the Catholic Archdiocese of Lagos.

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the healing mission of the Church in imitation of the healing ministry of Jesus, the compassionate, loving, and gentle Master who heals the sick and the infirm. This noble act of caring for the sick and the dying is all encompassing. The church must be ready to sacrifice her time, energy, and wealth in the service of the sick in the hospital, maternity centres, and orphanages and clinics belonging to the Religious Congregations and Institutes, Diocese/Parish or State, in cooperation with the Health workers according to the circumstance. The Church makes her services available to people of every condition, but especially the poor and afflicted. In Lagos Archdiocese, the archdiocesan bishop, priests, religious, exercise responsibilities that are rooted in their respective offices to promote collaboration among health care leaders, providers, medical professionals, chaplains and other specialists. The vocation of health care professionals to share in the carrying forth God's life-giving and healing work must not lose its focus. The sick and dying must remain the "core" of our call to imitate the healing ministry of Jesus. Conscious of the delicate nature of the work and that slightest mistake may have serious repercussion, health workers should be conscientious in their duties. They should moreover observe the highest professional standards and the norm of the Christian ethics. Therefore, health care workers strive to fulfil the mandate of Jesus: "Go out to the whole world proclaim the kingdom of Heaven is close at hand. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those suffering from virulent skin-disease, drive out devils. (Matt.10:7-9).

INTRODUCTION

"I came so that you might have life and have it more abundantly." (Jn. 10:10)

In imitation of Jesus, the Catholic Church sees health care as a continuation of Jesus' healing ministry.

The work of caring for the health of a person is a very valuable service to life. It expresses a profoundly human and Christian commitment, which is undertaken and carried out not only as a technical activity but also as one of dedication to love and service of neighbour. It is a form of Christian witness. The church's health care ministry also sees a human person, not just as a patient with Tuberculosis, AIDS or Cancer. This ministry is concerned with sacredness of life and its transmission and protection.

The Catholic Archdiocese of Lagos has been involved in the provision of health care for over 40 years. The inspiration for this involvement springs from Jesus' own

words and actions. The gospels are full of examples of how Christ cured every kind of ailments and diseases.

This article proposes to explain the concept of health and healing, the process of getting well, the different types of healing, the healing ministry of Jesus, His Disciples and the mission of the Church -- both in the past and present.

CONCEPT OF HEALTH

Health and healing are difficult to define. However, *health* may be defined as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”³³⁷ This points to a condition of satisfactory functioning of the whole organism; the words *health*, *wholeness* and *holiness* are closely linked in origin. *Healing* may, therefore, be described as the process by which a living organism, whose functions are disordered, is restored or returned to health or ‘made whole,’ that is to say, it returns to complete functioning; healing involves the restoration of structure and function of injured or diseased tissues. In other words, to heal is to cure of a disease or wound and restore to soundness or to that state of body in which the natural functions are regularly performed; as, to heal the sick. In the Scriptures, to *heal* also means to forgive, cure moral disease and restore soundness, restore an object (say waters) to purity; it is to purify from corruptions, redress grievances and restore to prosperity.

Healing involves an understanding of the basic types of conditions that require healing and the appropriate medicine methods by which each condition may be addressed effectively. Healing is much more than eliminating or suppressing symptoms. It is essentially a reversal of the process involved in becoming ill, and at the same time it is an awakening to one’s true nature and the meaning of life. Healing involves re-integrating or bringing the members back together holistically. In short, healing is a path that can be embraced.

Holistic healing is an approach to health and wellness that takes into consideration the whole person, that is, the physical, mental /emotional, spiritual values and social lifestyle and interaction with the environment. Holistic health is based on the natural principle that the whole is comprised of inter-reliant parts, and that when one part is not functioning at optimum levels it impacts on all of the other parts. This healing focuses on all parts of the person, not just the physical portion where ailments are most obvious. Therefore, holistic healing goes beyond merely treating symptoms and instead uses them as a guide to address the root cause of the problem. Physical symptoms can be alleviated by taking medication, but unless the whole person is treated, the actual problem still exists.

³³⁷ World Health Organization, *Constitutions*, Principles.

On the physical level, healing involves following diet and a healthful lifestyles with lots of rest. It may involve changes in activities, consuming special foods, taking supplementary nutrients, and often the use of other natural therapies of various kinds. At the mental level, healing involves taking full responsibility for oneself, committing to oneself and to happiness and health, and releasing any habit, behaviour, job, persons, and attitudes or emotions that are blocking healing. It also involves discipline, forgiveness of self and so on.

THE PROCESS OF GETTING WELL

The process of getting well is a series of organised steps designed for expansion of consciousness and a new understanding of who we are. These major steps are used as tool for measuring the level of healing.

1) Emotional Healing

Most of us are driven by our emotions like fear, longing, physical desires, anger, resentment, guilt and many others. These are considered normal emotions and are even encouraged by some psychologists. Healing requires letting go of that which is not conducive to a positive emotional environment.

2) Spiritual Healing

This healing involves touching the deeper self, which is vast, powerful and mysterious. There are moments called peak experiences, ecstasy or enlightenment when the ego has somehow been put aside. While physical symptoms may be addressed along the way, the spiritual self also needs to be a focus.

3) Taking Full Responsibility

One of the most damaging attitudes of one, who wants to be healed, is that of feeling like a victim. It is extremely disempowering when one may seem to be the victim of, for example, one's upbringing, or a tumour. The healing process requires above all taking full responsibility for whatever exists in one's life, which is very empowering. If you created a mess, you can un-create it.

Taking responsibility also does not mean not accepting help, far from it. We are here to help one another awaken, and thus to heal. Taking full responsibility means respecting the sovereignty of each individual and ability of each one to make choices, not imposing their vision on others. Jesus would always ask, "Do you want to be healed?" "YES, I want to, Sir, make me well again."

Healing involves an expansion of awareness. When love is the essence of what we are, and it becomes the force that keep us going, negative energy patterns disappear and the body heals effectively with any methods or therapies found helpful.

4) Healers And Doctors

Healing happens! Doctors, Nurses, therapists, ministers and counsellors facilitate the healing process, but do not cause it. Some have developed certain gifts, or are more open, in touch with their abilities and willing to share with others. Looking at a sunset, sitting under a tree, talking to a friend, taking a walk, eating a particular meal and a thousand of other experiences can also facilitate healing. Have we all not had such experience?

It is easy to become confused by laws that proclaim that only those with certain licenses or degrees may be healers. No, we need not be. For example, Jesus the ultimate healer was not a degree holder but healed all kinds of diseases and infirmity. Even some family members act as healer to the sick relation. Other laws proclaim that only certain “approved methods” can heal us. And again, Jesus applied different methods of healing approach during His healing ministry. I hope some of these laws, if they are misleading and confusing, will be repealed some day. They could obstruct the way of the process of healing. At the same time, it is necessary to ensure there are health professionals with adequate training, knowledge and competence, ethical probity, and open to welcoming and dialogue and operating with other persons who adopt other methods of healing, and thus avoiding the situation of spread of quack professionals parading themselves as healers and health care giver.

5) *Forgiveness*

This is an important principle. We all have to forgive others and to be forgiven. Learning not to judge persons is a great part of healing and forgiveness. No wonder Jesus would often use those words “go your sins are forgiven you, do not sin again.” By forgiving others, we obtain forgiveness for ourselves. Self-forgiveness, in turn, frees us to finally live without guilt and fear. “Forgive us as we forgive others” is thus a powerful healing principle.

6) *Easy Cases*

If healing occurs very easily, it is perhaps not healing but it is symptom-removal, which can look like healing. Only Jesus heals instantly. Like the woman with issue of blood. She spent twelve solid years on medical intervention without healing; it was only Jesus who healed her instantly. Healing is often a more involved process that requires certain changes in most aspects of life and must touch the deepest places inside one. Healing also involves a change in attitude in almost all cases. If this does not occur, it is not the deepest healing. At times, it is very difficult to distinguish between the two.

7) *Retracing*

Deep healing always involves the process called *retracing* or healing reactions. In the case of the blind man, Jesus asked him: can you see anything? He replied, I saw something that looked like trees. Jesus revisited the situation and at last the man got his sight. Essentially, one must revisit, reframe and rework or

reprocess old physical, emotional and spiritual imbalances so they are healed at the deepest levels.

TYPES OF HEALING

Healing also require another level of *commitment* on the part of the one who seeks it. There are many ways to create healing through the different types that exist around us all of the time. Let us consider the multidimensional aspect of healing.

1) *Spontaneous Healing*: Often this is an illusion as the individual has been consciously or unconsciously thinking about or taking action toward solving the problems for some period of time prior to the "healing." In most cases, while the healing may seems to occur "right now," the ground work, the work needed for it to occur, has been in process for weeks, months or even years.

2) *Medical Healing*: This implies that the individual has sought the help of a medical physician or is undergoing medical treatment programs. To do this they must consult, consent and allow medical treatment, including but not limited to the laying on of hands, receiving medical, anatomical, physiologic information, medications, surgery, physical therapy, or any other treatment or treatments considered to be "medical" in nature or usually associated with a medical treatment program.

3) *Group Healing*: In this type of healing, the individual joins a group, and a larger part of the work toward healing is based on the dynamics of the group. Simple groups like HIV/AIDS support, alcohol anonymous, cancer support, sickle cell anaemia, counselling and therapy groups.

4) *Dietary, Food Based Healing*: When healing is based principally around use of specific diet, foods, vitamin-mineral supplements or other nutrients which are used either in normal amounts or extreme dosages such as mega-vitamin therapy, all green, red, or white beach diet, elimination of certain foods or the manipulation of types and amount of food eaten such as in a low salt diet or diabetic diet.

5) *Healing At a Distance*: This comes about when healing is not through direct contact with the person who is being healed. The action is taken by others, an individual or a group, through prayer, or using "treatments" either known or unknown to the person being healed.

6) *Touch Healing*: When healing is directly associated with some form of touching, direct manipulation or handling of the "sick" person. This can be through random touch, directed or purposeful touch like massage.

7) *Faith Healing*: This kind of healing is referred to as claimed healing through supernatural or spiritual means. It can involve prayer, a visit to a religious house like Church or Chapel, or simply a strong belief in a supreme being (GOD). Ultimately healing occurs when you are ready for it to happen and when the time is right for it.

A LOOK AT JESUS AND HIS HEALING MINISTRY

The Gospels reveal to us that Jesus' ministry was a ministry of healing. Nearly one fifth of the gospels are devoted to acts of healing with over forty recorded instances of physical and mental healing.

Why is healing so important in Jesus' ministry? Healing is essential to the ministry of Jesus because it is His *call* and he has the *power* to perform miracles. They flow from within Him as heat from the sun, with compassion and love. He knows what He has, people sensed it, and to Him they came in droves and multitudes. Jesus welcomes the blind, crippled, leprous, even the dead people into His presence. Through his deeds, he could say, "I was eyes for the blind, and feet to the lame." (Job 29: 15).

Jesus performed all the healings. No problem loomed too great for His skill; none intimidated Him into silence because He came as God's healer. Jesus had compassion equal to His power. Matthew 8: 16- 17 says, "When evening came, they brought him many who were demon-possessed, and He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were ill." This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: He himself bore our sicknesses away and carried our diseases. And as Matthew 14:14 says, "When He went ashore he saw a large crowd; and had pity on them and healed their sick," and even fed them. That contrasted starkly with the disciples, who wanted the pesky crowds dispersed.

The people knowing they could receive help if only they could access and touch Him, responded to that compassion and love, in bold and unorthodox ways. The Canaanite woman struggled to meet Jesus, notwithstanding His disciples' desire to dismiss her, and His own initial, courteous refusal to. However, Jesus answered her, "woman, you have great faith. Let your desire be granted." And from that moment her daughter was well again. This was a combination of "faith" and "distance" healing.

The woman with a haemorrhage crept silently through the crowd to merely touch His clothes (Mark 5: 25-34) 'If I can just touch His clothes, I shall be saved.' After healing her, Jesus told her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well .Go in peace! Be cured from your illness. At least, Jesus credited the sufferer's "faith" as the means of being healed. And the crowds "begged Him to let the sick just touch the edge of His cloak," (Matthew 14: 36), for "all who touched him were healed."

Healing was essential to the ministry of Jesus, because He envisioned healing as a physical symbol of *forgiveness*. He guaranteed the ultimate glory of the human

body through His personal resurrection, but forecast that restoration by healing twisted, shrunken, blinded limbs and organs. The paralytic's restoration is only one of the many such examples (Mark 2:1-12). Verse 5 says, seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, my child, your sins are forgiven.

Jesus applied the *different types of healing*. According to Matthew 8:14 - 15. "When Jesus came into Peter's house, He saw Peter's mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to wait on him." It is amazing that Jesus' healing ministry was just giving a word, a command ("doctor's orders"). Jesus' other miracles have occurred through mere speaking of His word. The healing is immediate; the compassion is demonstrable.

Jesus heals through touch. He heals Peter's mother-in-law who was down with flu with just a "touch." Jesus' touching the leper is also significant, since such contact rendered Him ceremonially unclean (Lev. 13:42-46). The physical communication of charity meant suffering ceremonial uncleanness that could affect His involvement in corporate worship. It is clear that the act of touching is deliberate.

There are also instances of distance healing. In Mark 5:35-43, the daughter of Jairus was healed through the father's faith and request. On other occasions, Jesus heals individuals whose loved ones came to Him on their behalf. (Matthew 8:10- 13). Furthermore, Jesus' healing ministry is not for the sick alone; he demonstrates sensitivity for the concerns and needs of the family of the sick and dying.

Jesus endorses the use of medical assistance of the time (medicines of oil and wine) when He praises the Good Samaritan for acting as a physician; and he tells His disciples to go and do the same thing that the Samaritan did in the story.

Jesus heals because *He cares*. Jesus' wonderful, compassionate willingness to reach out and touch the physical needs of humans demonstrates that his healing mission is not and should not be understood just in future tense but also present tense. Salvation starts now, He heals in this life, in this moment, in anticipation of something much more complete as eternity rolls on. Jesus continues to heal through his disciples and His Church.

THE HEALING MINISTRY OF THE DISCIPLES

Healing did not end with Jesus. He entrusted the healing ministry to His *Church*. The first apostles healed the sick. So did a large group of disciples. He trained His disciples so they could continue His ministry after His ascension into heaven. First, Jesus taught them by the words He spoke. Then, He showed them how and when He healed the sick. Jesus showed them many ways to do this. He spent many months training the disciples before He released them to do the work of the

ministry. He told His followers to heal the sick, and stated that such signs as healing are evidence of faith. Jesus also told them to “cure sick people, raise up dead persons, make lepers clean, expel demons. You received free, give free” (Matthew 10: 8)

For the disciples, then, doing the healing ministry was an activation of what they learned from hearing Jesus teach and seeing Him minister to people. The disciples simply imitated Jesus. For example, when Peter raised Tabitha (Dorcas) from the dead (Acts 9:40), he made the mourners leave the room where the body was, just as Jesus had done when He raised the daughter of Jairus. In imitation of Jesus, Peter commanded Tabitha to get up. In Acts 3:2-6 Peter and John healed a certain man lame from birth through the name of Jesus, with a command “rise up and walk.” In 1 Timothy 5:23 Paul asks Timothy to take wine for medicinal purposes. Moreover, Luke reports that: Publius’ father was healed (Acts 28:8-9), the viper’s bite was harmless to Paul (Acts 28:3-6), Paul healed the lame man (Acts 3:1-10), and that many other sick persons were healed (Acts 5:12-16). God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, such that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them (Acts 19:11-12).

THE HEALING MISSION OF THE CHURCH: HEALTH CARE MINISTRY IN THE CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF LAGOS

The Mission

One of the major missions of the Church is the alleviation of human suffering, which she has faithfully carried out over the centuries. This is attested to by thousands of Catholic hospitals and religious congregation who dedicate their lives to helping the sick. The basis of the healing mission of the Church is the Christian understanding of health and healing, rooted in her integral vision of the human person. Health is not a static concept, but a “dynamic state” which is influence by various factors. Christian vision emphasizes that alongside social, medical and economic factors, one’s relationship to God and other persons is also a vital category. The experience of healing and the ministry of healing are as old as humanity itself.

As we saw, Jesus spoke with the sick, touched them, and was an instrument of healing for them. Jesus used signs in his ministry of healing, signs such as mud and washing, the laying on of hands, even spittle. Mark 7:33 records that Jesus used spittle and touched a deaf man’s ear. Christ desires to be present to the sick, the suffering, and the dying through His Church. The Church has been given the charge to continue Jesus’ ministry of compassion and love for the sick and dying. “Heal the sick!” (Matthew 10:8). Through his Church, the Family of God, Jesus continues to

minister to the sick, visiting them, touching them, and using signs, both sacraments and sacramental, and modern medical and scientific means.

The Apostles handed over the continuation of Jesus' work of healing and caring for the sick and dying to us, the present day Church. Healing is as much a mystery as it is a science. And the Church believes so much in faith healing as much as medical care. The Catholic Church is the largest non- government provider of health care in Nigeria and in the world. Catholic religious women and men in particular have been responsible for founding and running networks of hospitals in Country.

Ministry of healing

In the history of the Church, religious orders and congregations have often devoted themselves to the healing ministry of Jesus. When the Church saw their people's need for proper compassionate health care, the religious sisters, brothers and priests responded to the challenge to care for God's children, regardless of their social status (e.g., poor or rich), isolation, or distance, religious tradition. The hospitals and continuing care facilities run by consecrated persons and dioceses became places of hope for the sick, the elderly, and their families.

The Catholic nuns in particular were invited by parishes and Dioceses as well as Christian families, and provided nursing care as well as some medical, pharmaceutical, and surgical services. Nursing was a religious role for the nurse, and there was little call for science. Women religious institutes played and continue to play a particularly prominent role in the development of the Catholic Church's health care networks.

In today's scientific 21st century, the promotion of church's ministry of healing within the parish, diocese setting and public funded institutions, such as hospitals, clinics, primary health care centre, long-term care facilities or Home for the elderly, orphanage or Motherless babies' Home remain one of the most challenging opportunity of living out the Churches' vision of building communities of hope and compassion. Christian emphasis on practical charity gave rise to the development of systematic nursing and hospitals after the end of the persecution of the early Church. The Church developed a healing mission that is willing to nurse the sick and take food to them. "The care of the sick is to be placed above and before every other duty, as Jesus whom the Church holds as its founder, placed a particular emphasis on care of the sick."³³⁸

While many religious communities continue their commitment to the health care ministry, lay Catholics increasingly have stepped forward to collaborate in the ministry. Inspired by the example of Christ and mandated by the Second Vatican Council, lay faithful are invited to a broader and more intense field of ministries than in the past. By the virtue of baptism, lay faithful are called to participate

³³⁸ Catholic Archdiocese of Lagos document on health care services, pg. 20 of 2001

actively in the Church's life and mission; this endeavour certainly includes the mission of healing, the health care ministry. The participation and leadership of the lay faithful in the health care ministry, through new forms of sponsorship and governance of institutional Catholic health care, are essential for the Church to continue her ministry of healing and compassion. This is evidenced by the many men and women who are Catholics and non Catholics alike that coordinate the different Diocesan health institutions.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) had published the "Nigeria Catholic Health Policy" (2010), which provides guidelines for Catholic Health facilities in the country. The Catholic Archdiocese of Lagos, where I am serving as the Health Coordinator, has her history of health care services in Nigeria. Thus, in her mission, the Catholic Church has been at the forefront in the provision of health care services in the Country. The first Catholic hospital in Nigeria, the Sacred Heart Hospital, Lantoro, Abeokuta - formally under Lagos archdiocese, now Abeokuta Diocese - was built in 1895.

Ever since then, the Catholic Archdiocese of Lagos has continued to establish several health care facilities. Between 1970- 2014 the Archdiocese of Lagos has established forty-two (42) health care institutions that can be categorized into hospitals, clinics, primary health centre, and also mobile clinics. Among these facilities, five (5) belong to religious congregations.

These institutions basically provide health care services to Catholics and non Catholics alike ranging from preventive to curative treatments. The services are provided in the spirit of collaboration with other stakeholders for the common good. There has been on-going collaboration with the State Agencies (Lagos State Ministry of Health) and International non-governmental organizations such as United State Agency for International Development (USAID), with the Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Society for Family Health (SFH) and others as well as Teaching Hospitals who send their students on community experience.

Over all, the Archdiocese of Lagos health care facilities has been rated among the best in the provision of health care services in Lagos State and in the country at large. The Mission and Vision statement of these health care facilities -- which read, "To reveal the healing love of Jesus to all in need especially the sick," and "To be a leader in the transformation of health care in our communities through faith-inspired commitment to excellence," respectively -- stand out to fulfil the mandate of the Church seeking to ensure that the services offered in the past will be continued now and into the future. Hence, the Archdiocese of Lagos health institutions is evenly distributed across the parishes, reaching the unreached at the grass root, Catholics and non Catholics alike. The Parish/diocesan health care centres have trained professionals, which comprises of the Doctors, Nurses, Laboratory Scientist and Technicians, Pharmacist, etc... They work as a team to provide quality health care services to the sick. Proper care demands proper training, accreditation, ability and compassion, and promotion of technical competence and moral probity. "She

requires that those who wish to minister in acts of healing in the Archdiocese of Lagos, to be both trained and licensed within their specialized ministries.”³³⁹

The Church, while being a major provider of health care to HIV AIDS sufferers, and of orphanages for unwanted children, has been criticized for opposing the indiscriminate provision and use of condoms and the use of contraception. Most of the criticisms, however, are unfounded, and based on ignorance and prejudices. Moral issues relating to IVF, surrogacy and stem-cell research are among other areas of potential controversy for the Church in the provision of health care.

The pastoral need of the sick is of paramount importance to Catholic health care services in Lagos archdiocese. This has resulted in greater appreciation of a team approach to health care which often includes the pastoral care of the patient. This has given rise to a Pastoral Care Department in many hospitals and health facilities where a chaplain with Clinical Pastoral Education or the Parish Priest (where applicable) is to take care of the spiritual and pastoral needs of the patients and their families as well as staff of each health care institution. In Lagos archdiocese, we advocate for the celebration of the Holy Mass at least once a month in the health facility and anointing of the sick with oil as the need arises. This has been found very helpful.

The Care of the family is another area of attention for the health care workers. The family certainly needs and desires care. It is interesting that while patient is on admission, he or she is helpless with little questioning or discussion but the family does a whole lot of questioning and discussion, very anxious about the welfare of their loved ones.

Challenges and hopes

Catholic health care in the name of Jesus is flourishing. However, the situation is changing. Perhaps, isn't there the *diminishing of the presence* of religious sisters in the healing ministry? As earlier discussed, women religious administered services; provided nursing care, assisted in spiritual care along with the local priests, and looked after the feeding, cleaning, and maintenance within these institutions. Gospel stewardship of health care resources and not-for-profit motivation keeps us responsible to patients, to society, and to God. There is a felt and growing need to encourage a renewed increase of active presence of consecrated women in the health care apostolate.

Our goal must always be to *reach out to serve* those who are suffering, not to sell a product. I remember number of times I had to provide food to patients before administering medication. There were no issues of *fraud or mistrust* from any angle, there was good working relationship as one family, but the story is totally different now. Less obvious but equally true, however, is the *increasing number of priests* who are now administrators of health institutions. The religious sisters have suddenly become fraudulent; it is all about “*money*.” The whole idea of “a call to *serve and give*

³³⁹ Catholic Archdiocese of Lagos Health Policy, 2014

love to the sick and their families,” is gradually dying. The patients are suffering in most health facilities, the ethical value of “save life first” which is the oath sworn by health professional is now a thing of the past. Often times when a sick person is brought to the health facility, instead of attending to the sick first, all you hear is “go and pay first,” that is, the instruction from the administrator. Health care today is a very much a field of professionals, “you cannot give what you don’t have.” Let the right person be in the right place, so that the necessary skills and applications can be duly utilized and followed, (“Square peg in a square hole”).

During the time of the early Catholic missionaries, health care services were delivered to sick people free of charge. This was so because; those medicine and equipments were already paid for by some international individuals, donor and non-governmental organizations. Even the staff salaries were paid as well. This very fact was hidden from our people. In truth, nothing was free! Somebody, from somewhere, was somehow paying for it. Now comes our own missionary time, when practically everything that is used in the health care facilities are purchased, the staff salaries have to be paid, the bills and other expenses must be paid, from the income that the facility is able to generate and often times, augment from the parish collection. The maintenance and sustenance of the health facility is another huge angle of the story; all these funds have to come from within. As a result of this, the Catholic health institutions are experiencing *staff attrition rate* due to our low salary structure.

Unfortunately, most beneficiaries of our health care services, especially the Catholic faithful are still living with this mindset, namely, that these services should be provided free of charge simply because the facility belongs to the church. We should not blame them! Still, even in relation to the church’s health facilities, “we cannot forget that a Church is able to reach material and financial independence only if the people entrusted to it do not live in conditions of extreme poverty” (John Paul II, *Church in Africa*, n.104). As I always tell my colleagues, our duty is to educate them. They need to know that we are missionaries of our time, no one subsidizes for the services we render. And as such, we look for other ways of sustainability and affordability. Apparently, for this reason, the Lagos Archdiocese health services department responded to the yearning from Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN) and strives to alleviate the sufferings of health care consumers, by establishing the *Pool Medicine Procurement Scheme* (PMPS). The whole idea of the PMP is to identify the most effective drugs and negotiate lower prices that are affordable by our health care consumers. Jesus met the need of all the sick. We also should work towards achieving that goal, a mandate. Therefore, I encourage all, especially the Catholics, to support and grow in awareness and understanding of the Church’s mission of healing and effectively contribute to its realization.

The Catholic Church’s health care institutions need the government and public *support*. The health facilities are living witness to the Church’s *healing presence*. Unquestionably, we must be *thankful* to all those persons and organizations, especially the religious sisters, the medical professionals, and the many unsung workers and volunteers, who have given and continue to give so generously of

themselves, time, talents and know-how in the care of the sick, dying and their families.

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2. EXPERIENCES - WITNESS - INTERVIEWS

CONSECRATED LIFE IN NIGERIA TODAY:

CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

An Interview with Most Rev. Dr. Donatus Ogun, OSA,

Bishop of the Catholic Diocese Of Uromi, Nigeria.³⁴⁰

On the occasion of the celebration of the year of Consecrated life, the Catholic Voyage's Editor-in-Chief, Fr. Oseni J. Ogunu, OMV, had interview with the new Liaison Bishop of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) to the Consecrated Life, Most Rev. Dr. Donatus Ogun, O.S.A, Bishop of Uromi. As a scholar he has written extensively on the theme of Consecrated Life. He has been a frequent contributor to the Catholic Voyage, whose Editorial Board is honoured to have him as a member. In this Interview, Bishop Ogun frankly addresses a wide range of issues such as the mutual relations between Diocesan Bishops, the clergy and Consecrated persons; the role of Consecrated persons in society and the Church; the year of Consecrated Life; role of the Liaison Bishop; the establishment of new Congregation; the year of Mercy.

Editor: We appreciate your granting to the Catholic Voyage this interview, at a time when you begin your service as the Liaison Bishop of the CBCN on Consecrated Life in Nigeria and barely settling down as the new Bishop of the Diocese of Uromi. Could you please briefly tell our readers about yourself.

Bishop Ogun:

My names are Donatus Aihmiosion Ogun. I am the Catholic bishop of Uromi Diocese. I was appointed Bishop on 6 November 2014 by His Holiness, Pope Francis, and consecrated on 31 January 2015. Before the appointment as Bishop I was the pioneer director (President) of the nascent Augustinian Institute in Makurdi.

Liaison Bishop of the CBCN to the Consecrated Life

Editor: What are the roles of a Liaison Bishop for Institutes of Consecrated Life?

³⁴⁰ The preparation for this interview involved several aspects. It was facilitated by precious assistance received by the Editor from a group of talented Oblate of the Virgin Mary Seminarians at the *Lanteri Oblate Seminary*, Ibadan (Nigeria). I, therefore, sincerely thank them for their input to the questions and issues presented to the Bishop at the interview.

Bishop Ogun: During the first Plenary of the CBCN in February 2015, I was elected the Liaison Bishop for the Consecrated Life in the Catholic Bishop Conference of Nigeria. The role of the Liaison Bishop for Institutes for Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life include among others, being a go-between to the two Conferences, that is, representing the Catholic Bishops' Conference before the Conference of Major Superiors (Male and Female) as well as representing the interest of the Conference of Major Superiors before the Bishops. It involves helping to stabilize and of course strengthening the relationship and the collaborative bonds between the two Conferences. Helping, as much as it is possible, to foster collaborative relations and create avenues for reducing frictions to the minimum in collaboration if and where they may exist.

The Year Of Consecrated Life

Editor: What is the year of the Consecrated Life all about?

Bishop Ogun: The year of consecrated life as declared by the Holy Father, Pope Francis, is as beautiful as it is timely. It has come at just the right moment in history, related to the Year of Priests celebrated some years ago. I am sure it is a life-long dream of His Holiness if we are to recall when the thought first came up in September 2013. As a seasoned Pastor, this must have been very dear to his heart especially from his experiences of working in Argentina. Obviously, the understanding of the consecrated life *vis-a-vis* the experience of the challenges in collaboration between institutes of consecrated life and the local churches, (Institutes *contra* Dioceses and by extension, religious houses/communities *contra* parishes). Listening to him in September 2013 when he first talked about establishing a year for Consecrated Life, it is obvious from his feeling as a Pastor that there was need to reiterate the age old understanding of consecrated life through a process of awakening in order to refresh in all the understanding of their respective locus within the Church, the Body of Christ. The Pope said, and I try to quote "it has become necessary that we should have the year for consecrated life, especially, following from the poor understanding of this all important state of life by different categories of persons in the Church as a result of which consecrated persons are often reduced to just being extra hands on the plough rather than a charismatic form of life to foster, from within, the holiness of the people of God". In the same vein, we can say that the Holy Father had in mind the fact that many consecrated persons either do not fully comprehend or are fast losing the true meaning of their state of life. The situation of the lay faithful is not different either and since vocations are born from the family, it is only necessary that there be a good understanding of this state of life by all.

In declaring the year open, the Holy Father says very clearly that *consecrated persons should wake up the world*. That is the summary of his statement: *WAKE UP THE WORLD*.

And this among other explanations is a direct call to consecrated persons to return to what we may call *the original inspiration of the consecrated life*.

Jesus Christ as Model for Consecrated Persons

Editor: What meaning does the Consecrated Life hold, and why is it apt, for the Church?....

Bishop Ogun: One of the primary missions of the Church is to help the world to understand why Jesus became man. And it becomes an even stronger reason for the existence of consecrated persons to help human beings understand the purpose for human existence, because the main vocation of the consecrated life is to reflect Christ. Well enshrined or grafted into human history, the consecrated life actually represents for the world the physical presence of the God made Man, the second Person of the Blessed Trinity.

The intention of the Pope is to draw the world back to its source, back to God. In declaring this year of consecrated life, the Church makes an introspection about her own *raison d'être*. The vocation of the Church is to continue the work of Jesus Christ of restoring creation back to God and this happens through the concrete actions of holiness and holy living, helping the human person to key the self back to the original plan of God, making man all over again a true and committed disciple of Christ, and helping creation to attain God's original intention.

Consecrated Life and the Civil Society

Editor:And for the world at this time?

Bishop Ogun: When we look at the way the world is going, that is, past and present civilizations and even the so-called post-modern era, we realize that there are so many twisted interpretations of how things should be. It is not completely out of place now to speak of a twisted interpretation of morality, twisted interpretations of economic life and twisted interpretations of even the spiritual life. We are bombarded in the world by different forms of civilizations, morality, economic progress, and even of bio-ethics. When we talk of morality today, you have crisis in family life, some of which have attempted to redefine the perennial and immutable understanding of marriage. We have forms of economic progress where the rich nations of the world enslave the poorer nations with bad economic policies, policies that will not sincerely lead to the growth of some of these underdeveloped and developing nations but which will make them perpetual slaves. So, it is possible to speak of Neo-Colonialism which cuts across many levels including the new age spirituality. In our case back here in Nigeria, one is bombarded with prayers of revenge and curses, of fire consuming the neighbour, and the prayers of destruction among many others.

The call to the consecrated life to wake up the world could not have come at a better time, and in doing this, consecrated persons as agents of conversion and perpetual disciples and Apostles of Christ, are called to learn from the Master and take the

liberating and imbibed message to the world. As perpetual Disciples and Apostles of Christ learning at the Master's feet, they meet the world with their understanding of the Person of Jesus Christ making Him visible again to the world, help the world to understand the divine law and objective morality as intended by God. They are to help the world understand the meaning of true spirituality as seeking the heart of God and allowing the Spirit of God to direct the spirit of man so that there can be harmony between the intention of God and the intention of man when he prays. These, among others, are some of the reasons why the declaration of this year becomes both timely and indispensable.

Permit me to be a little more parochial; there is also a further challenge for the African during the celebration of this year. I strongly feel that this year is an opportunity for consecrated persons to educate the local people in Africa about the meaning of the consecrated life. What does this state of life mean for us? Now our people are very conscious of activity- what are you doing? And this is often translated into wanting to become an achiever, material achievers. In the local environment, the Catholic priest is considered in some places as the bread winner of the family and he is male, which means even the male religious finds himself falling into this crisis of wanting to become the bread winner in his family. Female religious are not left out altogether. Since the society says you must be seen doing something and achieving something, there is an apparent celebration of rather than upbraiding those who fail in their obligation through establish structures in their families. These have turned out to become the champions and heroes of their community rather than people who ought to be called to order. In this regard, it is very appropriate and most proper to give thanks to God that at this point in the history of these troubled times of humanity, the Church is inviting all, but more particularly, consecrated persons to tell the world who they are and what they represent and by so doing call the world back to God.

We have a world that is asleep, asleep in the wrong direction, in chasing shadows and materialism. Consecrated persons have said they are not materialistic; now, they must help the world to see the true value of things. The world that now prices sex above every other thing, the world that prices money as the ultimate drive, the world that prices power and acquisition as the singular human pursuit; this world is in need of renewal. Christ came to return the world to the Father, to restore all things to their original condition. He is with the Church always (Mt. 28:20) and in a special way through the consecrated persons. Consecrated persons who imitate Christ specifically should as much as possible renew the Church, renew the world by making evident again who they are and who they claim to be.

Consecrated Persons and the Local Church

Editor: As a scholar specialized in Consecrated Life and having served the church in various capacities, and also at the diocesan level, what is your assessment and take concerning the relationship between Diocesan clergy and Consecrated persons in Nigeria today, and on their collaboration in ministry?

Bishop Ogun: When I look at the collaborative relationships through the years, that is, the Nigeria experience, the relationship between the consecrated persons and the diocesan clergy has made some progress but still with much room for improvement. There seems to be some amount of mutual distrust born out of faulty understanding of the Consecrated Life. We have repeatedly written in the past that Consecrated Life as a state of life in the Church should be on the curriculum of the Major Seminaries. Granted that many a diocesan priest serve as spiritual directors, and in most cases, pastors in places or parishes where you have consecrated persons, for them to be able to preach and challenge consecrated persons to look critically at who they are beyond the daily regular sermons for all the faithful, there is need for a deeper knowledge and understanding of this state of life or else they will just be treated like every other pious association in the Church. Cases abound even among learned Catholics asking about the value of the Consecrated Life. There are many knowledgeable clerics who understand very profoundly this state of life. In like manner though, there are priests who simply refer to consecrated persons as another pious association of women who belong to a special class. It is possible to just fantasize or romanticize about this life without a deep or conscious and committed understanding that this life is a state of life founded on the very life of Jesus Christ, his teachings and examples as well enunciated in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*. There is no doubt that the formation the members of the different states of life in the Church undergo is different. Consecrated persons are not all together innocent in this discussion because they see themselves sometimes as a special class, and even if they are, being special does not create room for pride but is a call to humility like the humble Christ they reflect. There is distrust arising from economic reasons: they have come to cart our money away! By way of summary, it should be clearly stated that the foundation of true collaboration depends on the particular charism of the institute. The hierarchy has a role to play here in going back to the intention of the Church.

Editor: Why the Apparent Confusion?

Bishop Ogun: There is ample room for improvement in the area of collaboration. In some cases the difficulty comes from the religious themselves who want to make the others feel that they are better trained and better qualified and that they can do it better which again goes back to the point of humility. The absence of humility could be another ground for distrust. A lot of confidence in the tutor by the learner is required to be able to help all to understand the meaning of this particular state of life, and if it is explained humbly and with respect, then there will be more acceptance. But if it is explained haughtily or with disregard, the learner will stiffly resist and even not be interested in acquiring the knowledge. So I think what we have is a far cry from where we should be. Part of the proper relationship, going back again to the place of the Bishop, is to understand the environment.

Pastors who work in Parishes should take pain to understand the pastoral challenges of the parish environment and every Congregation or religious institute that is invited to a place should equally be a response to the pastoral challenge of that environment. Bringing their charism and spirituality to respond to the particular situation of the environment, which means, the Bishop should understand the charism and possibly spend time to look at the Constitutions of the Congregation that he is bringing into the diocese. If he cannot do that personally, he could give the Constitutions to some experts in the diocese to study and see if the Congregation is his true response to the pastoral climate of a particular place, rather than just bring in any group and saying we want Religious by all means. Understanding the Constitutions which will contain the Charism, Spirituality, the Government and Discipline of life among others, is also a way of enriching the entire diocese because the Bishop is inviting a specific way of life into an environment. In other words, this way of life is coming to help build up the spirituality of the ecclesial community, and if something is coming to help build up, then the chief builder or the master planner must understand what he is adding to the structure. Since the Bishop as Shepherd is the overall architect or supervisor of the Pastoral ministry of his Diocese, he has the obligation to understand what is coming into the diocese as every charism he welcomes participates in the overall pastoral plan of the diocese. So, this for me is the first step into any relationship, and strictly speaking, when an Institute of Consecrated Life desires to modify its Constitutions, it is only proper that Bishops in the places where the Institute is present should be aware as there could be changes to some elements previously understood in the Contract. In other words, the group the bishop invited came into the diocese based on their mutual understanding of what the group is all about and so if they are going to change anything by way of abrogating, subrogating or changing any form of their Constitutions they should know if what they intend to modify may affect their Diocese. So, for an improved spirit of collaboration, there should be mutual understanding between the two - those in charge of the apostolate which is the Bishop as Pastor, and those coming to execute an apostolate which is the Religious Institute.

Most times, part of the problem in collaborative ministry as I have said is about money. In many instances apostolates have been reduced to dividends and profits, both by Consecrated persons, Congregations and the Dioceses. Money is needed to run projects, true, but money ought not to be the primary purpose. We have to go back to the original inspiration, Anthony of Egypt, Pachomius, the great hermits and the early fathers of the monastic life. They embraced the Monastic life to shun wealth, to shun the world (*fuga mundi*) so as to help the world better appreciate the goods of the world which in their time was enslaving humanity. Now, what we are going through may only be strange to us because we are new, but if we look at history, the reason for the Consecrated Life has always been a challenge to the world in the words of Pope Francis to *Wake Up the World* and respond to the needs for God in the world.

The Diocesan Bishop and Consecrated Persons in the Diocese

Editor: If the collaboration between Consecrated Persons and the diocesan clergy has not yet reached a satisfactory level in Nigeria, could you further elaborate on what, in your view, should be the proper mutual relationship between consecrated persons and the Bishops of the dioceses?. And, in general, how can the desired mutual relationship be attained and sustained?

Bishop Ogun: The Bishop has the obligation to care for the consecrated persons in the diocese because they are living out a particular charism. However, when there is a profitable project owned by the Congregation, Can. 1263 par. 2, may be applied, where it requires that the institute that has a particular apostolate, if it is doing well, is obliged to support that kind of apostolate in other parts of the diocese not as a tax, but from the spirit of the gospel to support the same works of the gospel. For example, in education or health, if a Religious Congregation has a first class hospital in a part of the diocese, from the net profit, there is nothing wrong in saying we give this much every year, to support the health sector or apostolate in other parts of the diocese to show that we are also giving witness and we are not just here to collect money. So, the greatest crisis of collaboration today in Nigeria tends towards money and mega structures which rather, should be at the service of the gospel.

Building the Bridge in the Understanding of Consecrated Persons in the Church

Editor: Diocesan clergy and the laity seem to have a poor knowledge of the consecrated life. How do you hope to use your office to spread awareness and advance their mutual knowledge?

Bishop Ogun: Now, when we look at the relationship between the diocesan clergy together with the laity, and the understanding of consecrated life, my position as the liaison bishop remains making every effort to foster more enlightenment as regards the place of consecrated life in the Church. This sort of education can only occur when I am called upon since knowledge cannot be imposed; it has to be requested. Experts abound across Nigeria with the knowledge to pass on but if the cup is already full, you have to empty it to create room or even put it on the fire if it is iron, let it heat up then the level goes down before you can add more things to what is already on the fire. Sometimes, our people think they already know and this prejudices acquiring more or true knowledge.

Prospective Challenges as Liaison Bishop

Editor: Religious men and women often run the risk of losing their own identity in being too absorbed in the work in the diocesan context, e.g., parish ministry. How can our identity and charism as consecrated persons be preserved and advanced amidst these concerns?

Bishop Ogun: A further challenge that I see from my position in helping to spread the knowledge or awareness of the consecrated life between the diocesan clergy and the laity is for the religious themselves to be convinced of who they are and spread the message about who they are. They need to also have an understanding beyond the apostolate and the Superiors are not totally innocent in this regard: the quest for returns more than the presence which *Vita Consecrata* talks about. More energy is given to *doing* rather than *being*. We do admit though that, *being*, if not well articulated and lived out can be boring for the idle. In order to be, we must learn to be in communion with God to enjoy the state of *being*. If God is not in it, then there is more excitement from action and execution of activities that people see than in *being*. The religious habit is already an invitation to a recognition of existence and religious must live out this habit as a way of life to help even the lay faithful who look up to them for a deeper understanding. There is a high level of admiration from the lay faithful even when they have only a vague understanding of the vocation to the consecrated life. *Lumen Gentium* (nn. 46) explains very clearly that consecrated persons who embrace this life, are not a waste to the society. Consecrated persons also have to help the world to see their fruitfulness by giving life to others. The fruitfulness of the consecrated life is enshrined in its witnessing as life is born and nurtured in persons who see Christ replicated in real life. The life that consecrated persons give is the regeneration of others through a way of existing. Consecrated persons give spiritual regeneration to our people more than physical rebirth.

In further discussing this crisis of poor awareness and understanding of this state of life among the clergy and the laity, we also look at the situation of men and women religious and their absorption in work and a possible consequence of loss of identity. These are all connected.

Parish Ministry and Clerical Religious

Editor: In what practical ways can consecrated person make their presence felt in the quest for making our nation a better place, taking into context the myriads of challenges (in the social, economic, political and religious realms) that we face daily?

Bishop Ogun: The history of the Church informs us that clerical religious institutes were literally implored to go into parish ministry because of the shortage of the diocesan clergy. Indeed, some of the mendicant and canonical clerical Institutes sprang up for this during the 13th and 14th centuries. Now that we have the blessing of God with diocesan vocation, it is time to begin to return to the original intention for our existence - living together and praying as the life-blood of the Church and beginning some form of deliberate withdrawal from parish-based apostolates to the apostolates of prayer and academics. Consecrated persons are not called to be rich but to come and imitate the poor Son of God. Even the evangelical counsels do not give room for wealth; they actually create room for total poverty and dependence on

God. Poverty in all spheres, from the use of the will to decide (autonomy), material poverty (owning nothing) and of course, poverty even through *not having children*. There is a deep connection between all the counsels and total self-emptying. The more we begin to look at the energy placed on parish apostolates as an escape from the original intention of the consecrated life, the more productive I think consecrated persons would become and sought after. This is an opportunity to quickly introduce the concept of *charism*. The Pope in this same document, *Waking up the World*, gives the definition for consecrated life as making an aspect of the life of Christ visible or as one's mode of *being*. This is a very deep expression: to make an aspect of the life of Christ visible as a way of life. It means a deep look at the person of Christ and make an aspect of this personality come alive again to challenge the Church to wake up the world.

Proliferation of New Institutes

Editor: The establishments of new religious congregations get momentum by the day. What does this hold for proliferation of religious institutes, or should we say of "charisms"?

Bishop Ogun: Charism, from its Greek, 'Charis', means gift. It is a free gift or a gift of grace given by God through the Holy Spirit as a reflection of an aspect of the life of Christ. This understanding, once it is clear, will help all to understand the meaning of the consecrated life. Every Constitutions is built around a particular gift received which is concretized or expressed for all to see. It is a cause for concern that apostolates are nowadays becoming quasi-charism. Anybody familiar with the history of the Church and the history of consecrated life will see that in the 18th and the 19th centuries, many religious congregations were born, and to a great extent, for reasons of performing an apostolic task. We will not go into the history of the use of the term 'Congregation' as distinct from 'Institute', but many congregations were born essentially to take care of pastoral needs. Now, there should be a difference between the pastoral needs and the way of the spirit. What history has further demonstrated to us is that needs come to an end. By the time the Church starts to respond to a particular need, the State (that is, civil society) sees the importance of that need, and soon, politicians come into it, put in more money and the church is placed in a competitive stance. This clearly explains to us that one does not need to profess the evangelical counsels as such to become an active professional in the world. Notwithstanding this apparent competition from the civil societies, the Church should not be discouraged in carrying apostolic ministries since the spirit behind the initiative is evangelical. At least, doing it well is a part of the process of waking up the world to its negligence. However, in making an aspect of the life of Christ a way of life, the apostolic work becomes richer when we profess to live as Christ lived - poor, chaste and obedient to the Father. Christ came to show us the way back to the Father. The total gift of self without holding back of the will in an undivided heart, loving God as the highest value, obeying Him is the supreme law. The young man asked Jesus, "What is the greatest commandment of the law?" And

the Lord said to him, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your might'. (Cfr. Mt. 22:36-40). Now, if you love with all your heart, your emotions are stolen; with all your soul, your spirit is captured; with all your energy, then your will and the desire to use your energy in the wrong direction is already imprisoned by Divine Love. Thus, one now becomes a free slave of God. *Free slave* because you do not have any of these again as yours. But free because you live in God and anything placed in the hands of God leads to total freedom and liberation.

This is for me, a deep understanding of *Charism* which must be at the heart of every definition of the consecrated life; this has to be the road back home. Consecrated persons must return to what inspired our founders. What inspired St. Benedict, Francis, Dominic, Augustine, Bernard, Angela Merici, Vincent De Paul, Anthony Mary Claret, Don Bosco? All of these, had some original inspiration which the members set out to live so as to bring Christ to humanity, to reform humanity in order that humanity can reform the world. That is the return that we need to embrace. It is the distinctive element of the consecrated life and its common denominator rather than *work* which is fast becoming *uniform*. What makes all the difference is that there is an aspect peculiar to each, which while not denying the entire Christ, the consecrated person finds the self keying into with the least resistance and this is the aspect that makes the difference, one Congregation from another. If there is a deep understanding of this, that the vocation of the consecrated life is to restore humanity, then consecrated persons are already on the road to liberating society.

Recently, we talked about witnessing in a violent world and I asked, "What is violence?" The distortion of the good. And so, everything that is done to destroy the good is violence and consecrated persons are those who have discovered the meaning of the good and they want to enthrone the good. Their response to the challenges of society is to make the world see again the value of goodness.

Editor: *What makes a Congregation new?*

Bishop Ogun: Establishing of new Religious Congregations in Nigeria and indeed Africa seems to be pastorally fashionable today, probably because we are still a pastorally challenged environment notwithstanding the crowds we have as converts or as Catholics; *challenge* in the sense of people jumping from one world to another either seeking recognition or discovering a new identity of being called Christians rather than making a choice. Christianity is a deliberate choice to want to live like Christ, and to want to live like Christ requires an understanding of who Christ is, a developed personal Christology. This is where the Catechism remains indispensable. On a closer analysis of the matter, we may ask ourselves, why people want to start new religious congregations. The first response is, there is need for new congregations. But they must be truly new as the appellation *new* implies. And if we connect founding to charism, then we may begin to ask, what is really new about

this proposal? If we say there should be no new ones, it means the Holy Spirit is no longer alive in the Church. But if the Spirit is alive, then we need to rediscover what the Spirit is saying to us as a Church because from what the Spirit is saying, we can respond to the challenges of the world of today. But if consecrated life is reduced to work, then what we call *new* will not be new after all, but a replication of Catholic schools, Catholic hospitals, hospices, and of different jobs rather than a totally new experience of the expression of the person of Jesus Christ or an aspect of the life of Jesus Christ. I may not have been quoting documents, but these are in numerous documents of the Church, especially *Ad Gentes*, among others, which through the years, have become part of us. So, establishing new congregations is not odious but they must be new in truth even by their identity.

Consecrated Persons and the Year of Mercy

Editor: Providentially, the year of the consecrated life will be followed by the Jubilee Year of mercy; does this have any message for Consecrated Persons? How do consecrated persons proclaim the Truth and Mercy to those who are burden and broken-hearted in Nigerian society today in order to help sustain their hope?

Bishop Ogun: Consecrated persons are agents of mercy. Christ came that we may have life and have it to the full. His vocation which he clearly expressed in the Gospel according to Luke Chapter 4 when he entered the temple remains the comprehensive vocation of all Christians but more immediately of consecrated persons. The consecrated life makes present the life of Christ, teachings and example which are summarized in the *Beatitudes* (Matt. 5). Now that we celebrate the Year of Mercy alongside the year of consecrated life which terminates on 2/2/2016, the words of the Lord reverberates again, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy". To be another Christ is to continue to relive the sentiments of Christ and be seen as witnesses to the mercy of God just as their physical appearance already resonates the person of Christ to the world. There is an elaborate program issued by the Holy Father in *Vultus Misericordiae* as well as the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, for the celebration of the year of mercy which all must key into first at diocesan, then at congregational level or vice versa and finally in the local community and parish. Consecrated persons, whose vocation is a regular *conversio morum*, must be seen to be persons of mercy, showing mutual forgiveness and as agents of the mercy of God. Every spirituality and charism fall within the mystery of salvation and those who make the following of Christ their sole business must be seen to reflect the mercy of God proclaimed and lived by Jesus Christ. Thus, this year is a further call to renew and wake up the world that is fast losing consciousness of sin to return to the path of God who waits to *welcome the stray*.

Consecrated life (persons) has a special role to play in this year of mercy in several ways. In the first place, the formation process of the consecrated life is the shaping of a person into the person of Christ through the imitation of the founder(s) and the

spiritual patrimony accorded to posterity and approved by the church. This process could be seen as the moulding of the person through the model presented by the founder into more improved reflection of Christ the Lord. The person who satisfies the process of formation is now considered as supremely redeemed to live as a full human person after the likeness of Christ. This person who has gone through the process of self-mastery is now qualified to help others improve on themselves in their respective state of life. This is the ultimate gift the consecrated life owes the human society (world and Church) in this extraordinary jubilee Year of Mercy. They must present the truth of God as not inimical to any person with pure Christian love. Just as the bee or butterfly perch on flowers and suck the nectar without injuring the plant, so should the agents of mercy patiently lead all to the intention of God and gently help all with respect.

Celebrating the Year of Consecrated Life in Nigeria

Editor: Any comment on the current celebration of the Year of Consecrated Life in the context of Nigeria?

Bishop Ogun: The response to the National celebration of the Year of consecrated life which took place in Ibadan (31/7 - 2/8/2015) remains for me a most discouraging event, especially in the area of attendance. The turn-out was rather disappointing, first on the part of consecrated persons where Congregations apparently sent mostly the young religious, and then on the part of the ecclesiastical hierarchy all of whom were absent, with exception of the local ordinary - Archbishop Abegunrin, Archbishop Job and myself. The discussion of low turn-out would require an altogether separate parlance or write-up but suffice it to say that the Nigerian Church did not celebrate the year of consecrated life as this state of life deserves. There was an exaggeration of personal comfort and refusal to make sacrifice which is at the foundation of this state of life (Phil. 2:1-11). What this attitude portends for the future of the consecrated life in Nigeria deserves a more profound study.

There is a parochial and almost sectional celebration of the year of consecrated life among Religious Institutes across the country. As liaison bishop for the consecrated life, I feel that a part of the process of waking up the world should go beyond celebrating vespers in religious houses by consecrated persons present in a Diocese. It should be at the parish level after the Diocesan level. On a rotational basis, there should be celebration of vespers and benediction in parishes by consecrated persons together with the lay faithful and possibly at Deanery levels where the Diocese is too large, rather than gathering for meals and funfare in religious houses. It is part of waking up the parishes. Furthermore, the joy of seeing different habits and institutes would become both a call to prayer as well as vocation drive. In a situation wherein attendance at meetings is left to the younger ones there is every reason to question the excitement, enthusiasm and joy of the older religious still in the life.

There is an urgent need during this year to prayerfully revisit the myriad of conciliar and post-conciliar documents on the consecrated life especially at joint celebrations

between the clerics and consecrated persons. It is easy to claim to know what these documents contain but this year is a unique opportunity for open discussion regarding collaboration. There cannot be effective collaboration if there remains a nebulous understanding of one of the parties in the relationship.

A Looking at the Future

Editor: What are the prospect for Consecrated Life in Nigeria?.

Bishop Ogun: The future of consecrated life in Nigeria is quite beautiful as it is challenging. While we may celebrate the apparent springing up of Institutes as a blessing and of course the overwhelming response of persons desiring to join the religious life, we should carefully look at what happened in Europe and America and plot the graph, the curve of which is on the downward slope. If it could happen to a people with centuries old of the Catholic faith, unless we reread and learn fast we would repeat their present situation even much earlier than it took them to decline when we are faced with an even less serious onslaught.

The future of the consecrated life will depend on the profoundness of our theology and Christology as a response of the Church to heal and strengthen itself from within as well as respond to the challenges of society. The consecrated life is the spiritual palliative of Christ to His wounded Body, the Church. All who embrace and make this state of life their primary mode of being must be ready at all times to seek the mind of Christ so as to remain relevant to humanity since they strive to represent God who in the words of St. Augustine is Beauty ever ancient and ever new.