

The Catholic Voyage: African Journal of Consecrated Life

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EDITORIAL

“I am counting on you ‘to wake up the world’, since the distinctive sign of consecrated life is prophecy. As I told the Superiors General: ‘Radical evangelical living is not only for religious: it is demanded of everyone. But religious follow the Lord in a special way, in a prophetic way.’ This is the priority that is needed right now: ‘to be prophets who witness to how Jesus lived on this earth... a religious must never abandon prophecy.’”¹ These words of Pope Francis explain in some ways the importance of the studies in the present volume of the *Catholic Voyage*. This edition sets out proposing reflections on some aspects of the *identity, significance and challenges* of Consecrated life and Societies of Apostolic life. With this general theme in mind, the “Call for Papers” suggested several specific topics, leaving prospective author with the freedom and option, obviously, to propose any other directly related topic. A selection had to be made. The resulting articles examine, broadly, the following groups of issues, many of which in one way or another are critical for a continued implementation of the call to “wake up the world”. These issues are: the identity, charisms, community life, and mission, and the distinctive characteristics; the relevance and challenges of religious Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life; the formation for Consecrated life and Catholic Priesthood, and the collaborative ministries; mercy, seen also in relationship to truth; the foundation of new religious institutes and lay Christian associations; and the Catholic priesthood in Nigeria today. Through these studies the reader is invited to reflect on and act, in so far as possible, on the matters discussed, so that the Consecrated life and Societies of Apostolic Life in Nigeria may be better understood, appreciated and lived in an increasingly credible, authentic and joyous way, even amidst challenges.

The opening article explores the distinctive marks of the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. Victor Onwukeme, MSP, explains how the people who are called to this vocation are meant to be with Jesus, learn at his feet and eventually to live like him, by embracing the evangelical vows, and living a life of solidarity, simplicity and service. Since their mission is to live in community and through a life of witness proclaim the Gospel values, the question is asked: How far is this way of life and mission being lived today? The author frankly investigates the mission and relevance of institutes of consecrated life in contemporary Nigeria. In addition, highlighting the relevance and challenges facing consecrated life, Agnes Okoye, DDL, makes some recommendations on how Consecrated life will continue to be a positive force for building a better Nigeria, rebuilding the brokenness of the society. However, she argues, to actuate the relevance and positive impact, such endeavour will depend upon the extent consecrated persons themselves are faithful to their vocation and mission.

An essential part of the vocation and mission of Consecrated persons is to welcome and live the gifts, the charisms that God has given to an Institute as one religious *family* and to each of its members as *individuals*. Jude Aniobodom Ossai,

¹ Pope Francis, *Apostolic Letter To All Consecrated People On The Occasion Of The Year Of Consecrated Life*, no. II.2 (21/11/2014).

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OSA, boldly tackles this delicate issue. He proposes a reflection on the relationship between charisms of an Institute of Consecrated Life and the personal charisms and talents of their members. The Magisterium of the Church insists that consecrated persons must be faithful to the charism of their Institute. She also teaches that Consecrated Persons, like every other Christian, indeed humans, should with gratitude receive and responsibly use their God-given personal charisms and talents. Acknowledging that both types of charisms are divine gifts, the author discusses the nature and value of each type, the possible tensions in practical terms, and the way to ensure harmony in favour of the common mission of the Religious Institute.

The General Chapter has a vital and indispensable role in the interpretation of the charism of an institute of Consecrated life and a Society of apostolic life. In this regard, MaryAnn Osaroejii, PHJC, examines the meaning of “Chapter” and what happens during General Chapters. Explaining the different levels of Chapters, she also indicates how they affect the Institute or Society whose charism it interprets for the present day and circumstances.

Some specific practical issues are also addressed. First, the necessary, ever-present and impellent question of *formation*. Nkechinyelu Ezeanyino, DDL, clearly argues that the “Theology of Consecrated Life” should be made part and parcel of the academic curriculum of the Diocesan Seminaries and Institutes for Theological Formation throughout Nigeria. Such program will “help eliminate the stark ignorance manifested by many diocesan priests, especially the young ones, of the nature, place and functions of Consecrated persons in the Church. Such ignorance is evident in the misguided spiritual direction given to young consecrated persons by such priests, lack of appreciation and respect for consecrated persons, and poor collaboration between such priests and the consecrated persons ministering in their parishes.” The fact-checking of the widespread complaints and unnecessary tensions seen and heard over many years in this regard will not permit a reproach to her bluntness and the eagerness to see the proposed need met. The Nigerian Bishops had requested, many years ago, that such formation program be taught in diocesan seminaries. But their demand for the most part remained a dead letter or fell on deaf ears. The author suggests the many benefits that a holistic and in-depth formation program in this discipline will have for the clergy, the consecrated persons, and for the entire Church and her mission. On her part, Josephine Enenmo, OLA, examines the understanding of mercy and formation and how both can relate in discerning the suitability of a candidate for admission into religious profession or/and priestly ordination. Her article emphasizes the importance and necessity, in the collaborative venture of formation, for the Church, the Religious community, the Formator and the candidate in formation to cooperate with the grace of God in order to achieve a holistic formation. However, at the heart of the dynamics of formation, she argues, is conversion by way of internalization and expression of Gospel values.

Second, the question of *violence*. Consecrated persons, citizens of a nation, live out their vocation and unique charisms and mission not in a vacuum, but in a concrete human society and situations. Therefore, they sometimes personally experience

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and/or, in any case, like other citizens they are equally challenged by the violent and terrorising situations around them in Nigeria. The study by Olisaemeka Okwara, DDL addresses this reality: the problem of violence. Can a consecrated person, or a group of them, offer any help in ameliorating violence in the society? If “yes”, in what ways can consecrated persons bear witness to Christ in the situation of violence?. The author argues that, while crisis and violence challenge their total submission and faith in God, the violence around consecrated persons is an opportunity, for it challenges them to a more prophetic witnessing in the world.

One of the essential elements in consecrated life in the Church is Community life. St. Augustine’s spirituality and concept of *Community life* has influenced many institutes of consecrated life through the centuries. The standard Rule of St. Augustine of Hippo is now followed not only by Augustinians but it has influenced many religious institutions and organizations in the world. Jude Ossai, OSA, offering another reflection, explores the theme of community life, focusing on the perspective of St. Augustine. Why did St. Augustine have special preference for community life and sharing of things in common as the best way to seek God and to seek and arrive at knowledge and truth?. The article investigates the phenomena and events that influenced Augustine’s understanding and approach to community life, his concrete experience of community life and his theological, sociological and evangelical teaching on community life. In the midst of profound changes and technological and social development of our time, the author argues that Augustine’s perspective on community life is still relevant and applicable to the modern world today as it was in his days.

In the Lord’s vineyard, everyone in his family is called to love and serve in the one mission of Christ with their different gifts (Cfr. Ephesians 4:2-7). Ikechukwu Kanu, OSA, looks into the issue of the collaborative ministry among Religious, and between the Religious and Diocesan priests and the lay faithful. Collaborative ministry, understood as an indispensable instrument for effective witnessing, is presented as a way of life whose scope of practice is limitless. The writer exposes the reasons for this, and suggests the expected benefits of this form of ministry. On his part, Emeka Nwosu, OP, proposes an attentive reflection on the Catholic priesthood; specifically, he examines the factors that account for the changing face of the Catholic priesthood in Nigeria, and the implication of this change for the future of the sacerdotal ministry in Nigeria. This contribution to the history of the Catholic Priesthood in Nigeria is a tribute to Monsignor Raphael Chukwubunna Anasiudu, the former Secretary General of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria.

The theme of truth and mercy is fundamental to the life and mission of the Church, and to consecrated life in a special way, more so in the present time of call to renewal (or reform) and fidelity, to a pastoral conversion, in the Church. Oseni Ogunu, OMV’s article discusses “mercy” and “truth”, highlighting their meaning, value, relevance and implications. It considers the relationship between both elements. It briefly indicates some of the specific area and situations of Christian life and mission where values of *mercy* and *truth* embrace or should always meet together.

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Finally, Charles Ukwé's article offers us an informed and timely commentary on the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria's *Guidelines and Directives on Founding Religious Institutes and Lay Associations in Nigeria* (September, 2014). In the face of the phenomena of the proliferation of religious foundations, this document intends to aid bishops and founders through the different stages from the initial foundation to its approval of Institutes and Associations. The article, therefore, presents the background, the contents and requirements of the *Guidelines and Directives*, and the process of approval it foresees. The author emphasizes the serious responsibility of the bishops for discernment in this entire process. The good of each prospective aspirant, the good of the Church and of the Consecrated life seem at stake on this matter.

Through this edition, therefore, the *Catholic Voyage* offers to our readers a rich and engaging review of a wide range of relevant and current themes. The vocation to consecrated life, like faith itself, is a gift, a mystery and a responsibility. At a moment when "faithfulness is being put to the test,"² the Institutes of Consecrated life and Societies of Apostolic Life know that "it is full time now for you to wake from sleep" (Rom 13:11). Generally speaking, looking at the reflections in the volume you have at hand, one sees that in Nigeria this marvellous way of life appears as a rich and dynamic reality which, in spite of the many real challenges, has altogether a very clear vision of what its identity and mission are. Profound seems the consciousness of the need for fidelity to the charism of the Institute and Society, and to fraternal life in community. Consecrated persons would eager to engage themselves in whatever their respective Institute or Society are willing and able to pastorally do to ameliorate the Church and society in Nigeria. The Consecrated Life counts on the necessary discernment, accompaniment and formation of its members -- and also of the diocesan clergy -- for the betterment of all. Not giving in to what Pope Francis calls the criteria of *worldliness*, Consecrated Life seems eager and poised to be more prophetic, creative and audacious in its bearing witness to Christian mercy and truth, in order to bring joy and hope to people we are called to love and serve.

So, I wish to sincerely thank all the authors who have willingly chosen -- and some writers generously accepted the invitation within a limited time in spite of hectic work schedule -- to contribute their reflections and perspectives to the present edition the *Catholic Voyage*.

I hope you find these reflections helpful for deepening your reflections, and for formation and mission.

Enjoy the reading!

Oseni J. Osilama Ogunu, OMV,
Editor-in-Chief

² Pope Francis, *Address To Participants In The Plenary Assembly Of The Congregation For Institutes Of Consecrated Life And Societies Of Apostolic Life*, 28 January 2017.

**THE RELEVANCE AND MISSION OF THE INSTITUTES
OF CONSECRATED LIFE IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT

The article looks at the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. Through the few samples chosen, the article examines the distinctive marks of the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. People who are called to this vocation are meant to be with Jesus, learn at his feet and eventually to live like him. They live a life of detachment and abandonment embracing the evangelical vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, a life of solidarity, simplicity and service. Like Jesus, they give up marriage and family life in order to give undivided attention to Jesus and his work. Their mission is to live in community and through a life of witness proclaim the Gospel values in season and out of season.

INTRODUCTION

In the Church we have various groups of religious institutes such as Canon Regulars (Congregation of the Immaculate Conception), Monastic Orders (Order of St Benedict), Mendicant Orders (Franciscans), Clerics Regular (Clerics Regular of the Mother of God), Religious Clerics (Oblates of Mary the Virgin), Religious Institutes of Sister (Daughters of Mary Mother of Mercy) Religious Institutes of Brothers (Marist Brothers), Societies of Apostolic Life (Missionary Society of St Paul). Here can be reworked as follows: The above come under Institutes of Consecrated Life except Missionary Society of St Paul which come under Societies of Apostolic Life. Most of these live more or less the same kind of life guided by their charism and the inspiration of their founder. The paper will focus on Institutes of Consecrated Life, examining their relevance and mission in Contemporary Nigeria.

It is difficult to think of any parish or cathedral which is not the fruit of missionary work of the religious. Missionaries are usually sent to difficult terrains. Led by the Holy Spirit, they move into these tough places and like Caesar, they come, they see and they conquer. Missionaries do this, following the instruction of our Lord who before he left the world, gave his disciples a special mandate: *Go therefore, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit* (Matt 28,19; cf. Mark 16,15). Along the same line, Jesus called his disciples to be with him; to be sent out and then to preach and drive out demons (Mark 3, 13-15; cf. Luke 9,1-6; 10,1-12). In the above texts, Jesus emphasized the three Missionary

's' which should characterize the life of every religious – solidarity, simplicity and service. According to Richard Baawobr, the life of the religious can be summarized by these three³.

DISTINCTIVE MARKS OF THE INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE

Pope Francis noted that every baptized faithful by virtue of his baptism is a missionary disciple (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 120). They are conscious of the fact that they are the hands of Jesus, his legs and so forth. However, Institutes of Consecrated Life are made of various groups of men and women who come together led by the Holy Spirit with the aim of knowing Christ more and making Him known; loving Christ more and making Christ loved; serving Christ more and making him served. They usually live community life and have a special charism and apostolate which guide their life and work.

These men and women model their lives on that of early Christians who owned everything in common and nobody was in need (Acts 2,42; 4,32). They model their lives on the lives of the apostles who were called by Christ. The term apostle is from the Greek verb *apostellein* which means to send out and from here comes the noun form *apostolos* meaning apostle. It denotes the one who is sent, carrying with it the notion of delegation of authority.⁴ This is seen clearly in Mark 3,13-15. Jesus went up to the mountain and called those whom he wanted and they came to him. He appointed twelve whom he named apostles to be with him and to be sent out to proclaim the message and to have authority to cast out devils. In this text, we see the meaning and implication of the word *apostle*. For one to be an apostle of Christ, one has to be called and having been called one has to stay with Jesus to learn at his feet; and one has to be sent and having been sent, one carries out the work of service. So, the call is for service. The background to the above text can be traced to the Israelites. God called the twelve tribes of Israel up to the mountain and he made Israel a light to the nations (Isa 49,6).

Let us take a brief look at the three 's.' Solidarity – When Jesus called the first disciples he called them first to be with him and then to be sent out. So, he called them to live together. Gregory the Great has the following commentary on the sending of the disciples: *The Lord sends his disciples out to preach in twos in order to teach us silently that whoever fails in charity towards his neighbour should by no means take upon himself the office of preaching.*⁵ In Luke 9,1-6 (Luke 10,1-12) Jesus sends out seventy-two disciples indicating he is sending them to the whole world. Jesus sends his disciples out as lambs among wolves. He knows they will meet violent rejection (Acts 14,19). They will be rejected, mocked, derided and ridiculed. However, if they live in community, this will help to strengthen them. And so, he prepares their minds for such tough times. In the community, they are meant to treasure and

³ R. BAAWOBR, 'The Spirituality of Apostolic Missionary Institutes', a paper given to the Superiors General of Societies of Apostolic Life at Gwagwalada (April 30 2017) 14

⁴ PHILLIP CARRINGTON, *According to Mark, A Running Commentary on the Oldest Gospel* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1960) 84.

⁵ See the "Second Reading" of the Office of Reading for 18th October, Feast of St Luke.

appreciate the presence of one another. They must be a source of encouragement to one another and never a stumbling block.

Simplicity – Jesus sends out his disciples instructing them not take a bag, sandals, purse and so forth. They are to travel light trusting in God’s providence. Poverty does not necessarily mean absence of possession but rather not being possessed by anything, be it money or other worldly belongings. A religious community should be rich while individuals are meant to be poor. Poverty is being free from what is mine, recognizing that the earth is the Lord’s and its fullness (Ps 24,1; 1 Cor 4,7). Evangelical poverty is imitating Christ in his *kenosis* which means self-emptying (Phil 2,6-11). Jesus is calling the religious to leave themselves fragile. Jesus is reminding us that we are not masters of the mission but its servants.⁶ As noted above the early Christians owned everything in common. In that same spirit, the religious are not supposed to possess properties. This is the reason they are not allowed to have private bank accounts; properties such as lands, houses and even costly movable belongings such as cars, helicopters, airplanes, boats and so forth. Everything is owned in common and everyone’s needs are catered for by the community. Among the Israelites, priests who are consecrated to God are not allowed to inherit landed properties because the Lord is their inheritance (Deut 10,8-9; 18,1-5; Num 18,19-20; Josh 13,14). Along the same line, the religious are not supposed to be attached to any person or anything rather they are to have intimate communion and union with God.

Service – A religious like Christ gives his life in service of the people among whom he works. The focus is on salvation of the human person in the spirit of Christ who said: *I have come that they may have life and have it to the full* (John 10,10). This is why the assembly of the Latin American Episcopal Council, better known as CELAM, held at Puebla (Mexico) in 1979 makes a lot of meaning. That Conference recognized that preaching the Gospel should not be limited to spiritual ambient. It should go above this to ensuring justice, goodness and overall wellbeing of the human person. The insight of this conference is captured in the following statement: *Action on behalf of justice is a constitutive part of the preaching the Gospel.*⁷ Missionaries should see to it that their people get justice; that they live a meaningful life; that they are able to feed. They are able to live a decent and modest life; that they have employment and so forth.

RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA: MISSIONAND RELEVANCE

Some years back Nigeria received a lot of missionaries (men and women) from Ireland, Italy, Canada, Spain, Portugal and USA. Those missionaries were brave men and women. The priests belonged to one religious congregation or the other while others were diocesan priests who volunteered to go on mission. Those men and women defied our excruciating heat; they did not mind our strange language, our

⁶ R. BAAWOBR, ‘The Spirituality of Apostolic Missionary Institutes’, a paper given to the Superiors General of Societies of Apostolic Life at Gwagwalada (April 30 2017) 14.

⁷ Cf. <https://www1.villanova.edu/content/dam/villanova/mission/JusticeIntheWorld1971.pdf>

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mosquitoes, scorpions and snakes, our strange food, strange environment and the like. The first group arrived and within a week nearly all of them died. The second group arrived and shared the fate of the first arrivals. One of the survivors wrote:

*As man followed man into the soft red clay of Africa, the survivors gathered around his grave, crossed hands and kneeling with bent heads, made a solemn demand on God: 'Accept O Eternal Father, they prayed, the sacrifice of the life of this our brother in Christ; the sacrifice of our life too. But grant that over his bones and ours a great Church will arise amidst a people whom we serve.'*⁸

These missionaries were not deterred. They were not frightened. Even if they were frightened, they did not allow fear to conquer them. They left familiar environment for an unfamiliar environment; familiar food, potatoes for unfamiliar food, *eba*; they left the people they knew for a people they did not know. They left familiar culture for an unfamiliar culture. They passed through difficult moments and some of them persevered. At that time, there were no airplanes. We had no electricity. They travelled on the sea for months. One day, I was reflecting on their lives and their sacrifices asking myself: What was motivating them? Why did they refuse to yield to fear and many other dangers threatening their life? Why did they brave it all the way? I found the answer in 2Cor 5,14 *Caritas Christi urget nos*. They were led by the love of Christ. Many of those missionaries would go home and ask for help from their families and friends in order to help build churches, build schools, help the poor in Nigeria. The Church in Nigeria owes a lot to the Church in Europe and Americas.

In 1969 Pope Paul VI said to the African Bishops gathered in Kampala, Uganda: You Africans have received a lot of missionaries, now you too must become missionaries. Dominic Cardinal Ekandem took the words of the Pope to heart and this led to the founding of the Missionary Society of St Paul in 1977. Cardinal Ekandem was then the President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) and so he got the Nigerian Bishops to key into this. St Patrick's Missionaries did a lot in order to see that this missionary congregation called The Missionary Society of St Paul (MSP) saw the light of day. Apart from MSP many other missionary congregations who have been in the country such as Vincentians, Dominicans, Society of African Missions, Missionaries of Africa, St Patrick's Society, Augustinians, Oblates of Mary the Virgin and so forth have begun to harvest local vocations. Many dioceses have also begun to send priests to needy dioceses not only in Nigeria but to other parts of the world.

Today there are many priests from Nigeria working in various parts of the world. Some belong to one religious congregation or the other, some are *fidei donum* priests, and others are diocesan priests who volunteer to go on mission. There are also numerous groups of women religious dispersed and working in various parts of the world. We must thank God sincerely for the current vocation boom in the country. John Cardinal Onaiyekan once said that the current vocation boom cannot simply be attributed to the poverty in the country. After all there are countries like Tchad, Niger and others which are poorer than Nigeria but such boom is not the

⁸ COSMAS NWOSUH, *Dominic Cardinal Ekandem & the Growth of the Catholic Church in Nigeria* (Iperu-Remo, Ambassador Publications, 2012) 513.

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case in these countries. Due to the vocation boom in the country, Institutes of Consecrated Life are blessed with so many vocations. However, care must be taken so that only those who have vocation to the religious life are admitted into it. When those who have no vocation get into it, the result is not edifying. After taking the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, you discover that the same person who has taken the vow of poverty has become importer and exporter. Such a person is importing cars and other valuables for business; building mansions and renting them. Recall the mark of a true missionary as displayed by early Christians and early missionaries who came to Nigeria. They would go home and bring things back to enrich the people. Let the opposite not be the case with missionaries from Nigeria. It is true that the solidarity in African families poses a huge challenge to an African religious who is not allowed to own property. In exceptional cases where a family member is seriously in need of help, this can be brought to the attention of the Order who in charity can render some help. Among the three vows taken by the religious, poverty seems to be the most challenging for an African religious. The reason is that sometimes such a religious sees his or her relatives in dire need and s/he lacks the capacity to help. African family spirit invites the religious to render help. My opinion is that each congregation must continue to emphasize the vow of poverty. However, each congregation can set up some kind of structure through which a family member who is seriously in need can be helped by the community.

Some religious take the vow of chastity and yet they live a life of questionable character. More work needs to be done in the formation houses so that those who find it extremely difficult to live celibate life are not admitted into religious life. Some religious take the vow of obedience but they are not obedient to their superiors. Greater work needs to be done in the formation house in this regard. Some religious are unable to live in community with fellow religious. This can be quite scandalous. When the people do not see love among the religious, the whole ministry becomes counter-productive.

Nigerian religious men and women must continue in the same spirit as the apostles, early disciples and early missionaries. They are called to rediscover the burning zeal of those early missionaries, the passionate love for Christ demonstrated by the apostles and the spirit of detachment shown by early Christians. They must continue to live the three evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. They are called to have an undivided heart in living out their religious vocation. Led by the Holy Spirit, they must continue with the great zeal to know nothing but Christ Jesus and the power of his resurrection (Phil 3,10). In this way they will continue to make the Gospel relevant in the midst of the hostility and impending aberrations of today.

CONCLUSION

The mission of the religious in Nigeria today is to continue the mandate of Christ both in Africa and in the places where the faith is waning due to lack of priestly and religious vocation. The Gospel must continue to be preached undiluted even when the modern world with its ideology looks at the Gospel values as if they were

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strange and untenable. This is what Paul meant when he said: *proclaim the word welcome or unwelcome* (2 Tim 4,2).

**THE CHARISMS OF INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND THE
PERSONAL CHARISMS AND TALENTS OF THEIR MEMBERS:
Divine Gifts, the Tensions and Paths to Harmony for the Common Mission**

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ABSTRACT

The basic focus of this article is the relationship that should exist between the talents and charisms possessed by individual religious and consecrated persons and the collective and permanent charism of the religious Institute to which they belong. God gives different charisms to different persons. While we acknowledge that, we also have to point to the difference between these personal charisms and the charisms on which the religious Institute is established and which gives it a peculiar character and identity.

This article intends to defend and promote the teaching of the church, especially in the Second Vatican Council, that consecrated persons should stick to their respective charisms. The question of personal talents is important to give attention too, because like personal charisms, talents may also be to the detriment of the Charism of the religious Institute, instead of enhancing it. We wish to state in this article that even though the collective charism of a religious institute should not suppress or destroy individual charisms and talents, personal talents and charisms on the other hand should not vitiate or destroy the charism of founders and of foundation of religious institutes.

INTRODUCTION

A Novice under my care was very passionate about football. He openly asked me if the Order would allow him play professional football. In his view, professional football would be an avenue for evangelization and also a source of income for our religious Order. I had to take him through the demands and implications of the charism and spirituality of our order and the demands and implications of being a professional footballer. At the end our discussion he agreed with me that both are not compatible.

I have interacted with some religious who were full of complaint for the manner of life in their religious Institutes while comparing theirs to other Institutes. Further discussions with them revealed that such religious were in religious institutes that did not match their personal charism and spirituality. In the state of confusion and frustration of such persons, they begin to desire and even campaign for a change in the charism and spirituality of their religious Institute. In as much as such situations are really frustrating, the truth remains that personal charisms cannot alter the charism of foundation and of the founders of religious Institutes.

God gives charisms to persons for the good of the Church and humanity. Not all charisms are permanent and conducive to the formation of religious Institutes; some charisms are temporal. In like manner, God gives talents and natural endowments to different persons. All these are gifts of the same God. However, the

charisms of religious Institutes give them special characters and identity and the persons who join and share this collective charism have to adapt to it.

This article is, therefore, meant to explore the relationship between personal talents and charisms and the charism of an Institute of Consecrated life. We intend to look at the meaning of talent and that of charism and their implications, especially as they relate to the collective charism of a religious Institute. The basic question we intend to tackle is: What should be the appropriate relationship between personal charisms and talents and the charism of a religious Institute?

CHARISM

Charism is the English equivalent of the Greek word, *charisma*, which means “free gift”. It is connected with the same root as *charis* (grace)⁹ Charisms are gifts of grace; they are given freely to human persons by God through the Holy Spirit; they are not inherited or learned. One can only make charism more visible and efficacious by putting it into practice. In the scriptures and in theology, charism is understood as divine gift to human persons, understood to be gifts and spiritual endowments with altruistic purpose. In other words, they are special gifts of the Holy Spirit meant for the building up of the Church (cf. *1Cor. 12:7*). Charisms, according to the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, are given to individuals for the good of the Church, the good of men and needs of the world.¹⁰

Charism can further be described as “a gift of a grace (internal and external) given by Christ to a persons, through the Holy Spirit”.¹¹ Charism can be in three forms:

- (a) Charism can be for the spiritual use of the recipient for the common good of the Church;
- (b) Charism can be temporary or permanent; it can be individual or collective. If it is permanent and collective, it gives rise to a stable ministry or institute, as in the case of consecrated life;
- (c) Charism can be ordinary or extraordinary. In this case, it is momentary and does not necessarily provide for an instituted ministry or a stable form of life.¹²

John Paul II affirms that irrespective of the form or nature of charisms, whether they are exceptional and great or simple and ordinary, they are graces of the Holy Spirit that have usefulness in the Church, either directly or indirectly.¹³ Karl Rahner describes charism as extra-sacramental grace which is very important for the Church. Charisms, in his view, are necessary, essential and permanent feature of the

⁹ *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Xavier Leon-Dufour (ed.), (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1992), 68.

¹⁰ Cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*. (21 November, 1964), 12.

¹¹ Ogun Donatus Aihmiosion, *Foundation and Canonical Erection of An Institute of Consecrated Life*. (Benin City: TD Prints Nigeria Ltd, 2016), 272.

¹² *Ibid*, 272-273.

¹³ Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, (30th December, 1988), 24. See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), 799-800.

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Church because they guarantee the constant presence and sustenance of the power of the Holy Spirit in the Church.¹⁴

St. Paul dwells extensively on the different forms of personal charisms that people receive through the Holy Spirit. According to him these different charisms are given for the well-being of all (cf. *1Cor* 12:4-12).

Though Charisms are given to individuals (and groups as well), it is the responsibility of the Church to discern all charisms. In fact, this magisterial function is a necessity and no charism is exempt from the scrutiny and approval of the Church. “No charism is exempt from being referred and submitted to the Church’s shepherds”.¹⁵ The implication of this point is that the authenticity and usefulness of a charism, individual or collective, is not subject to private interpretation. This supervision and discernment is very vital in forestalling confusion and division instead of harmony and promotion of common good.

Some other authors have made extensive researches on the theme of Charism in its biblical, patristic and ecclesial perspectives.¹⁶

It is important to note the following points before we leave off our discussion on the definition, meaning and implication of charism in catholic theology and practice.

- First, Charisms are free gifts which are given to individuals or groups. The gift of charism is the prerogative and initiative of God, the giver, not the recipient. Therefore as we noted earlier, they are not learned or inherited from one’s parents.
- Secondly, charisms are meant to benefit the Church and humanity. In other words, God benefits people other than the recipient(s) of the Charism so given. The people to whom these gifts are given are channels through which God reaches other members of the Church or of humanity.
- Thirdly, certain charisms are temporal while some others are permanent. As St. Paul notes, certain gifts of the Holy Spirit can cease (*1Cor*. 14:8)
- Fourthly, certain charisms, the ones that are permanent and collective, can lead to permanent ministries or institutions like the case of institutes of Consecrated life. We shall return to this kind of charism when we shall be considering charism in relation to Institutes of Consecrated Life.

TALENTS

¹⁴ Cf. Karl Rahner, *Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, (Karl Rahner, ed.), (Kent: Burn & Oates, 1993), 184.

¹⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 800. The same points are echoed in *Lumen Gentium*, 12 and John Paul II’s *Christifideles Laici*, 24. St. Paul spoke of the importance of discernment of Spirits in *1Thesolonians* 5:12, 19-21. Since Charisms are gifts of the Holy Spirit, it is important that their authenticity and genuineness be ascertained by the Church.

¹⁶ See for instance: Oseni J. Osilama Ogunu, OMV, “Consecrated Persons and Charism”, in *Consecrated Life: The Past, the Present, the Future and the Constant Demand for Renewal*, Kanu Ikechukwu Anthonly (ed.). (Ibadan: St. Paul Publications, 2015), 141-182. Anthony Akinwale, OP, *Charism and Contradiction: Theological Reflections on Consecrated Life*. (Ibadan: St. Paul Publications, 2016), 7-11. Van Bavel T.J., *The Basic Inspiration of Religious Life*. (Villanova: Augustinian Press, 1996), 108-115.

Talent is any natural or special gift, special aptitude or eminent ability. Talent describes an innate ability or endowment which enables one to perform above average, for instance, the ability to cook or dance or perform one form of sport or another.

Talents and charisms are gifts given to the faithful, to human beings, but they are not exactly the same. We can inherit talents from our parents but we do not inherit grace – charisms are graces. Even though natural talents may appear in charismatic activities, we cannot simply identify charisms with natural talents. One major point of meeting between charism and talent is that in bestowing charism on a person, the Holy Spirit builds on and perfects that person's natural abilities. In other words, God confers charism on us as a gift which helps to bring out our natural talent and indeed, perfect it.

Persons with natural endowments and talents are not obliged to use these gifts for the benefit of others, though in natural ethical relationships, different cultures emphasize the need to be altruistic and generous with one's gifts. In the case of charism, altruism is a necessary requisite for the possession of it. As we have seen in St. Paul's Letter to Corinthians (12:7), gifts of the Holy Spirit are meant for service towards others and the Church. Possession of natural talents does not in any way lead to a ministry or Religious institution, without the gift and presence of charism.

Having explored briefly what charisms and talents are and having looked at the similarities and dissimilarities, we wish to note that consecrated persons possess natural talents and they obviously possess personal charisms. Religious communities are actually made up of people with variegated enormous talents. In the same vein, many religious men and women possess personal charisms and spiritualities. We also wish to keep in mind that there are also collective or institutional charisms. It is now important to consider these collective charisms, vis-a-vis the personal talents and charisms of the persons who make up these religious institutes. First of all we will explore the permanent and collective charisms of Institutes of consecrated life before we pay attention to the need to harness and harmonize collective charisms with individual charisms and talents.

CHARISMS AND INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE

Every Religious Institution has a peculiar charism and spirituality.¹⁷ Such a charism belongs to what we described above as a collective charism and it is permanent. The Second Vatican Council's decree on the renewal of religious life, *Perfectae Caritatis*, recognises that there is a variety of charisms and refers to the charism of the religious institute as "special Character"¹⁸ The charism of a religious institute is a special character in the sense that it denotes its peculiar identity among other

¹⁷ At times charism and spirituality are used interchangeably because of their similarity in nature. (See Van Bavel T.J., *The Basic Inspiration of Religious Life*, 109). They are both gifts of the Holy Spirit. However, while Charisms are the basis of the peculiar character and identity of a religious Institute, spirituality is the peculiar way these basic charismatic gifts are lived out by a given religious institute. The Spirituality of an institute arises from its charism. Spirituality is the motivating force and manner of interpreting and living the charisms. See Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria, "Guidelines and Directives on Founding Religious Institutes and Lay associations in Nigeria". September, 2014.

¹⁸ Cf. Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Up-to-Date Renewal of Religious Life, *Perfectae Caritatis*. (28 October, 1965), 1.

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institutes and religious communities. The quiddity and *raison d'être* of any institute of consecrated life depends on its charism. Each Religious Institute is individuated and identified by its charism.

It is on account of this essential nature of Charism that the Vatican Council II Fathers taught that the distinct character of each religious institute should be preserved and fostered by the Church.¹⁹ The same document further states that the Religious and consecrated persons have the obligation of remaining faithful to the spirit of their founders.²⁰ The spirit of the founder here refers to the same charism and inspiration of the founder or founders of the Religious institutes. The Council recognizes that the charisms of the founders of religious life are gifts of God and that the gifts were given and received within the church. This is why it is essential to maintain and preserve them as spiritual patrimonies. On a practical note, preserving and maintaining each Institute's charism is meant to prevent indiscriminate proliferation of religious Institutes in the Church.

To further reiterate the importance of identifying and remaining faithful to the peculiar charism and spirituality of a religious Institute, Pope Paul VI in a post-conciliar document, insisted on a reawakening of religious life in accordance with the charism of their founders: "Only in this way you will be able to reawaken hearts to truth and to divine love in accordance with the charisms of your founders who were raised up by God within the Church"²¹

The Code of Canon Law also speaks of the charisms of religious Institutes, even though it prefers to apply other expressions instead of the term "charism". Terms like "gifts", "nature", "character" and "end" are used to describe the distinctive charismatic gifts of religious Institutes.²²

The International Association of Superiors General describes Charism of religious Institutes in this way: "Charism implies a specific mode of being, a specific mission and spirituality, style of fraternal life and structures of the institute at the service of the ecclesiastic mission".²³ This assertion is in line with the teaching of Vatican II as noted above.

Collective charism and spirituality is born because some people decide to associate with inspiring religious leaders, like Augustine, Benedict, Francis, Theresa of Avila, etc. The style of life and the way these religious leaders practice parts of the evangelical demands form the charism and spirituality which is willingly shared by those who are willingly inspired by them.²⁴ There can be no collective charism (that is the religious institute, in this regard) if the founder did not recognize and put to use the charism of foundation. On the other hand, collective charism will not exist if people do not key into this charism.

¹⁹ *Lumen Gentium*, 44.

²⁰ *Lumen Gentium*, 45.

²¹ Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelica Testificatio*, (29 June, 1971), 11.

²² Code of Canon Law, (1983), 577, 588 & 605. Donatus Ogun, (Op Cit.) notes, with references the technical reason why such terms are preferred to the term "charism" in post-conciliar documents. See foot note no. 86, on page 272.

²³ The assertion of the Superiors General at an International Congress in November 1993, as cited by Van Bavel T.J., *The Basic Inspiration of Religious Life*, 108

²⁴ Van Bavel T.J., *The Basic Inspiration of Religious Life*, 111.

CHARISM OF FOUNDER(S) AND CHARISM OF FOUNDATION

Before we proceed, it is important to dwell briefly on the convergence and difference between the personal charisms of the founders of religious Institutes and the charism of the Institutes founded or brought into being by their inspiration. On this point, I find the research of Donatus Ogun very rich and pertinent.²⁵

He notes that authors consider the “charism of foundation” as synonymous with the charism of the founder even though they also make a distinction between both: “At the beginning of each institute there is the charism of the founder, which we referred to as *personal charisma*, as well as the collective charism given by the Lord for the foundation of the Institute”.²⁶ He further explains that personal charisms are those qualities that God gives to a person for his own good (with all the implications and obligations that go with such charisms). These gifts include the way a person responds to the message of the gospel of Christ, personally. This is different from the charism of foundation. The charism of foundation is “the particular gift or experience of the Holy Spirit given to the founder for the establishment of a new institute of consecrated life in the Church. It is a specific way of making Jesus Christ of the gospel present in the Church, through determined historical situations”.²⁷ The personal charism of the founder may have some influence on the charism of the institute founded by the founder. Nonetheless, all the members of the institute founded by this founder are not obliged to possess or to practice the personal charisms of the founder.

I find this distinction particularly interesting and necessary for the purpose of this article because a founder may have the tendency to force his/her personal charisms on the members of “his” or “her” Religious Institute. On the other hand, certain members of a Religious institute may feel obliged to conform their lives to the image of the founder instead of living out the charism of the religious institute. Furthermore, if this distinction is not made, and the delicate balance not well maintained, certain members of a religious institute may begin to promote their personal charisms and spirituality within a religious institute, thereby creating a confusion and deliberate disregard of the charism of their founder, that is, the charism of foundation. This is contrary to the vision of the Second Vatican Council regarding the renewal of religious life.

The basic point we have to keep in mind as we proceed is the fact that every religious institute has a distinct character which is guaranteed by its charism. The question of having a peculiar charism or spirituality is related to the question of possessing a particular identity. The self understanding of a religious Order or Congregation depends on this particular identity. If the members of an institute follow different kinds of spirituality, and disregard the collective charism and spirituality of the institute, this common self-understanding is undermined and destroyed.²⁸

²⁵ Ogun Donatus Aihmiosion, *Foundation and Canonical Erection of An Institute of Consecrated Life*, 273-274.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 273.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 274.

²⁸ Van Bavel T.J., *The Basic Inspiration of Religious Life*, 112.

I think it is also important to point out that the peculiarity and distinctiveness of the charism and spirituality of a religious institute should not be overstretched. A healthy balance is necessary here as well because “all spiritualities are related to one another, since all are based on the gospel”. Nearly all the elements of one spirituality can be found in other spiritualities. The specific charism of a religious institute determines how the spirituality is lived out.²⁹ The spiritualities of contemplation, community life, prayer, preferential option for the poor, apostolic service, etc., are not special reserves for only one religious institute. The difference is actually on the level of emphasis and the way they are ranked by the different Religious Institutes. The similarity is rooted in the same gospel of Christ; the distinctiveness is influenced by the respective charisms of the Religious Institutes.³⁰

PERSONAL CHARISMS AND TALENTS AND THE CHARISM OF A RELIGIOUS INSTITUTE

So far we have sought to understand Charism in its different ramifications and application in the Church. We have paid much attention to collective and permanent charism because it is most suited for the purpose of this article. We have also briefly looked at the meaning of talent and the points of convergence and divergence with charism. It is important now to explore the kind of relationship that should exist between talents and personal charisms on the one hand and the charism of a religious institute on the other.

I would like to situate this discussion within the context of the relationship that should exist between a religious community and the individual members of same.³¹ The religious community should not crush a person and the individual aspects of the personality should not destroy the community. A community is richer and healthier when the community is respected and promoted and the persons who form the community also respected and promoted. It is important to promote personality, freedom, privacy and responsibility, but not to the detriment of the community. A proper equilibrium and balance is required for a true community to exist and have value³².

With regard to charisms and talent, therefore, it is pertinent to say that there should be a healthy balance: The charism of the religious institute should not subdue, suppress and destroy the personal talents and charisms of its members. On the other hand, it is important that individuals who make up the religious institute do not destroy or obfuscate the essential quality and character of the religious institute. As we have noted earlier, the essence and identity of a religious institute is

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ See *Ibid.*

³¹ See Jude A. Ossai, “Community Life among Consecrated Persons” in *Consecrated Life: The Past, the Present, the Future and the Constant Demand for Renewal*, Kanu Ikechukwu Anthonly (ed.). (Ibadan: St. Paul Publications, 2015), 126.

³² *Ibid.* Not all is really “common” in Community life, in the sense that the individual persons have to be protected so that they are not “swallowed up” by the common life. See the thoughts of Cilleruelo Lope. *Caratteri del Monacato Agostiniano* in *Sanctus Augustinus Vitae Spiritualis Magister* I, Roma, 1959, 44-45. Carlos Moran Fernandez, OSA gave a summary of Cilleruelo’s point of view in his article, “The Community in St. Augustine, Philosophical and Theological Perspectives” in *Elements of an Augustinian Formation*. (Rome: Pubblicazioni Agostiniane, 2001), 286.

guaranteed by its charism. Therefore, destroying it affects the essence and nature of that Institute.

Personal charisms are not ruled out by common or collective charism; both of them can coexist. However, everyone who wishes to live in a group, a Religious Institute in this case, has to accept the guiding principle, that is, the charism and spirituality of the institute.³³ If this delicate balance is not maintained, there can be no community. The charism of the religious institute has to be the common inspiration and guiding principle of all its members.

Right from the time of initial formation, especially at the Novitiate, candidates who aspire to join a religious institute have to be made to confront their personal charisms and talents with the charism and spirituality of the institute and decide whether they will accept the charism and spirituality of the institute. Should the student in formation decide to go ahead and be part of the Institute, he or she has the responsibility of adapting to the charism and spirituality of the Institute, aware of the implications and demands. The adaptation to the charism and spirituality of the religious institute has to be done by the candidate in formation; the religious institute cannot adapt to the personal charism or talent of the intending or *bona fide* members.

The aspiring members of a religious institute, either novices or persons in temporary vows, have to be sincere to themselves in considering the adaptability or otherwise, of their personal talents and charisms before making perpetual and solemn vows.

For instance, the talent to play football, dance, do gymnastics or acrobatics, etc, have to be considered on their level of adaptability to the life of the religious institute one aspires to join. The same can be said of the personal charisms and spiritualities of persons who aspire to join a religious Institute. It is obvious that the way we understand, appreciate and live out the gospel of Christ is different from person to person. It is, therefore, important to consider whether my personal charism or talent is adaptable to the charism and spirituality of the religious Institute I desire to join.

The person who desires to make use of his football talent to play professional football needs to think twice because that is not compatible with religious life. Recently we heard of a former Manchester United footballer who abandoned professional football in order to become a Dominican Friar. It was also on the news, recently, that one former beauty pageant had to give up that way of life so as to join the convent. This discernment is significant because there are certain things that are not just compatible.

In the same way, the person whose personal charism tilts towards silence and a secluded/contemplative life is not suited for a mendicant order or a society of apostolic life. A contemplative community will be more suited for such a person. Though contemplation is part of the spirituality of Mendicants, they also need to reach out to people and be disposed to serve the Church and humanity. In like manner, the person who has the charism of active apostolate is not suited for a contemplative/monastic life. It does not make any form of sense for one to join a

³³ Cf. Van Bavel T.J., *The Basic Inspiration of Religious Life*, 110.

religious Institute where his/her personal charism and spirituality is not compatible and then attempt to twist the hand of the religious Institute to suit his/her talents and charism.

There are situations today where certain religious appear to possess and exhibit traits of spiritualities that do not match the charism and spirituality of their institutes. An example is the inclination towards and open promotion of a "Pentecostal spirituality of prayer" by some religious whose charism and spirituality are actually centred on meditative prayer, interior journey and the promotion of Catholic liturgy. Some of such religious even disregard liturgical norms and rubrics in a bid to appear current and popular. Or as some would claim, express their spiritual gifts. The point here is not the case of condemning a certain way of praying. It is rather meant to address a concern regarding the subtle ways consecrated persons veer off the charism and spirituality of their Religious Institutes. Even though it is important that we recognize the charismatic gifts and personal preferences of individual religious men and women, it is equally essential to keep an eye on, and to live according to what makes a particular institute *that* Institute. One should be free to practise and make use of one's talents and charism, but without doing harm to the collective charism and identity of the religious institute or of the Church.

CONCLUSION

There is a great need for proper discernment of vocation, identification and internalization of the common charism and spirituality of one's religious institute. This discernment process should be sincere and objective. Candidates who aspire to form part of any Institute of Consecrated Life should endeavour to understand their personal charisms and talents and ensure that they are compatible with the charism and spirituality of the Institute. This process is very important because it helps to forestall preventable frustrations that may occur in the future. There are some personal charisms and talents that are very good in themselves but are just not compatible with the collective charism and spirituality of the Institute one belongs to.

The Church recognizes and acknowledges the presence of different charisms, individual and collective. In particular, the Church sees the different charisms of Religious Institutes as marks of God's abundant blessings on the Church. Therefore, it is natural that the Church insists on maintaining the nature and value of these different Charisms without confusion or unnecessary multiplication of religious Institutes that share the same charism. Each consecrated person has to bear this in mind and make efforts to promote the renewal efforts of the Church since the Second Vatican Council.³⁴

³⁴ Second Vatican Council's Decree on the Up-to-Date Renewal of Religious Life, *Perfectae Caritatis*, and other post-conciliar documents on the subject are attempts of the Church to make religious institutes more adaptable to modern age and the Church's understanding of the place and value of Religious Life within the Church. One major concern of these documents is the re-discovery of the true nature of the different religious Institutes and the importance of living according to their charism and original source of their being.

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Individual talents of members of religious Institutes contribute to the beauty of religious life. We know from experience that in the absence of variety of talents religious communities becomes boring and uninspiring. We can also say that personal talents contribute to the success of our apostolates as religious men and women. However, it is pertinent to ensure that talents, like personal charisms, do not negatively affect or destroy the prophetic values of the charism of one's Institute of Consecrated life.

Insistence on maintaining one's identity as a consecrated person of a particular religious Institute is not anti-progressiveness, nor is it crass rigidity. Renewal and progress, *aggiornamento* and *ressourcement*, adaptation and modernization, are, in fact, the basic thrusts of Vatican II's renewal project, and these can be done without doing harm to one's peculiar character and identity as a religious and member of a specific Institute.

**RELEVANCE AND CHALLENGES OF CONSECRATED LIFE IN NIGERIA
TODAY**

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ABSTRACT

This article attempts to highlight the relevance and challenges facing consecrated life in Nigeria today and to make some recommendations on how consecrated life will continue to be a positive force for building a better Nigeria.

Consecrated men and women are entrusted the function of proclaiming by the witness of their lives, the value of Christian fraternity and the transforming power of the Good News, which makes it possible to see all people as sons and daughters of God, and inspires a self-giving love towards everyone, especially the least of our brothers and sisters. Their life of imitation of Christ who is both poor, chaste and obedient is of inestimable value in every epoch, but much more in our present era where a good number of men and women are indifferent to the things of God and are more committed to things secular, ephemeral, and worse still, live as if there is no life after death.

Interestingly, consecrated life remains a witness to God's love and eschatological sign of the world to come. The contributions of consecrated persons in rebuilding the brokenness of our world today cannot be over emphasized. By their holiness of life and total commitment to the course of God's kingdom, they lead others to the highest goal in spiritual journey, which is union with God-what it means to be Christian and most strongly, what it means to be fully human.

However, the relevance and positive impact of the consecrated persons on our society depend upon the extent they are faithful to their vocation. No doubt, they will make more positive contributions to our nation building when challenges like secularism, materialism, individualism, disunity, and activism undermining consecrated life today are minimized or eradicated.

INTRODUCTION

Everything created by God is good (cf. Gen. 1: 31), so also every state of life inspired and ordained by God is good. However, its actual usefulness to the Church and humanity at large lies in the fulfilment of the tasks or functions attached it.

There are different states of life in the Church and each is to contribute in building up the Body of Christ according to particular gift or vocation in the Church. By divine institutions Christ faithful are divided into sacred ministers (clerics) and laity. From these two groups there exist equally Christ faithful consecrated to God through the profession of the evangelical counsels in a particular state of life known

³⁵ Sr. Dr. Okoye, a specialist in Canon Law, lectures *History of Canon Law, and General Norms*.

as the state of consecrated life.³⁶ In itself, the state of consecrated life is neither clerical nor lay.³⁷

The evangelical basis of consecrated life can be traced to the special relationship which Jesus, in his earthly life, established with some of his disciples. He called them not only to welcome the Kingdom of God into their own lives, but also to put their lives at its service, leaving everything behind and closely imitating his own way of life.³⁸

Each of the fundamental states of life in the Church “is entrusted with the task of expressing, in its own way, one or other aspect of the one mystery of Christ. While the lay life has a particular mission of ensuring that the Gospel message is proclaimed in the temporal sphere, in the sphere of ecclesial communion an indispensable ministry is carried out by those in Holy Orders, and in a special way by the Bishops. The latter have the task of guiding the People of God by the teaching of the word, the administration of the sacraments and the exercise of sacred power in the service of ecclesial communion, which is an organic communion, hierarchically structured.”³⁹

This reflection focuses on answering these important questions: What is the meaning, values and fundamental mission of consecrated life that makes it relevant to the Church and society at large, especially in our country Nigeria today? What are the challenges of consecrated life in Nigeria today? How can consecrated life contribute to the mission of the Church and renewal of society? Asking questions on the meaning of one’s life, or rather on the duties one is called to fulfil and living accordingly is very important because it is the basis for a happy, peaceful and fulfilled life.

THE NOTION, VALUES AND MISSION OF CONSECRATED LIFE

The concept of consecration refers to a total dedication of a person or thing to God for his service. Through the sacrament of baptism, confirmation and Holy Orders, all Christ faithful are consecrated persons (cf. 1 Pet. 2:..).

However, the idea of consecration has been for centuries in the Church been applied specifically to the faithful who devote themselves to God and to the service of the Church through the profession of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience.⁴⁰ This form of consecration is considered by the Church’s tradition as “a special and fruitful deepening of the consecration received in Baptism, inasmuch as

³⁶ Cf. The Code of Canon Law in English Translation, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, London 1983, can. 207, §§ 1 & 2,

³⁷ Can. 588, § 1; cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, in *The Vatican Collection, Vatican II*, The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents, New Revised Edition, Austin Flannery, General Editor, Costello Publishing Company, Northport, New York 1998, 31. Hereafter to be cited as LG.

³⁸ Michael Ogunu, *Catholic Faith and Life*, Floreat System, Benin City 2015, 142.

³⁹ VC 32.

⁴⁰ T. Rincon-Perez, Commentary on can. 573 in *Exegetical Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*, prepared under the responsibility of the Martin De Azpilcueta Institute Faculty of Canon Law, University of Navarre, Angel Marzoa, et al. eds., English edition, E. Caparros, general editor, Wilson & Lafleur, Montreal, Canada 2004, 1466.

it is the means by which the close union with Christ already begun in Baptism develops into the gift of a fuller, more explicit and authentic configuration to him through the profession of the evangelical counsels."⁴¹

Consecration through the profession of evangelical counsels even though rooted in baptismal consecration is distinct from it and is not its necessary consequence. Baptismal consecration includes call to holiness but does not call for virginity, renunciation of possession or obedience to superior as required from those who profession evangelical counsels.⁴²

Consecrated life is a response to God's call.⁴³ The initiative for consecrated life has its origin in God's special love for an individual. This love of God takes over the person completely body and soul reserving the person to God himself. In other words God consecrates the person to himself making him or her to participate deeply in the dual paschal mystery of death and resurrection,⁴⁴ already present in baptismal consecration. From this comes a new and special consecration responding to a spousal covenant which demands totality. Thus, in this consecration and each of the evangelical counsels that expresses it prevails God's positive act of love towards an individual and the person's response of love to God.

In line with the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, the 1983 Code of Canon Law describes consecrated life as follows:

Life consecrated through profession of the evangelical counsels is 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 supremely loved. By a new and special title they are dedicated to seek the perfection of charity in the service of God's kingdom, for the honour of God, the building up of the Church and the salvation of the world. They are a splendid sign in the Church, as they foretell the heavenly glory. Christ's faithful freely assume this manner of life in institutes of consecrated life which are canonically established by the competent ecclesiastical authority. By vows or by other sacred bonds, in accordance with the laws of their own institutes, they profess the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience. Because of the charity to which these counsels lead, they are linked in a special way to the Church and its mystery.⁴⁵

Canon 573 cited above contains essential theological and canonical elements that define consecrated life. The theological elements include: 1) total consecration to God who is supremely loved and the following of Christ more closely under the

⁴¹ John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consacrata*, Paulines Publications Africa, Kenya 2005, 30, hereafter to be cited as VC.

⁴² Cf. VC 30.

⁴³ Cf. PC 5; VC 1.

⁴⁴ Cf. *Redemptionem Donum* 10.

⁴⁵ Can. 573, §§ 1 & 2).

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action of the Holy Spirit; 2) the glorification of God; 3) the building up of the Church and salvation of souls; 4) realizing the perfection of charity; and eschatological significance.

On the other hand, canonical elements comprise: 1) stable form of living; in institute canonically erected by competent ecclesiastical authority; 2) a new personal consecration, established by the profession of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience, assumed through vows or other sacred bonds 3) union with the Church by the perfection of charity to which consecrated life tends; 4); free choice of the life by one who felt called to it, and the obligation of the observation of the laws of each of the institutes of consecrated life. These distinctive theological and canonical features of consecrated life are inseparable for its exhaustive comprehension.⁴⁶

Consecrated life has its origin in the action of the Holy Trinity. It proclaims what the Father, through the Son and in the Spirit, brings about by his love, his goodness and his beauty. In fact, "the religious state reveals the transcendence of the kingdom of God and its requirements over all earthly things. To all people it shows wonderfully at work within the Church the surpassing greatness of the force of Christ the King and the boundless power of the Holy Spirit."⁴⁷

Consecrated life is the life of Christ which he lived when he came to this world and which he proposed to his disciples. In what consists exactly the life of Christ? It is a life dedicated totally to the work of God's Kingdom, to doing the will of God. Consecrated life manifest the priority of God's kingdom above all earthly needs, and in a special way is evidence of "the unsurpassed breath of the strength of Christ the king and the infinite power of the Holy Spirit marvelously working in the Church."⁴⁸

The state of consecrated life is constituted by the profession of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience which are God's gift to the Church and are rooted in the words and examples of the Lord. A Christian binds him or herself to the evangelical counsels either through vows or other sacred bonds that are like vows in their purpose. It is by the means of this bond that a person becomes totally dedicated to God. Through this means, a person is ordained to the honour and service of God under a new and special title.⁴⁹

Indeed through Baptism a person dies to sin and is consecrated to God. However, in order that he may be capable of deriving more abundant fruit from this baptismal grace, he intends, by the profession of the evangelical counsels in the Church to free himself from those obstacles which might draw him away from the fervor of charity and the perfection of divine worship. By the profession of the evangelical counsels, then, he is more intimately consecrated to divine service.

⁴⁶ Cf. T. Rincon-Perez, Commentary on can. 573, op.cit., 1467 – 1470.

⁴⁷ VC 20.

⁴⁸ LG 44.

⁴⁹ Cf. LG, 43. 44.

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This consecration will be the more perfect, inasmuch as the indissoluble bond of the union of Christ and his bride, the Church, is represented by firm and more stable bonds.⁵⁰

The deepest meaning of the evangelical counsels is revealed in relation to the Holy Trinity. They are an expression of the love of the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit. By the practice of the evangelical counsels, the consecrated person lives with particular intensity the Trinitarian and Christological dimension which marks the whole of Christian life.⁵¹

Given that consecrated life constituted by the profession of the evangelical is divine gift to the Church⁵² which pertains to her life and holiness, Church authority has the duty and obligation to safeguard, interpret, regulate its practice by law and constitute them into stable form of living by canonical approval.⁵³

Referring to consecrated life as a stable form of life entails that it is something permanent that should last for one's whole life time and not just a hit and run affair.

The responsibility entrusted by Christ to Church hierarchy of caring for and leading the People of God to most fruitful pasture (Ez 34:14) applies equally to consecrated persons. Hence, Church hierarchy has the obligation to see that each institute of consecrated life "grow and flourish according to the spirit of the founders and wholesome traditions."⁵⁴

The state of persons who profess the evangelical counsels belongs to the life and holiness of the Church. Consecrated persons are called to benefit from a special gift in the life of the Church and to contribute to its saving mission according to the purpose and the spirit of each institute.⁵⁵ The evangelical counsels, based on the teaching and example of Christ the Master, are divine gift which the Church receive from the Lord and which by its grace it preserves always.⁵⁶

The values of consecrated life abounds; it aims at freeing those who embraced it from earthly cares; it manifest to believers the presence of heavenly goods already possessed here below; it witnessed to the fact of a new and eternal life acquired by the redemption of Christ, and also foretells the future and the glory of the heavenly kingdom,⁵⁷ and it "fosters the perfection of love of God and love of neighbor in an outstanding manner."⁵⁸

⁵⁰ LG 44.

⁵¹ VC 21.

⁵² Cf. LG 43, can.575

⁵³ Cf. LG 45, cann. 574, §§ 1 & 2, 576).

⁵⁴ Can. 576, cf. LG 45).

⁵⁵ Can 574, §§1, & 2

⁵⁶ Can. 575.

⁵⁷ Cf. LG 44.

⁵⁸ LG 45

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The life of the evangelical counsels is for the spiritual advancement of those called to live it and for the welfare of the whole Church. "These religious families give their members the support of a more firm stability in their way of life and a proven doctrine of acquiring perfection. They further offer their members the support of fraternal association in the militia of Christ and of liberty strengthened by obedience. Thus these religious are able to tranquilly fulfill and faithfully observe their religious profession and so, spiritually rejoicing, make progress on the road of charity."⁵⁹

The profession of the evangelical counsels appears as a sign "which can and ought to attract all the members of the Church to an effective and prompt fulfillment of the duties of their Christian vocation." (LG 44).

The life of total dedication to God's service according to the mind of the Church ought to inspire and foster in those called to it the exercise of the virtues of humility, obedience, fortitude and chastity. By the practice of these virtues they share in Christ's self-emptying and life in the Spirit.⁶⁰

The profession of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience, though entails renunciation of certain values, "does not detract from a genuine development of the human person, but rather by its nature is most beneficial to that development. Indeed, the counsels, voluntarily undertaken according to each one's personal vocation, contribute a great deal to the purification of heart and spiritual liberty. They continually stir up the fervor of charity. But especially they are able to more fully mold the Christian man to that type of chaste and detached life which Christ the Lord chose for himself and which his Mother also embraced. This is clearly proven by example of so many holy founders."⁶¹

Consecrated persons do not become strangers or useless to humanity by their profession of the evangelical counsels or consecration because even though they do not always mingle directly with their contemporaries, yet in a more profound sense they are "united with them in the heart of Christ and spiritually cooperate with them. In this way the building up of the earthly city may have its foundation in the Lord and may tend towards him, lest perhaps those who build this city shall have laboured in vain. Through their various work of apostolate, consecrated persons "render generous services of all kinds to humanity."⁶²

"A particular duty of the consecrated life is to remind the baptized of the fundamental values of the Gospel, by bearing "splendid and striking testimony that the world cannot be transfigured and offered to God without the spirit of the

⁵⁹ LG 43.

⁶⁰ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Up To Date Renewal of Religious Life, *Perfectae Caritatis*, in *The Vatican Collection, Vatican II*, The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents, New Revised Edition, Austin Flannery, General Editor, Costello Publishing Company, Northport, New York 1998, 5.

⁶¹ LG 46

⁶² LG 46.

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Beatitudes.”⁶³ The consecrated life thus continually fosters in the People of God an awareness of the need to respond with holiness of life to the love of God poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit(cf. Rom 5:5), by reflecting in their conduct the sacramental consecration which is brought about by God’s power in Baptism, Confirmation or Holy Orders. In fact it is necessary to pass from the holiness communicated in the sacraments to the holiness of daily life. The consecrated life, by its very existence in the Church, seeks to serve the consecration of the lives of all the faithful, clergy and laity alike.”⁶⁴

On February 2014, during the Sunday Angelus, Pope Francis on the importance of consecrated life affirms, “Every consecrated person is a gift for the People of God on a journey. There is much need of their presence that strengthens and renews the commitment to spread the gospel, to Christian education, to charity for the most needy, to contemplative prayer; the commitment to a human and spiritual formation of young people, of families; the commitment to justice and peace in the human family.

Consecrated persons are signs of God in diverse environments of life; they are leaven for the growth of a more just and fraternal society, prophecy of sharing with the little and the poor. As such understanding and experience, the consecrated life appears to us just as it really is: a gift of God! They are the leaven that carry the people of God forward!⁶⁵

PEOPLE’S EXPECTATION OF CONSECRATED LIFE

The world of today needs the contribution of the consecrated persons to mend its brokenness. On the expectation of the lay faithful from consecrated persons Professor M. Ogunu affirms, “The lay faithful have great expectations for men and women of the consecrated life. They expect them to be pure and holy and faithful to their religious vows so that they can be a sign of hope for a broken world. They expect them to be true imitators of Christ and His Mother by a life of prayer, contemplation, and faithful service to humanity, obedience, chastity, poverty and dedication to their calling.”⁶⁶

In the same vein Humphrey Best Iriabe, in his paper titled “Consecrated Life: Lay Perspective and Expectation”, presented on the occasion of the gathering of men and women religious in Benin City, 2015 asserts:

Today, we live in a social, cultural and political milieu that is daily damaged by sin, secularism, moral profligacy and relative materialism. Evil is real, sin remains at work in our world to inhibit our transformation. By your calling, you (men and women of consecrated life) are expected to help remake the world by revitalizing Gospel approach to issues. Your chastity, purity and holiness are not to be compromised. The biblical Samson, who was consecrated by God for a special purpose like

⁶³ LG 31.

⁶⁴ VC 33.

⁶⁵ Michael Ogunu, *Catholic Faith and Life*, Floreat System, Benin City 2015, 144.

⁶⁶ Michael Ogunu, *Catholic Faith and Life*, Floreat System, Benin City 2015, 154.

you, compromised his state of life and was in solidarity with promiscuous life...⁶⁷

Pope Paul VI in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelica Testificatio*, addresses religious on what is expected of them thus:

You must give your full attention to the needs of men, their problems and their searching; you must give witness in their midst, through prayer and action, to the Good News of love, justice and peace. The aspirations of men to a more fraternal life among individuals and nations require above all a change in ways of living, in mentality and in hearts. Such a mission, which is common to all the People of God, belongs to you in a special way.⁶⁸

The Church sees consecrated life as God's special gift to the whole People of God to be cherished and promoted by all. She expects that persons called to share in this special gift in the life of the Church will be a shining example to others and will serve as positive stimulus for them to fulfill their Christian duties by their own fidelity in living the evangelical counsels. Consecrated persons are seen as sign of God's presence that will bring renewal in the society and help people turn their attention to God's kingdom while trying to build the earthly city. Consecrated persons are looked upon as prophetic presence to remind people of God's will and who will combat all form of social injustice and see that the poor and the weak get what is their due in the society.

"Today's world is expecting to see in consecrated men and women the concrete reflection of Jesus' way of acting, of his love for every person without distinction or qualification. It wants to experience that, with the Apostle Paul, it is possible to say: "I still I live my human life, but it is a life of faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave his life for me (Gal 2: 20)."⁶⁹

CHALLENGES OF CONSECRATED LIFE

Consecrated life in Nigeria today and globally is facing challenges in living up to its mission.⁷⁰ The challenges include: Modernity/Secularism, Materialism, Individualism, and Disunity.

⁶⁷ Humphrey B. Iriabe, "Consecrated Life: Lay Perspective and Expectation", paper presented on the occasion of the gathering of men and women religious in Benin City, 2015, cited in Micheal Ogunu, *Catholic Faith and Life*, Floreat System, Benin City 2015, 154.

⁶⁸ Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation: *Evangelica testificatio*, 29 June 1971, in AAS, 63 (1971), 497-526), 52.

⁶⁹ Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Starting Afresh from Christ, A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium*, Paulines Publications Africa, Kenya 2002, 2.

⁷⁰ "All over the world, consecrated life is going through a difficult moment of transition: present structures no longer provide the answers like in the past, and new structures must be born and emerge from a new spirit. For this reason, it is necessary to point to a new paradigm. We need imagination and decisiveness to achieve

MODERNITY/SECULARISM

Modernity is marked with the growing of the phenomenon of secularism which is essentially a belief that man does not need God. It is “a system of doctrines and practices that disregards or rejects any form of religious faith and worship. Its primary objective is the total elimination of all religious elements from society.” Secularism is also known as secular humanism, which teaches that there are no objective or absolute truths defining right and wrong in essence. To secularize something is to make it worldly and unspiritual.⁷¹

The more the world is becoming secularized, the more the challenge of living authentic consecrated life, as secularized world does not give incentive to consecrated life rather, it impedes it and some among the consecrated tends to imbibe the mentality and lifestyle of the secularized world.

Pope John Paul II observes that “the legitimate need to be familiar with today’s society in order to respond to its challenges can lead to surrender to passing fashions, with a consequent lessening of spiritual fervor or a succumbing to discouragement. And that the praiseworthy desire to become close to the men and women of our day, believers and non-believers, rich and poor, can lead to the adoption of a secularized lifestyle or the promotion of human values in a merely horizontal direction. Sharing in the legitimate aspirations of one’s own nation or culture could lead to embracing forms of nationalism or accepting customs which instead need to be purified and elevated in the light of the Gospel.”⁷²

Modernity, Professor A. Akinwale rightly remarks, “has affected and continues to affect the way religious life is envisioned and lived.” He explains this influence thus:

First, modernity has attempted to replace God with the human person and that has effect on the way religious life is understood and lived today. Modernity is a period in history when God is marginalized in western societies and maligned in our own Africa societies. In the western world, advancement in science and technology tends to portray God as an idea of the past. In our African societies, despite what may be termed technological backwardness, there is appreciable impact of science and technology. There is a residue of African traditional beliefs that, if not married with reason, provides a fertile ground for maligning God, that is, saying of God what is not true of God. Religious life is an act of faith in God. But if God is overthrown and replaced, as modernity seem to have done, religious life is deprived of its fundamental motivation, which is perfect charity, the love of God above all things. If there is no God to whom the religious is to be bound, religious life becomes a way of life of an NGO. If God is taken out of the picture, it becomes impossible to

important changes of structure and lifestyle. Consecrated life finds it hard to offer to the present Christian life a new synthesis and an alternative that could touch and renew its identity and become a significant contribution to the Church and contemporary society.” J. M. Arnaiz, “The Great Challenges of Consecrated Life Today,” http://archive.paoline.org/paoline/allegati/15808/Arnaiz_LegrandiSfideVCoggi-eng.pdf, visited 17/04/ 2017.

⁷¹ Cf. <https://www.gotquestions.org/what-is-secularism.html>, visited 16/04/2017.

⁷² VC 38.

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justify religious life. It becomes a meaningless burden to embrace the evangelical counsels-counsels given by Jesus for the sake of the Kingdom of God-when God, Jesus and the Gospel are no longer taken into account. The greatest temptation of the religious today is to want to live a religious life without God. A religious life without God is a life without prayer. It is a life lived as if one could do without prayer, that is, without constantly seeking and deepening friendship with God. Modernity has affected the prayer life of the religious.⁷³

Consecrated life is a God centered life, hence it loses its intrinsic meaning and value when God is not given his deserve place in the life of consecrated persons. Institute of consecrated life will then be reduced to ordinary social club without spiritual foundation and goal. Authentic consecrated religious life is not possible without the grace of God which one receives through union with God that can be attained through prayer. There is tendency of forgetting the Lord of the work, while doing the work of the Lord among consecrated persons. In other words, the danger of activism.

There is danger of the work of the consecrated persons becoming ordinary humanitarian work instead of apostolate because the one doing it is disconnected with God and the work does not serve the goal of bringing persons to Christ. The soul of apostolate is first of all union with the will of God. The will of God is discovered in meditation and contemplation. Hence, the Church teaches that "The apostolate of all religious consists primarily in the witness of their consecrated life, which they are bound to foster through prayer and penance."⁷⁴

A consecrated person may not openly say that he or she does not need God, but he/she can implicitly act that by living in indifference of God, that is, by not seeking encounter and experience of Christ, that is, by been careless about personal prayer.

MATERIALISM

"Materialism which is the glorification of the world of matter over the world of the spirit seems to be the maxim today and Nigeria as a country is no exception in this idea. Materialism has consumed the mind of people in this country that it is now belief that every human action is actually directed at only achieving material gains. This pursuit for material gains is shown in the inordinate desire for money at all cost. This is because it is believed that when one gets money, one would do anything to remain comfortable."⁷⁵

⁷³ Anthony Akinwale, *Charism and Contradiction: Theological Reflections on Consecrated Life*, St Paul Publications, Ibadan 2013, 229- 230.

⁷⁴ Can. 673.

⁷⁵ S. Dagin, "Precis" in S. Ibi Ajayi, "Materialism and the Nigeria Society," in Proceedings of the National Seminaries Committee Workshops, Makurdi 2002, Ekpoma 2003 and Ibandan 2005 no. 2, C. M. Hammawa, editor, Fab Anieh Nigeria Limited, Jos 2005, 155.

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In our country Nigeria today, there is observable fact of exaggerated pursuit of things that are ephemeral: wealth, honour and power, instead of authentic fundamental values of integrity, truth and moral probity. People seek to be esteemed for what they have and position they occupy in the society than who they are in reality.

This plague of materialism has unfortunately equally affected us consecrated persons. Instead of competing for holiness, there is struggle for acquiring material things, position of honour and authority in the society and in the Church. Hidden campaign which takes different shapes does occur before and during general chapter in some institutes of consecrated life; for the purpose of securing vote for oneself or for others through whom one hope to get some material gains.

For some acquiring academic title is a top priority, to be gained at all cost not excluding compromising one's commitment. The search for personal security is taking upper hand among us than the desire for life of union with Christ and total self giving for others which is the essence of consecrated life. Call to consecrated life is a call to "leave everything" and thus to "risk everything" for Christ. But the Lord who calls is saying to the consecrated, "Rise, and have no fear." From the standpoint of the Christian life as a whole, the vocation to the consecrated life is, despite its renunciations and trials, and indeed because of them, a path "of light" over which the Redeemer keeps constant watch.⁷⁶

The Church demands intellectual and professional development of consecrated persons but not at all cost.⁷⁷ The Document *Vita Consacrata* reminds us that apostolic service does not depend primarily on human means but on God (VC 38).

Modern Means of Social Communication

Irrespective of its many advantages, which include quick access to useful information and easy communication, modern means of social communication has negative influences on consecrated life. It is time and money consuming, and thus could lead to the compromise of the vows of poverty and chastity, and time allotted to prayer. Besides, internet exposes consecrated persons to pictures that could constitute a danger to their chaste life.

Fraternal life in common, silence and solitude which foster union with God are challenged by modern means of communication. Nowadays, one can be in a community without any warm relationship with the brothers and sisters there as one can now easily maintaining relationship through internet connection or phone with others outside the community.

Some consecrated persons have lost sense of great silence indulging in internet or phone call late at night at high pitch, careless about the rule of great silence. This affects solitude and prayer life of the consecrated persons.

Without denying the positive aspects and usefulness of modern means of social communication, one makes bold to affirm that they are affecting consecrated life

⁷⁶ VC 40.

⁷⁷ Cf. Can. 660, §§ 1 & 2.

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negatively today. Hence, its prudent use by us consecrated persons is absolutely necessary for a fruitful consecrated life. Canon 666 demands observation of necessary discretion in the use of the means of social communication. It calls on the members of consecrated life to avoid whatever is harmful to their vocation and dangerous to the chastity of a consecrated person.

DISUNITY

Disunity based on ethnic, racial and character differences do exist among consecrated persons. This at times reaches point of becoming a great scandal to the lay folk, and disevangelizing. The first mission expected of consecrated persons and which modern world needs so much is the witness of brotherhood and sisterhood by their mutual love, care and respect for one another. The Church attributes to superiors and members of religious institutes the obligation of building fraternal community in Christ where God is sought and loved above all things (cf.can. 619).

On building fraternal community the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life enjoins consecrated persons thus:

Bear one another's burden, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Gal 6: 2). In the entire dynamic of community life, Christ, in his paschal mystery, remains the model and measure of the command of mutual love: we must love one another as he loved us. And he loved us to the point of giving up his life for us. Our life is a sharing in the charity of Christ, in his love for the Father and for his brothers and sisters, a love forgetful of self.

All of this, however, is not in the nature of the "old man," who wants communion and unity but does not want or intend to pay the price in terms of personal commitment and dedication. The path that leads from the "old man," who tends to close in on himself, to the "new man" who gives himself to others is a long and difficult one. The holy founders realistically emphasized the difficulties and dangers of this passage, conscious as they were that community cannot be improvised. It is not a spontaneous thing nor is it achieved in a short time.

In order to live as brothers and sisters, a true journey of interior liberation is necessary. Israel, liberated from Egypt, became the People of God after walking for a long time through the desert under the guidance of Moses. In much the same way, a community inserted within the Church as People of God must be built by persons whom Christ has liberated and made capable of loving as he did, by the gift of his liberating love and the heartfelt acceptance of those he gives us as guides.

The love of Christ poured out in our hearts urges us to love our brothers and sisters even to the point of taking on their weaknesses, their problems and their difficulties. In a word: even to the point of giving our very selves.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Fraternal Life in Community*, Paulines, Kenya 2004, 21.

In today's world torn apart by ethnic hatred or senseless violence, conflicting passions and interests, communities of consecrated life, are expected to spread the spirituality of communion first in their internal life and in ecclesial community, and beyond, through dialogue in charity among themselves. Communities of consecrated life, where persons of different ages, languages and cultures meet as brothers and sisters, are signs that dialogue is always possible and that communion can bring differences into harmony.

Consecrated men and women are entrusted the function of proclaiming by the witness of their lives, the value of Christian fraternity and the transforming power of the Good News, which makes it possible to see all people as sons and daughters of God, and inspires a self-giving love towards everyone, especially the least of our brothers and sisters. Such communities are places of hope and of the discovery of the Beatitudes, where love, drawing strength from prayer, the wellspring of communion, is called to become a pattern of life and source of joy.⁷⁹

WAY FORWARD FOR AUTHENTIC WITNESSING

Authentic witnessing is hindered by the challenges mentioned above. For these challenges to be overcome the following is necessary: Life of holiness, fostering intense and quality personal prayer life, and building a fraternal community.

LIFE OF HOLINESS

Holiness is demanded of all the Christ's faithful but most especially of consecrated persons. The vocation of consecrated persons to seek first the kingdom of God is first and foremost a call to complete conversion, in self-renunciation, so as to live fully for God. The Church recognizes the profession of the evangelical counsels as "a special path to holiness." Consecrated life has supplied the Church down through history holy men and women, who because of the work of God's grace in their life have carried out generously demanding works of evangelization impelled by love of God. The path to holiness involves accepting spiritual combat. We consecrated persons need the practice of asceticism to open out hearts to the Lord and to our brothers and sisters. Path to holiness equally entails fidelity to the founding charism, and spiritual heritage of each institute. It is in fidelity to the inspiration of the founders and foundresses that the essential elements of the consecrated life can be more readily discerned and more fervently put into practice.⁸⁰

It is through friendship with God that we, consecrated are better prepared to help people by our various apostolates. Consecrated life is marked with the thirst for the divine Absolute and for holiness.

Holiness entails unconditional love for God and neighbor. Great work can be accomplished for God and humanity only by one who truly loves. St Theresa of the Child Jesus right affirms that without love, the martyrs will not give their life, the Apostles will forget to preach the Gospel and missionaries will not evangelized.

⁷⁹ VC 51.

⁸⁰ Cf. VC 36.

God is the one who sanctifies; hence holiness is attained through constant union with God in prayer and works of love. The Holy Spirit pours out the love of God in our hearts through prayer. Here comes the importance of prayer.

FOSTERING DEEP PERSONAL PRAYER LIFE

The call to holiness is accepted and can be cultivated only in the silence of adoration before the infinite transcendence of God. All, believers and non-believers alike, need to learn a silence that allows the Other to speak when and how he wishes, and allows us to understand his words". In practice this involves great fidelity to liturgical and personal prayer, to periods devoted to mental prayer and contemplation, to Eucharistic adoration, to monthly retreats and to spiritual exercises.⁸¹

There is also the need to rediscover the ascetic practices typical of the spiritual tradition of the Church and of the individual's own institute. These have been and continue to a powerful aid to authentic progress in holiness. Asceticism by helping to master and correct the inclinations of human nature wounded by sin, is truly indispensable if consecrated persons are to remain faithful to their own vocation and follow Jesus on the way of the Cross.⁸²

On the challenges of consecrated life today and way forward, Carlos Palacio, in his article published in the magazine *Convergencia* of the Conference of Religious of Brazil asserts: "Consecrated religious life today is suffering from an undeniable 'evangelical anaemia,' both personal and institutional.... To overcome this anemia it is necessary to redeem its passion for the person of Jesus Christ, the first love that consecrated religious life ought to radiate."⁸³

Still on challenges of consecrated life and way forward, Abraham Kadaplackal aptly states:

The most pressing need and the most difficult challenge faced by the religious in the new millennium is "evangelical witness": to be the living Gospel, a sacrament of Christ's love. The Council had explicitly taught: Let religious see well into it that the Church truly show forth Christ through them with ever increasing clarity to believers and unbelievers alike - Christ in contemplation on the mountain, or blessing children and doing good to all men, always in obedience to the will of the Father who sent Him" (LG 46).

He continued:

Facing this challenge needs preparation. Part of that preparation is, without doubt, a deeper understanding of religious life. The topical scriptural text for the religious life is: "For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain

⁸¹ VC 38.

⁸² VC 38.

⁸³ Carlo Placio, cited in Jose M. Anaiz, "The Great Challenges of Consecrated Life Today," http://archive.paoline.org/paoline/allegati/15808/Arnaiz_LegrandiSfideVCoggi-eng.pdf, visited 17/04/ 2017.

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Christ" (Phil 3: 8). The challenge is simply to make this reality transparent in the life of the religious. This will be convincing witness the present world needs and this will inevitably make the religious more relevant, credible⁸⁴.

Overcoming the challenges of consecrated life according to J.M. Arnaiz requires reinvigorating or revitalizing consecrated life. Vitality here is identified with these expressions: impassioned following of Christ, radical discipleship, evangelical radicalness, witnessing to the primacy of God, evangelical spirituality, intense prayer, apostolic dynamism, missionary enthusiasm, lively communities, simple and open communities, option for the poor, and intense fervor. For him the watchword is: "return to Jesus," "return to the Gospel," "return to the Word of God," and forget all else. This comes from the Spirit and is identified with the passion for Christ and for humanity. It expects to create and support people who are consistent, men and women marked by evangelical truth, immersed in the Spirit of God; and create lively communities, simple and open, which are missionary and have an intense spiritual life. These communities and persons will be moved by fervor, fraternity and missionary dynamism. Consecrated life in our world has to work at recuperating the mystical aspect that comes from the prayerful reading of the Word of God, which is at the heart of being Christian and consecrated, and which leads to an impassioned following of Jesus and sharing with the poor. It must be fire, that is, Christian life and missionary self-giving.⁸⁵

BUILDING A FRATERNAL COMMUNITY

The Church urges superior and members to build fraternal community in Christ where God is sought and loved above all (cf. can. 619). Canon 602 states that "fraternal life proper to each institute unites all the members into, as it were, a special family in Christ. It is to be so defined that it proves of mutual assistance for all to fulfill their vocation. By their fraternal union, rooted and based in charity, the members are to be an example of universal reconciliation in Christ."

The modern world needs witnesses of true brotherhood and sisterhood. The only evangelizing community is a community where true fraternity exists, where members love, care for one another, and have one mind and one heart. Hence, building fraternal community is indispensable for the consecrated persons to be true witnesses of Christ in the world today. Their oneness's of heart and mind is the basis for their fruitful apostolate. Disunity that exist among consecrated persons today in some cases is a great challenge and obstacle to evangelization.

The document "Fraternal Life in Community" teaches that, "from the gift of communion arises the duty to build fraternity, in other words, to become brothers and sisters in a given community where all are called to live together. From

⁸⁴ A. Kadaplackal, "The Challenge of Evangelical Witness," in *Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium, challenges and Prospects*, J. Eruppakkatt, editor, St Paul Press Training School, Mumbai 2004, 56-57.

⁸⁵ J. M. Arnaiz, "The Great Challenges of Consecrated Life Today," http://archive.paoline.org/paoline/allegati/15808/Arnaiz_LegrandiSfideVCoggi-eng.pdf, visited 17/04/ 2017.

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accepting with wonder and gratitude the reality of divine communion shared with mere creatures, there also arises conviction of the need to make it always more visible by building communities “filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 13:52).

The community founded and headed visibly by Christ until his death has one mission: the spreading of the message of salvation to all nations. Peter was appointed by Christ himself to be the head of this community with the duty of pasturing it and seeing to the advancement of its mission. Following the great event of the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the apostles became fearless and could not yield to the threat of the Jews to stop preaching in the name of Christ (cf. Act 4, 17-20). Their main focus was on the fulfillment of the mission entrusted to them. At the complaints of the Hellenists against the Hebrews of the neglect of their widows in daily distribution of food, they have to appoint deacons to see to that need so that it does not interrupt their fundamental mission (Acts 6: 2-4). With the descent of the Holy Spirit the early apostolic community enjoyed special moment of grace. They became fearless and there was unity and love among them. The communal sharing of their properties was the result of their spiritual communion work of the Holy Spirit. They love one another and share their proprieties in common. These twelve men together with those who joined them later were able to spread Christianity far and wide because of the strong bound of love among them; the apostolic community was a real supernatural family initiated by Christ (cf. P. G. CABRA, *Breve Corso Sulla Vita Consacrata, Appunti di teologia e spiritualità* Seconda Edizione, Edrice Queriniana, Brescia 2006, 131; See V C 42).

This is the model religious life aspires to, living together as a family in Christ with one heart and one mind, to gather their resources together for the realization of their collective mission.⁸⁶ To help one another towards the realization of their personal vocation within the one mission of the institute as each one is gifted differently. The call of the superior in this community⁸⁷ is to make their being together a real fraternal life where each loves and respects one another.⁸⁸ Superior cannot do this alone without the collaboration of the members that is why the legislator says: “Superiors are to devote themselves to their office assiduously and, together with the members entrusted to them, they should be eager to build a community of brothers or sisters in Christ in which God is sought after and loved before all else.” A religious community though made up of people of different race and languages by their common spiritual gift become one body that exist for the fulfillment of one mission, which can only be achieved in a real fraternal community distinguished by mutual love and assistance.

⁸⁶ The charismatic gift of a religious family which members share makes people of different places live together as a family with one charismatic project. Things fall apart when individuals in pursuit of personal realization becomes careless of the common mission that gathers them together as a family.

⁸⁷ See Fraternal Life in community 69, Starting Afresh from Christ 14.

⁸⁸ “Fraternal life signifies a life shared in love, an eloquent sign of ecclesial communion typical of religious life but also to be practiced by other forms of consecrated life: Secular Institutes, Consecrated virgins, consecrated widows and widowers. All the consecrated religious included by their evangelical discipleship commit themselves to the fulfillment of the Lord’s command to love one another as he has loved us (cf. Jn 13:34)” VC 42.

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John Paul II emphasizes the importance of building fraternal community thus: The fruitfulness or fecundity of religious life depends on the quality of fraternal life in common. More still, the actual renewal of the Church and in religious life is characterized by a search for communion and community. Therefore, religious life will be meaningful to the extent it is able to construct “fraternal community where God is sought and love above all” (CIC, can. 619), and will lose its reason of existence when this dimension of Christian love, which is the construction of a small “family of God” with those who have received the same call is forgotten. Fraternal life must reflect the “goodness of God our Saviour and his love for men” (Tit 3:4), which is manifested in Jesus Christ. If however, this public witness of religious life to apostolic action or to self realization is postponed, religious community loses the power of evangelization and will not be any more that reality which St Bernard defined with the beautiful expression *Scholae amoris* (School of love) that is, places where one learn to love the Lord and to become day after day, sons of God, therefore brothers and sisters.⁸⁹

Living together in one house, eating together, praying together without mutual fraternal love and union of hearts is contradictory to the true sense of religious community life. It is equal to living together of strangers with each minding his or her business. The authority of a superior works so that the religious house is not merely a place of residence, a collection of subjects each of who lives an individual history, but a “fraternal community in Christ.” (cf. *Fraternal Life in Community*, 50b). It is union of heart and mind fruit of union with God (“If consecrated persons have dedicated themselves to the total service of God, authority promotes and sustains their consecration. In a certain sense, authority can be seen as “servant of the servants of God.” Authority has as its main task building in unity the brothers and the sisters of “a fraternal community, in which God is sought and loved above all.” A superior must therefore be, above all, a spiritual person, convinced of the primacy of the spiritual, both with respect to personal life and for the development of the fraternal life; in other words, he or she must know that the more the love of God increases in each individual heart, the more unity there will be between hearts. Thus, the superior’s main task will be spiritual, community and apostolic animation of his or her community.” *Fraternal Life in Community*, 50), which is the work of the Holy Spirit that makes religious community life a real communion. Union with God is achieved through listening to the word of God and reception of the Eucharist, source and summit of Christian life.

There is no community life without fraternity or fraternal communion; there is no communion without unity of purpose and aim which cannot exist without oneness of heart and mind. There can be no oneness of heart and mind without Christian love, there cannot be Christian love without the Spirit of God, source of unconditional love. The presence of the Spirit of God creates union of heart and

⁸⁹ Cf. JOHN PAULII, *Il Papa ai Consacrata*, in *Siate Testimoni!* Pauline, Milano 1994, 121 – 122.

mind, and fraternal love. The fraternal community of the apostolic community was constructed after the descent of the Holy Spirit, hence, the Holy Spirit is a *conditio sine qua non* of Christian community, there can be no fraternity without the Holy Spirit because He is the one who can create in us the spirit of benevolence towards our brothers and sisters typical of the new man. "It is the Spirit himself who leads the soul to the experience of communion with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ (cf. Jn 1:3), a communion which is the source of fraternal life. It is the Spirit who guides communities of the Consecrated life in carrying out their mission of service to the Church and to all humanity, in accordance with their original inspiration."⁹⁰ To build community of brothers and sisters is not an easy work; it demands a lot of sacrifices. It becomes yet more difficult in our present epoch with escalation of individualism.

CONCLUSION

Consecrated life is a call to radical following or imitation of Christ's form of life (a life at the service of God's Kingdom); a call to prophetic witnessing, to holiness, and to continual interior conversion.

John Paul II in the document *Vita Consacrata* underlined this fact thus, "All the sons and daughters of the Church, called by God to "listen to" Christ, necessarily feel a *deep need for conversion and holiness*. But, as the Synod emphasized, this need in the first place challenges the consecrated life. In fact the vocation of consecrated persons to seek first the kingdom of God, is first and foremost a call to complete conversion, in self-renunciation, in order to live fully for the Lord, so that God may be all in all. Called to contemplate and bear witness to the transfigured face of Christ, consecrated men and women are also called to a "transfigured" existence."⁹¹

Modern men and women need authentic witnesses not teachers, and listen to teacher to the extent they are witnesses (Paul VI). "Holy men and women have always been the source and origin of renewal in the most difficult circumstances throughout the Church's history."⁹²

Our Motherland, Nigeria needs saints, who will serve as models and incentive to others. We are blessed in Nigeria by many vocations to priestly and consecrated life. The greatest challenge to us consecrated persons and those called to priestly ministry in Nigeria today is commitment to our call, that is, to be authentic evangelizers and witnesses of Christ. This is only possible through a life of deep personal relationship with Christ, which can be acquired through a prayerful reading and meditation on the Word of God, and adoration of Jesus in the Most Blessed Sacrament.

The negative traits we mentioned earlier constitute a counter witnessing rather than authentic witnessing. Consecrated life will be a positive force in our country Nigeria and will contribute greatly to the creation of a renewed and better Nigeria, by our living our call to the fullest, that is, by our total dedication to God and salvific

⁹⁰ VC 42; cf. PC 1.

⁹¹ VC 35.

⁹² VC 35.

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mission to which he called us. We conclude our reflection with this statement of *Vita Consacrata*:

To the degree that they deepen their friendship with God, consecrated persons become better prepared to help their brothers and sisters through valuable spiritual activities such as schools of prayer, spiritual exercises and retreats, days of recollection, spiritual dialogue and direction. In this way people are helped to grow in prayer and will then be better able to discern God's will in their lives and to commit themselves to the courageous and sometimes heroic demands which faith makes of them. Consecrated persons "at the deepest level of their being...are caught up in the dynamism of the Church's life, which is thirsty for the divine Absolute and called to holiness. It is to this holiness that they bear witness". The fact that all are called to become saints cannot fail to inspire more and more those who by their very choice of life have the mission of reminding others of that call.

THE IMPORTANCE AND ROLE OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER AS AN INTERPRETER OF THE CHARISM AND IDENTITY OF A RELIGIOUS INSTITUTION

Sr. MaryAnn Osaroejii⁹³

ABSTRACT

This article aims at presenting the role of the general chapter in the interpretation of the Charism of the religious institutes. It looks at the meaning of the word Chapter and what happens during religious chapters. It explains the different levels of chapter and how they affect the institutes. Chapter is presented here as an analogous form of an ecumenical councils of the church albeit within the religious institute where positive ideas for on emanate. Every reform in the church is aimed at bringing back the original truth which the spirit inspired from the beginning and which God intended.

Since the Charism of every religious institute is paramount to the life and apostolate of the congregation, the article also presents to us the meaning of Charism, charisms as inspired by the spirit and how the general chapter enhances the understanding of our charism as religious men and women. It gives reasons why every religious should uphold the charism of his/her congregation and live to express in all sincerity, a life in line with the good seed sown in the congregation through the founders and Foundresses.

The article likened the General Chapter to the gathering of Jesus Christ with his disciples citing some biblical indications to the chapter.

Notwithstanding, it also tries to broaden our minds to the consistent working of the Holy Spirit in the founders and foundresses of our institutes, and how through the same spirit, these Charisms are also transmitted from one generation to the next for the continuation of expanding the horizons on the gospel value.

INTRODUCTION:

Religious life is a special call within the church to serve God in humanity and to express the love of Christ in its totality. Religious institutions are made up of men and women who have been called to this special relationship with God. They are people who are called to an interior life of prayer that is expressed in their witness of life through words and works.

While every institute of Consecrated Life has a different name and founders/foundresses, historically consecrated life as such has its origins from the monastic life of the early centuries of the church. Ultimately, all institutes of Consecrated Life have their roots in Jesus Christ, whom their members desire and strive to follow Him more closely. As the change in times is inevitable, this way of

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life got continually reformed from one century to the other. That is why today, we have newer forms of the same religious life.

These reformations are deemed necessary to give way for more realistic ideas to transpire with the already lived pattern, that the religious life could be livable and that the persons called to serve in this way of life, as well as their services could be more useful to the church and the world at large.

Since the relevance of religious communities for the life and holiness of the Church can never be overemphasized, it becomes weighty to examine the lived experience of today's religious communities, whether monastic and contemplative or dedicated to apostolic activity, each according to its own specific character. This is the more reason why the church from time to time calls for a council to put things in place. As the church considers a broader view of sustaining the mission of taking Christ to the people in their very situation and in the places where they are, religious institutions also in their specific way help the church to facilitate the spread of the gospel message. Jesus at the beginning of his public ministry chose from among the people his apostles who worked closely with him. He taught them and trained them on what to do. He did not just stop there, He called them together once in a while to teach them new things. The deeper they went into the work, the more they needed clarifications on the mystery of the incarnation.

We may safely assume that the followers of Jesus were having meetings to discuss pressing matters even after his death. Hence there were the different Councils of the Church, though the first one mentioned appears in Chapter 15 of the Acts of the Apostles, where Luke narrated the event of the Council of Jerusalem, thus:

A great issue faced the Christians. Led by James, head of the Jerusalem

Community, they had focused on converting Jews, and most doubted whether They should spread the faith to Gentiles. The unquestioned champion of Evangelizing the Gentiles was Paul. Basically, Paul presented his case; the assembled leaders, apparently all men, discussed what Paul had said; and James, speaking on behalf of the other leaders under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:28), agreed that the missionaries could go to the Gentiles, and from the discussions that followed arose the "apostolic letter" which was sent through Paul, Barnabas, Barabbas and Silas to Antioch (Acts. 15:22-29). With that the people were given the right directions and they knew exactly what to do and what not to do.

Over the years, in a bid to make the church more organized and to also clear up certain confusions in matters of faith, since the church is constantly faced with oppositions and questions regarding her teachings and traditions, there were 21 councils over a period of 2000 years, among which is the most recent Vatican Council II that has so transformed the face of the Church as well as religious life in general. In today's Church, these Councils are called Ecumenical Councils and they are assemblies of Patriarchs, Cardinals, residing Bishops, Abbots, representatives of

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heads of religious orders and other juridical persons, and other persons nominated or invited by the Pope. The purpose of an ecumenical council is to define and/or to expose doctrine, reaffirm truths of the Faith and Morals, and therefore, where necessary, extricate heresy. Ecumenical Councils are convoked by the Pope and their decisions, to be valid, must be approved by the Pope. Participation is limited to the persons who have a right, or are elected, or invited to participate in the assembly; the participants who are enabled to vote cannot delegate their voting rights.

However, although they are technically not the same, the General Chapters or the assembly of the Religious institutes and Societies of Apostolic Life have some similarities with the Ecumenical Councils since they are both linked with the task of moving the Church forward, though at different level. The General chapters of the religious institutes are held according to the frequency established by the particular laws (e.g. the Constitutions) of each Institute or Society. They also elect the Superior leaders of the institutes; most of these leaders have defined terms of office. Only some are elected for life like in the case of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits Fathers).

WHAT IS CHAPTER

According to the HarperCollins encyclopaedia of Catholicism, the Word “chapter” originated with the monastic practice of assembling daily to listen to a reading of a chapter from a monastic rule. Gradually this gathering included discussions and decisions concerning the application of the rule. This assembly often took place in a so-called chapter house.

This definition of chapter given here must have been drafted centuries ago but is not far from what is applicable today.

Chapter in today’s sense is an avenue created for members of religious communities to share ideas, for discussing or passing vital information. Chapter is an opportunity for positive deliberations that can enhance the growth of an institution.

Speaking with an elderly sister of my Congregation (Rev. Sr. Christeta Hess), on what happens during chapter, she said, it is the meeting of sisters from many different cultures and ministry fields in an atmosphere of prayer, sharing, and deliberating with one another. She said chapter helps to deepen our own understanding of what we were called to do and in what kind of congregation. She continued that chapters help to deepen our spirit and charism and that, even in the face of the changing world, when our root is deepened enough in Christ, then change is no problem.

It is imperative to have in mind that every Founder of the religious group would like the identity and spirit with which he began to live on even after they are no more. And that is why even as older members of the Religious institutions get retired or pass on, younger and newer members join and need to be helped to understand and internalize the spirit and charism of the institute. So, there is the constant need to properly transmit the value and nature of the Congregation to the younger members, not just relating it the

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way it was expressively lived in the past but as it relates to the situation of our own time and place. This means that it is necessary to interpret the charism of the religious congregation in a way that is understandable to new members and may be better appreciated and expressed by every member. This will help them, particularly the new members, to have a sense of belonging and they can freely and courageously participate in the life. It is the duty of chapters to open the eyes of the entire congregation to these contents of change as we move from one generation to the next, and as we try also to update our traditional modes of expressing our identity, we should hold in high regard our values as handed on by the founders and foundresses.

There are different kinds of chapters. And in recent times, religious chapters take the form of the hierarchical structure of the religious institutions. There is the house or local chapters which involve religious men or women living in a particular community. The content of this level of chapter has basically to do with the issues surrounding the particular community or again to discuss information passed on from the leadership teams as they affect their particular community. Local or house chapter does not make any changes in the affairs of the institute, rather it relates to what is at hand in the current local community. Starting from there, it can of course also develop ideas what could make the life of the total congregation more effective in the present time. The house chapter is held regularly and it helps the community members to be more collaborative in deciding a way they can collectively carry out their apostolates and live community life according to the spirit of their congregation.

Furthermore, there are the Pro-regional, regional and provincial chapters. Here members within a particular country gather with or without a representation of general leadership to deliberate on issues concerning them. These two levels of chapters streamline their discussions to conform to the prior suggestions and decisions of the general chapter. According to the rules of the institute, these Chapters also elect leadership of the level at which it is held.

Similarly, the General Chapter is the assembly of religious men and women from the different provinces, regions and pro-regions as the case may be, where a religious institution has spread. Here the main focus is on how to foster the spread of the gospel values according to the tradition of the congregation. The General Chapter is chaired by the superior general.

The encyclopaedia stated that general chapter promotes the active participation of members of a religious institute in the life and welfare of the institute, that is to say, that the general chapter helps in the integration of the charism and identity of every religious institution. It further listed that protects the institute's patrimony, promotes renewal in the members, publishes norms for observance by the institute and also elects the General leadership team.

Every general chapter's decisions are drawn from the existing composition of the constitution or rule of the institute. And such decisions are not in any way to counter

any provision of the rules of the congregation; rather, the rules should guide the decisions and deliberations of the chapter. The general chapter by the thirteenth century became a requirement for all religious institutes.

CHARISM AND IDENTITY

Charisms are gifts of the Holy Spirit used to serve, sanctify and minister life in the Church and in the world. Ministering life here means, bringing Christ who is life to the world. God the father desired that those he created should enjoy life in abundance. And Jesus during his public ministry, said "I have come that they may have life and have it in full" (John. 10:11) and in another text he said "I am the way, the truth and the life..." (John 14:6). Charisms are the life breathed upon us by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost that we may move without fear to the ends of the earth. They are a manifestation of Jesus' intention to equip his chosen ones for the Mission.

The encyclopaedia of Catholicism has it that, it is a divine spiritual gift to individuals or groups for the good of the community. St. Paul in his first letter to the (1Corinthians, 12:7) expressed, that "to each is given the manifestation of the spirit for the common good. All these gifts are activated by one and the same spirit who allots to each one individually just as the spirit chooses". God chooses people, groups or Organizations through the Holy Spirit to work differently but all must be channeled towards the one purpose of spreading God's kingdom which was his mission on earth.

During one of the classes I had as a Novice, my Novice Directress explained intensely, what Charism is. She said the term "Charism" denotes any good gift that flows from God's benevolent love. In other words, it simply means any spiritual gift given to an individual out of God's love for the good of others. This implies that we do not merit the gifts but they are given to us out of the Love God has for us and most importantly they are given to us for the sake and good of others and as such must be used for that purpose.

Furthermore, it can also mean any of the spiritual graces granted to Christians to enable them perform their tasks in the Church. In the narrowest sense, it is a theological term for the extraordinary graces given to individual Christians for the good of others.

These extraordinary spiritual gifts, often termed "Charismatic gifts" are: the word of wisdom, knowledge, increased faith, the gift of healing, the gift of working miracles, prophecy, the discernment of the spirits, diverse kinds of tongues etc. (Cf. 1 Corinthians 12:8-10). To these gifts mentioned above are added the special ministerial gifts of apostles, prophets, teachers, helpers - connected to the service of the poor and the sick - and government or leadership ability which are connected with certain offices in the Church.

The charisms of all religious Orders reflect the actions of our Lord Jesus Christ. The bible explains how to use the gifts of the Spirit in (1 Peter 4:11): "If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very word of God, if any one serves, they

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should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ”.

Religious orders use the word “Charism” to describe their spiritual orientation or any special characteristic of their mission or value. An example might be the works of a teaching order compared to that of a missionary order or one devoted to the care of the poor, the sick and those who are in need of help. The charism of a religious order is the charism of her founder or foundress. By the charism of the founder or foundress, we mean the special grace granted by the Holy Spirit to an individual in order to empower that person to found a religious institute and to configure its shape and identity. When the spirit possesses a soul, the soul grows from strength to strength and this is made manifest in the lives of our founders who understanding their own special charisms, listened more intensely to the movements and promptings of the spirit and so they grew and established into what we have today. The charism of a religious order is what gives the members of that order their identity. Jesus Christ calls all religious to identify with his own way of life since he is the reason for our vocation. We see him in everything; in the Sick, the Poor, the abandoned, the homeless, the voiceless, and the unjustly imprisoned. Therefore whatever we do to these mentioned, we did it for Christ.

. In total humility Christ carried out his own mission on earth, so that he never deviated from the will of his Father who sent him. He is also urging us to do same as expressed in the book “ To live is Christ - Nature and Grace in the Religious life” by Robert W. Gleason “I am all that you see me to be, I have all the perfection that you admire in me, because I am humble. If you wish to be capable of imitating me in everything, in my virtues, in my words, in my actions, in my attitudes towards God and towards man, learn of me to be humble of heart”

In a nutshell, our charism as a religious institute is that identity which gives us a particular and unique character different from other religious orders. For instance, the Charism of The Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ which is to “Propagate Virtue through example, instruction and prayer” differs from that of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul that is devoted to “serving Christ in persons who are Poor through corporal and spiritual works of mercy” as well as that of the Jesuits in which “Dedication to the greater glory of God” is the first feature of their life style. The same applies to other religious institutes like, the Dominicans, Franciscans, Claretians, and Cistercians to mention but a few . All these charisms, though different in words and grammatical presentations, have some similarities in their apostolic expressions. The religious therefore have their root in their charisms. Through these charisms, they express and realize the total giving of themselves to God and to God’s plan of salvation for humankind.

The charism of religious life has three dimensions namely: missionary, apostolic-prophetic and eschatological. It is missionary because it bears witness to the life of Jesus and to the gospel. It becomes apostolic-prophetic when it proposes a new and eternal life won by the redemption of Christ. Then its eschatological dimension

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prefigures or represents the future resurrection and the glory of the heavenly kingdom.

Put differently, the charism of a religious congregation refers to the distinct spirit that animates a religious community and gives it a particular character. Our Charisms are so strong that they cannot be extinguished, even if every written or saved record concerning it is destroyed. It lives on by the testimonies of its members and those whose lives have been and are still touched in one way or the other.

God remains happy with us when we strive both as individuals and as a group to sincerely increase and not to extinguish the light rays that shine forth from our charism -- while we endeavour to express the same charism -- as handed down by the earlier members of our religious Institute. And in doing so we appreciate God each day for his gifts. Those who received these gifts and Charisms from the beginning, lived all their lives in gratitude to God, because they were aware that they received these graces not because of their worthiness or merit, but because it pleased God that they be chosen; and so they remained humble so that God may direct their paths. Blessed Mother Mary Katherine, the Foundress of the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ, emphasizes on allowing God's will to prevail. She expressed this often. In one of her letters to her sisters, she wrote for example: "May the holy will of God be done in all things and everywhere in our whole congregation, in all our convents, in all the sisters, in all our works and duties, down to the least until the holy will of God means everything to us. For this we ask, not for what we want or do not want".

Blessed Mary Katherine Kasper, just like other founders of religious institutes, understood herself to be called by the Holy Spirit and in prayer; she faithfully followed the guidance of the spirit. Thus, she experienced her vocation to such handmaid service. Out of her love and passion for the poor, Mother Mary Katherine chose the name "Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ" as the name of her congregation, and this name expresses the charism of her congregation. Handmaid simply means "servant". So our charism is "Readiness to serve through example, instruction and prayer". These services we try to render in love, humility and simplicity and through our services, we propagate and promote virtues.

Consequently, we must gently and obediently embrace the life pattern and methods reserved for us. We are obliged to use our good gifts and talents as members of our religious institutes, for the building up of the institutes we belong to. And in doing this, we are to sincerely submit ourselves wholly to be used by the congregation according to the discretion of the spirit through the superiors.

It is a fact that as persons, we have got some personal values and principles but as religious people, we evaluate each day to see that those are blended to be in conformity with the vision of our founders. As we spread and move into the nooks and crannies of the world, there is the certainty that the people out there will just stay to watch and see what we are up to. We can only succeed in bringing Christ to them if we remain consistent with our acts of love and justice as Christ did.

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It is important that we have a deep knowledge of who Christ is and as individual members, have a personal relationship with him, so we could in turn relate to these others. If we have embraced specific charisms by belonging to a particular institute, let us joyfully represent what we believe in and the identity with which we are marked. What we are called to is a very sensitive course which demands our readiness to take risks at any time. That is why every religious man and woman must be spiritually strong and mature, mature in the sense that we are fully aware of the presence of God working in us. Our Charism brings us into a unique relationship with God. There is something he wants to achieve through us, and so in this relationship, we must each day renew our readiness to make sacrifices, to offer something to God. It is very certain that God cannot ask of us what we cannot give. As Blessed Mary Katherine Kasper puts it in her letter to her sisters in December 28, 1884: "Good sisters work calmly and peacefully ... they take no notice of old age and weakness, for each sister does what she can and God demands nothing more". This is a clear statement that calls for constant self-examination. The hidden question here is, Have I, in all sincerity, worked to the measure of the strength I have received, or do I reserve some energy for a different purpose? One important thing to know is that, God does not just allow us to work by ourselves, rather he accompanies every demand he makes of us with an actualizing grace. This is very much evident in the lives of some important biblical personalities, for example: Abraham and our Blessed Virgin Mary.

Expressively, God's covenant with Abraham is an indication to this, that at the long run in his relationship with God, God asked of him a very un-imaginable sacrifice. The sacrifice of his only Son, Isaac: the only thing Abraham had ever yearned for and he was given. It is truly fascinating, that there was no resistance on the part of Abraham; he did just as God demanded. This is because Abraham had reached a high level in his relationship with God. He had faith in God and believed that even his Son was given to him by God, so ideally he was only returning what he had received. Abraham was fully involved in, and focused on this precious covenant he had with God and would not let anything come between him and God.

Similarly, reflecting shortly on the vocation story of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we could see how she gave up her youthful pleasure for the mission of our salvation. Every religious should take Mary as a model; we should be courageous and strong in carrying out our work. We should be willing to let go of our reservations like our founders did and to give ourselves fully and totally. For Jesus said in the Gospel of Luke. 9:24: "Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me, will save it".

However, Jesus urges us to remain constant in doing good even amidst the chaotic economic and political climate of our time, we should become faithful witnesses of our charism wherever we go, bearing in mind the command of God that accompanies every Charism "Go into the world and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19).

THE GENERAL CHAPTER AND THE INTERPRETATION OF CHARISM

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Every General chapter is like the beginning of a new dawn. It is a period of re-examination, a time of re-evaluating our abilities so far in the transmission of the gospel value embedded in our different Charisms. It is not a time for mediation or settlement of disputes; it is rather a season to peer into the future with the whole congregation, using a single eye.

The interpretation of Charisms usually involves a collective commitment. That is why the general chapter is considered a viable avenue for the purpose. The participants of the general chapter include delegates representing the entire congregation, and so whatever decisions agreed upon by the delegates are generally accepted by the total membership of the religious institution. Since those delegated to the General Chapter meeting are people who to an extent have experienced the life of the institution, the other members await a quality information at their return.

Prior to the general chapter, some committees are set up for a short term, to help look into specific areas of the Congregation. The focus is to see how all the congregational activities could be better carried out in the spirit of the institution.

For instance, there is the evaluation of community living, apostolate, formation, prayer and spirituality, finance management etc. Other aspects are contained within these discussions, even though the tags may differ from one congregation to the other. But the questions are: What was from the beginning, what has been, how effective has it been? Has it worked out with the method that has been chosen? etc.

General Chapter is a time to decide on some positive changes that could enhance the spiritual growth and foster sincere involvement of the members in the work of the congregation. Every religious institute, being members of the church, the body of Christ, systematically possess the characteristics of living things. Every living thing including human beings grows and develops and as this growth takes place there are inevitable changes that must be allowed to enable a holistic growth. The General chapter creates these opportunities for possible changes to take place. Change belongs to the phenomena that demand access to every part of the institution's life. And when a single unit is reframed, restructured or amended, the other parts are also adjusted since the parts of the body are connected to each other. Such access could be likened to, when an application is being downloaded into an Android phone for the first time, it brings up a dialogue box with such inscriptions ... will need an access to some packages (messages, personal information, etc.). The operator is expected to either accept or decline. Declining will mean, remaining with only what is available while accepting will add another package to what is there already and then the operator enjoys an improved version of the gadget.

The world changes with the passing of decades and centuries. What was possible in one century takes a different dimension in subsequent centuries and so there are changes in ideas, understandings, structures etc. These changes knock at the doors of different congregations as they carry out their work and as they strive to express their identity to the world. Unfortunately they are not allowed entrance in some

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religious institutions. Some do not want to adapt to anything new and so prefer to remain where they are in their closet, un-contaminated.

Robert W. Gleason in his book, *To live is Christ: Nature and grace in the religious life*, opined that, for many religious, the word adaptation has an ugly sound. It seems to suggest a disguised attack upon those ancient traditions of their order which incarnate the original spiritual intentions of their founders and foundresses. Nevertheless adaptation to modern conditions is a necessity for every religious congregation if it is to continue to meet the needs of the modern mind. In as much as the religious orders grow, spread to different parts of the world, and are open to admit people of recent time and people with modern ideology, it is important also to apply prudence and caution while adapting to any form of change, especially since there is no definite clarity in the economic and social questions in the world.

The General chapter has it as a duty to make sure that no change is made or adapted without considering all aspects of a situation, since it is sometimes difficult to reverse a change once it is introduced. These considerations should begin with the original intention of the founder for the congregation.

Speaking during the 5th general chapter of the Schoenstatt Fathers, the Holy Father Pope Francis stressed the need for religious orders to maintain their Charisms and transmit them accordingly so that they will continually be inspired in their lives and mission. *He further explained that , these charisms are not to be kept in a showcase just for contemplation and it is enough, he said, fidelity to keep the charism pure, in no way means to short it In a sealed bottle , so that it is not contaminated by the outside.* No, he said the charism must be opened and allowed to go out, so that it enters into contact with reality, with persons, with their anxieties and problems. His take is that when our charisms come in contact with reality, the charism grows, it is renewed and the reality is also transformed; it is transfigured by the spiritual force that the charism bears.

Consequently, as members of Christ's body, the spiritual radiance of our charisms should engulf our lives as members; it should penetrate to mingle with the situation within us. Then when we allow ourselves to be transformed from where we are, we can move to touching the lives of others around us in their own very situations. We could systemically change the situations of our environment and our world.

Members of religious orders progress differently in their work and apostolate. And this depends on how a person was able to allow his or herself to be immersed into the spirit of the congregation. It is important, as St. Paul puts it in his second letter to the Corinthians, chapter 3: 4-6, that we do not attribute anything to ourselves, as if it were our own, but to acknowledge that our capacity comes to us from God.

The General Chapters lays emphasis on the need for the members to pay more attention to the living presence of God working in and with them and to also identify (to) which direction he is pointing to at the time. And this is how we grow with our charism. As Pope Francis suggested earlier, we should be moving and not

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just to be stuck. If this is the case, the end result will be boredom and members can become worn-out since the spirit is not refreshed and the hope not renewed.

It is an avenue to teach members how to live life outside the enclosed box of their own perceptions which may not really be directing them to the reality all the time. This could also be the case of the whole institute. When a religious institute is so centered in itself, not allowing even the slightest wind from outside to refresh it, it gradually becomes solely self-referential and narcissistic; the human ideology takes precedence rather than the divine idea. This situation could lead to stagnation, so that there will be no room for spreading their wings, for true renewal and becoming disciples of all nations as our Lord Jesus Christ intended it. When there is a progressive movement from the self towards the original root (God) made manifest in humanity, then there will be much success recorded of their life and work.

The General chapter also evaluates the prayer life of the members, and offers new ways in which the members could improve in prayer. Prayer is what sustains every religious. This sincere and gentle dialogue with God who has called us is the key that keeps us safe in his shelter. God is our first love, he is the beginning of our vocation story and he should also be the end. So that in all things, we should always turn to God to seek his will.

In the same vein, Pope Francis said in his address during the 5th General Chapter of the Schoenstatt Fathers; *"It is not good to neglect prayer, or worse still to abandon it. If the Lord does not build a house, in vain do its builders labour"* (Psalm 127:1) furthermore, *"It would be a grave error to think that the Charism of a congregation is kept alive by concentrating on external structures, on schemes, on methods, on the forms"*. He said that *the vitality of the Charism is rooted in the 'first love' (Revelations 2:4).*

There is therefore, the need to once in a while, examine if we are still working in union with our first love, the point of our unity, the place where we have our sense of belonging; the fountain where the hope of our eternal salvation lies. In prayer, we meet with our true selves and we are able to freely unfold our inner poundings to the one who sees everything (Psalm 139).

Conclusively, when we are rooted and well-grounded in our specific charisms, our goodness in relating with one another and the extension we make to those out there who come in contact with us through our services of teaching, counseling, health apostolates, hospitality, charitable services of different kinds, especially as regards to the poor and abandoned. All that can never be short lived. If we take a closer look at our world today, we see people with their violent way of approaching life. Even our environments have remained hostile to those who live in them. Now there should be a different feeling when they come to us. There should be that feeling of peace, serenity, love, kindness, patience, faithfulness, trust and gentleness, we should make ourselves the victim for the sacrifice rather than just staying aloof and instructing as Sr. Irene (PHJC) puts it during my interview with her. We should be people who bear within them the seeds of the Holy Spirit. That is why, every general chapter is a new opportunity to re-evaluate our experiences so far and then try to reshuffle our steps

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The Holy Bible.

RESOURCE PERSONS

- Sr. Christeta Hess (PHJC)
- Sr. Kelechi Ifoegbu (PHJC)
- Sr. Irene Alonge (PHJC)
- Rev. Cornelius Apili (SJ).

**MERCY AND TRUTH SHALL MEET TOGETHER FOR RENEWAL AND
FIDELITY IN THE CHURCH:**

Oseni J. Osilama Ogunu, OMV⁹⁴

ABSTRACT

There has been an increased general interest on the theme of practice of mercy and doctrinal truths taught in the Catholic Church in recent years. Sometimes, the discussion tends to emphasize, or even pit one against the other; or it gives the impression that mercy is a new theme in the Church. This article reflects on the theme of truth and mercy which, to use the biblical expression, will meet together or embrace (Cfr.Ps.85:10). The need for such meeting in the Church life and mission has become more evident in our time many call for renewal (or reform) or for faithfulness in the Church, whether as individuals, communities and structures. The reflection highlights the meaning, value and practice of mercy and truth, drawing elements from the Sacred Scriptures, the Church's teaching, the writings of Venerable Fr. Pius Bruno Lanteri, and others. It also considers the relationship between mercy and truth, and indicates some of the specific spheres of life, the family life included, where mercy and truth embrace or should meet in action, in reality of life.

“Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck;
write them upon the table of thine heart.” (Proverbs 3:3).

INTRODUCTION

There is a renewed interest on the themes of *mercy* and *truth* in Church today. These matters are explored by theologians and pastors. They have been special object of attention in the Popes' exhortations. Pope St. John Paul II⁹⁵ and Benedict XVI⁹⁶ emphasized the necessity and value of truth. Particularly in recent years, Pope Francis reiterates and upholds the vital place and importance of doctrinal truths, but also highlight the theme of mercy and compassion of God and, therefore, the mercy that every human being, especially Christian,

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⁹⁵ For example, John Paul II, Encyclical letter, *Veritatis Splendor* (Splendor of Truth). John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Dives in Misericordia* (*Rich in Mercy*), 30/11/1980.

⁹⁶ BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas In Veritate* On Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth (29/6/2009); Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (Benedict XVI), *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

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should show to and receive from our neighbour in practical ministry and life.⁹⁷ Both the Magisterium and theology have traditionally acknowledged that Truth and Mercy are vital and interconnected themes in Christian teachings, based on the Gospel message and Catholic tradition. Aware “that authentic understanding and genuine mercy are never separated from the truth”,⁹⁸ pastors, Religious Superiors, and theologians have the duty to remind the faithful of the Church's teachings concerning not only the celebration of sacraments but also the day-to-day living of values and the apostolic mission of consecrated life as foreseen by the Constitutions of each institute of consecrated life.

Nevertheless, hearing or listening to some – and let me add this once and for all: it is surely not in *all* – discussions one senses a worrisome notion of “mercy” at play. In certain discussions, one gets the impression that mercy does exactly what the Karol Wojtyła the theologian insists it cannot – pretend that God’s Justice and Mercy are at loggerheads, the latter prevailing. It is claimed that an insistence on mercy distorts, contradicts or deviates from the truths the Catholic Church proclaims. This frequently led to name-calling. One group is sometimes tagged “liberal” and are accused of wanting to “change” doctrines, of “misleading” and creating “confusion” among the faithful, etc. The other are at times labelled “conservatives”, and alleged to be insensitive to the sufferings and pains of people, or accused of being ignorant and uncaring of the agony that real life and plights of persons, members of one’s religious institute, families sometimes imposes, and that, in a word, they lack mercy and compassion. Frequently, on either side of the aisle, there are oversimplifications, caricature or generalization of the other’s position, or in the assessments, sometimes fruit of prejudices and fears. Whatever evaluation one makes of such allegations, the impression is sometimes given that *truth* and *mercy* are opposed and are not interrelated values even in specific cases, such that one is expected to opt for either one or the other. So, for some people, the Christian community is or ought to be primarily or mostly concerned with upholding *truth* seen as the only thing that matters, while, for others, the Church should focus on the proclamation and practice of *mercy*, almost unilaterally emphasized simply as “the key” to Christian life, “the essence” of the Gospel. Is this true? A reductive and “one-way” approach may itself be deceptive, a misrepresentation or misleading, and hence an impoverishment of a complex matter. This has lead many to ask: are

⁹⁷ Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, MV, 1

⁹⁸ Cf. Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Humanae Vitae*, n. 29: AAS 60 (1968) 501; John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Pœnitentia*, n. 34: AAS 77 (1985) 272, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor*, n. 95: AAS 85 (1993) 1208; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith *Letter To The Bishops Of The Catholic Church Concerning The Reception Of Holy Communion By The Divorced And Remarried Members Of The Faithful*, 14/9/1994, n. 3; The Final Report Of The Synod Of Bishops To The Holy Father, Pope Francis, Vatican City, (24 October 2015), n. 34: “The Christian message always contains the reality and dynamics of mercy and truth, which converge in Christ (...)”, n.36: “No matter how distant, every family can attain mercy and be sustained by this truth,” n.55: “Proclaiming the truth in love is itself an act of mercy”; Pope Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia* (2016).

the teachings of the Church's Magisterium on mercy, as proclaimed through the centuries, not themselves a part and parcel of the "Truths" on faith and morals that the Catholic communities has always professed and practice? Are not the divine attribute and the virtue of mercy important aspects of the Truths the Catholic community believes in and that have practical social and moral implications? Isn't the proclamation of truths in love itself a demand and an act of mercy?⁹⁹

In the following reflection, I only wish to highlight that Christians, including the consecrated persons, are called in their mission and situations to seek and witness, inseparably, both mercy *and* truth. Focusing on selected aspects of "Mercy" and "Truth", this article, first, notes that the "Truth vs. Mercy" talk is a recurrent temptation a false and misleading framing of the issue that tends to create an artificial separation. Then, it discusses the value and practice of mercy, followed by some considerations on the significance, search for and communication of truth, before presenting the relationship between truth and mercy; finally, it suggests *albeit* in broad terms some important areas and situations of life where truth and mercy meet or should embrace.

1. A RECURRENT TEMPTATION IN NEW ENVIRONMENT

Attempts to divorce *truth* and *mercy*, opposing one to the other or, at least, downplay or ignore either one in favour of the other, is not a totally new phenomenon. At the level of reflections and/or of pastoral practice, there had attempts to do so. The Catholic teaching on justice was sometimes pit against mercy. The doctrine in favour of life, as expressed in Paul VI's Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* had been interpreted as being against freedom to choose or the individual's human rights. Such setting of issue perhaps reflects a frequent expression of the temptation to separate "faith" and "life", "doctrine" and "life"/"pastoral", "theology" and "practice," this time around under a new pontificate, or a new theological and pastoral climate and sensitivity, a new form of being and expressing *Church*, or under a particular pretext or guise (e.g. pastoral care for marriage and family life; preferential option for the poor; the marginalized persons those in the "periphery"; climate change).

In the late 18th and first half of 19th centuries, the threats and impact of the theological movements like rigorism, laxism and Jansenism were still very felt at reflective and pastoral levels and they aggravated such temptation. In fact, today it is argued that new forms of these currents of thoughts persist. However, in the face of major threats and dangers to the life and mission of the Church, theologians and pastors, founders and foundresses of institutes of consecrated life, and other Catholic thinkers have emerged and, in their own ways, reaffirmed the value, vital place and need of both certain Christian truths and mercy in the Christian Message and in the Christian life. They did so through

⁹⁹ The *Final Report* of the Synod of Bishops to the Holy Father, Pope Francis (24 October 2015), n.55, asserts: "Proclaiming the truth in love is itself an act of mercy".

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theological, spiritual, pastoral and philosophical writings and/or various forms of apostolate or pastoral choices – in some cases institutionalized through religious foundations. Reflecting on *mercy* and *truth* one cannot but make references to one or two of the many founders of religious institutes, as an example; some of their insights and attitudes on mercy and truth providentially find pertinence and relevance, to some extent, in the present-day context of the Church in our time, as one can see even from a glance at some of the recent publications and internet resources in the last few Years. At critical moments of the history of the Catholic Church, some founders have specially stood out as promoters and defenders of the Truths and Mercy according to Church's teaching. Take the St. Dominic (8 August 1170 – 6 August 1221), for instance:

“St Dominic's life was characterised by the practise of mercy and, ever since, his example has inspired men and women to follow him in the Order as Preachers of God's mercy. St Dominic's legacy to the Church is an Order that at its best faithfully lives its motto of *Veritas* (Truth). St Dominic realised that the truth was not merely something that we know, but a way of living which saves. He was acutely aware of how many people, even within Christendom, had not properly heard this saving truth and, motivated by mercy, he desired to share this truth with as many as possible. He saw the lie in any attempt to oppose mercy to truth.”¹⁰⁰

A protagonist of his time is also Venerable Pius Bruno Lanteri (1759-1830), a theologian and founder of religious institute, who was profoundly familiar with the multifaceted epochal changes, the revolutions (e.g. French revolution, the Napoleonic era, Restoration/ “Risorgimento” periods), the principal theological movements and errors and their effects in the church and in the society of his time.¹⁰¹ It was Church with which, to some extent, the present debates concerns about Christian truths and mercy has resonance and analogy, though a quite distinct socio-ecclesial milieu in many senses. Lanteri saw the existence of a combat between what he calls “Catholic principles” and “philosophical principles”. He ponders on the effects of the recent “past revolutions” upon the faith and morality of the people. He saw the increase of Religious indifference or apathy. He notes that “errors” and “false principles”¹⁰² are spreading. He noticed Voltaire re-echo the grudges against positive religions while suggesting that people should accept the *natural religion* recommended by Bayle, Herbert de Cherbury, Spinoza, and Locke. The fundamental truths of the Christian Religion were defined by many of these thinkers as moral and social necessity, a social construct. The mathematician and philosopher, Jean Le Rond D'Alembert, claimed that metaphysics is a sphere of insoluble questions, therefore we do not know nor can we know the existence of God, the nature of the human soul, the

¹⁰⁰ Bro. Tobe Lees, OP “ St. Dominic and the preaching of Mercy,” in: <http://www.op.org/en/content/st-dominic-and-preaching-mercy-0>

¹⁰¹ Cfr. Timothy Gallagher, *Begin Again. The Life and Spiritual Legacy of Bruno Lanteri.*

¹⁰² Org, 8052:T1 (CR);Org, 2262:T6,5.

existence of sensation of the body, of the thinking being, etc. In brief, in a work where he justifies his choice of “good books” as a means of fulfilling his mission, Lanteri describes the situation as follows:

“Since a systematic irreligiousness originating from false as well as evil principles promoted by the heretics of recent times has gathered to wage war against the Catholic Church, errors and vices have made too rapid progress. There is no village in Europe, where there are no woeful damages: the youth (...), persons that are well-to-do and those idle in any condition are the culpable victims; in many countries, the common people are infected of it; there are immense states where, with an unspeakable shamelessness, people bring licentiousness and irreligiousness to the public. Most of the areas of literature are spoilt by this poison; antichristian and obscene books, that caused the past revolution, were not as numerous then as they are today (...). Meanwhile, faith is extinguishing in thousands of hearts depraved by the masses and ill-famed person. (...). In summary, the spirit and the system, which dominates today, insolently outrage Heaven, corrupts the earth, and populates hell with the chosen ones. In the meantime, there reigns an absolute scarcity of good books to oppose so much evil, very many of these are exhausted, and one rarely finds the necessary books against current errors.”¹⁰³

For Lanteri, a fundamental question is *truth*, the truths of Catholic faith and moral values – that were accepted, denied, distorted or ignored, and to be sustained and defended against “current errors”. He defended a point of view whose authority and proposition are, he says, “indisputable”. He wants to have as guide the “truths”, and not “opinions”.¹⁰⁴ He also saw the need in ecclesial communities to proclaim mercy, both in doctrinal teachings and in pastoral practices -- including sphere of the celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation.

In our time, too, the theme of *truth* and *mercy* is critical. Today the Catholic Church and her particular Christian communities face enormous challenges. Truth is often subjected to negotiations, agreements reached merely through consensus. Many see the need and call for “renewal” (reform), while others insists on “fidelity” (or “faithfulness”) in the Church and Christian life. But what if the renewal is the way to guarantee and promote fidelity of the Christian community to Christ and His Gospel in our own time? What if the needed renewal is feasible, meaningful, healthy and productive if it returns to and is faithful the origins and sources of the Christian faith on which the Catholic community is founded? Or, in particular, if the desired renewal demands a

103 Org, 8069:T1-T2 (LANTERI, <<Motivi per cui si é anche presso per scopo particolare il far conoscere, e promulgare i libri buoni>>). The reasons he presents here are of the pastoral, moral and doctrinal (faith) character.

104 C3,339:T7 ; Cf. *Carteggio*, IV, 356; Cf. LANTERI, *MF*, III, 27; ID., *MF*, II, 153; and also *AOMV*, S.II Doc.266 f.547; *AOMV*, S. II doc 354.

return and fidelity to origins of the spirituality and charism of foundation a Religious Institute now awoken by the emerging needs and challenges of today?. Unlike the time of Pius Lanteri and other founders of the past, we live today in a new, pluralistic and more complex social and ecclesial context. Distinct but not separated, like *renewal* and *fidelity* in the ecclesial community, the theme of “mercy” and “truth” deserves to be properly understood.

2. THE VALUE AND PRACTICE OF “MERCY”

To understand *mercy*, we can begin by looking at faces. When you look into someone’s face, you can often see many things. Sometimes, you see serenity, peace, joy and satisfaction that reside in a person’s soul; or a worry or distraction, confusion or anxiety, wonder or hesitation, and so on. We can often see many things in the faces of others, things that are hard to hide. However, others can see many similar things in our own face. As St. Jerome says, “The face is the mirror of the mind and eyes; without speaking, they confess the secrets of the heart” (*Letter* 5). The Psalmist exhorts: “always look to the Lord and his strength; always seek his face” (Psalm 105: 4). The Book of Chronicles advises that we “rely on the mighty Lord; constantly seek his face (1 Chronicles 16: 11).”

When we seek the Lord’s face, we will find it most often in the face of other persons – who are in the family, in the religious community and in the religious institute, in the place of work, in the Formation House or Seminary, in the parish community, in the school, in the hospital, co-travellers in the means of transport, in the market, etc. When we seek and find the face of the Lord, what is it that we really see there? Pope Francis invites all to “seek the face of the Lord.” He believes that, at this point in history, the world needs to reflect upon the mercy of God. Therefore, Pope Francis states: “Jesus Christ is the face of the Father’s mercy.” “These words might well sum up the mystery of the Christian faith. Mercy has become living and visible in his words, his actions, and his entire person reveals Jesus of Nazareth, reaching its culmination in him. Jesus of Nazareth, by the mercy of God”¹⁰⁵ “Mercy,” he says, “... reveals the very mystery of the Most Holy Trinity. Mercy: the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us. Mercy: the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life. Mercy: the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness.”¹⁰⁶ Convinced of the rich and unfailing mercy of God, Pius Lanteri recommends that everyone should always remind him/herself: “If I should fall a thousand times a day, a thousand times a day I will begin again, with new awareness of my weakness, promising God,

¹⁰⁵ Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus, Bull Of Indiction Of The Extraordinary Jubilee Of Mercy* , 11/4/2015 (abbreviated: MV), 1

¹⁰⁶ MV, 2

with a peaceful heart, to amend my life. I will never think of God as if he were of our condition and grows weary of our wavering, weakness, and negligence. Rather, I will think of what is truly characteristic of him and what he prizes most highly, that is, his goodness and mercy, knowing that he is a loving Father who understands our weakness, is patient with us, and forgives us.”

2.1. The Significance of *Mercy*

The dictionary defines *Mercy* as: “That virtue by which kindness, tenderness and compassion are shown toward one in need.”¹⁰⁷ The Catholic understanding and expression of faith begins with the Sacred Scriptures. The Bible is the Word of God, the primary source and foundation of revealed truth. The Bible often speaks of “mercy” (in Hebrew the term is “*hesed*”; in Greek the term is “*eleos*.”). Scholars say that there are other scriptural words as well that are used to express the notion of “mercy” as this word is used today. However, here, we consider the Bible refers to “mercy” as something – an “attribute” the philosophers call it – rooted in the very nature and essence of God. For the Israelites “mercy” was, above all, one of the major attributes of God, especially revealed in His covenant with Israel (Deut 7:9). God was continually merciful to the Israelites, despite their many lapses into sin. The Israelites recognised the great connection between God’s love and His mercy.

The New Testament tells us something about God’s “nature and essence,” when John writes, “God is love and whoever abides in love abides in God and God in him/her” (1 John 4: 16). Mercy is the love that God freely show to us, for He is the one who first reveals himself to us and makes his presence known and felt. We do not “earn” this mercy; we do not “deserve” it; we do not have a “right” to it. Mercy is a free gift of God that, when given, draws us into God’s very being, making God present “to” us and then, “through” us to others.

In the context of the works of mercy, mercy¹⁰⁸ is a virtue that influences one’s will to have compassion for others and, if possible, to alleviate another’s tribulations. St. Thomas Aquinas is frequently quoted as saying that mercy is the greatest attribute of God. Aquinas implies that in relation to His creation, God’s actions essentially are merciful. Mercy, says St. Pope John Paul II, is the “most stupendous attribute” of God! Mercy reveals to us what God is like. It is “love’s second name”. The Bible, the tradition and the whole faith life of the People of God provide unique proof that mercy is the greatest of the attributes and perfections of God¹⁰⁹.

The Church calls us -- as does particularly the spirituality and charism of some institutes of consecrated life -- to keep in mind and make our own God’s abounding mercy. Evidently, this goes beyond the celebration of a Holy Year itself or of a Lenten Season. The pertinence and importance of God’s mercy is

¹⁰⁷ *Catholic Encyclopedia for School and Home*, Volume 7 (1965).

¹⁰⁸ Cfr. Bishop David M. O’Connell, C.M., Pastoral Letter for the Holy Year of Mercy, *Mercy and Truth Shall Meet* (14/9/2015).

¹⁰⁹ John Paul II, *Rich in Mercy*, n.14

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evident, because: With indulgence, we get nearer to Christ who committed no sin yet was wounded for our transgressions and by his wounds we are healed (Cf. Is. 53:4ff); Mercy helps us to seek our way to the Father through the practice of good works and by penitential expiation; Mercy obtains for us the graces needed to overcome sins; and Mercy keeps us holy and pure.

Consequently, let us make prayer and good works our constant practice so that we can gain the necessary graces which will secure our spiritual communion with the saints and with God the Father.

Pope Francis states,

As we can see in Sacred Scripture, mercy is a key word that indicates God's action towards us. He does not limit himself merely to affirming his love, but makes it visible and tangible. Love, after all, can never be just an abstraction. By its very nature, it indicates something concrete: intentions, attitudes, and behaviours that are shown in daily living. The mercy of God is his loving concern for each one of us. He feels responsible; that is, he desires our wellbeing and he wants to see us happy, full of joy, and peaceful. This is the path which the merciful love of Christians must also travel. As the Father loves, so do his children. Just as he is merciful, so we are called to be merciful to each other (VM, 9).

In the Sermon on the Mount the Jesus teaches: "Blessed are the merciful for they will receive mercy (Matthew 5: 7)." As we are, as we do, so shall we receive in and through the Church. Pope Francis emphasizes "intentions, attitudes, and behaviours that are shown in daily living" with respect to mercy. If we consider the mercy that God shows us and are, as a result, simultaneously called by God to live out, then we should reflect briefly on these three "concretes" that Pope Francis identifies. First, "intentions." The dictionary defines an "intention" as a "determination to act in a certain way." Then, "attitudes": this word is commonly used to describe our "disposition" or "way of thinking or feeling about someone or something." Finally, our intentions and attitudes consequently lead to "behaviours" or "actions/conduct" in life. This "concretes" - intentions, attitudes and behaviours - guide us to look into our minds, hearts and souls to see if and how mercy of God can be found there.

However, to "find mercy" we must first know what we are looking for. As earlier mentioned, mercy reveals and expresses the "essence of God," the "very nature of God." A closely look at this may be helpful. In the Church the word "mercy" is used in many senses: the scriptural, theological, liturgical, and so forth. In simple terms, mercy is the love of God shown to us; it is his "self-revelation," received by us and shared by us with others. Mercy shows itself in God's care, concern, tenderness and compassion for us and, in turn, it is shown in our care, concern, tenderness and compassion for others in the concrete situations of their lives and in the forgiveness extended toward those who wrong us. Again, mercy is freely given and not merited.

The experience of most people seem to indicate that showing mercy lowers the defences of both the giver and the receiver, so that both parties can experience life in God as God intended it to be. Mercy does not diminish, much less is it in opposition to, judgment or justice, as some suggest. Mercy recognizes what lies before us in life as it truly is and makes what it encounters better, more worthy of

love, of compassion, of forgiveness. This is not because the one shown mercy has earned or merits any of those things but because we all need love, compassion and forgiveness to be what we ought to be; given our fallen human nature, only mercy can make that happen. Mercy sees the truth of God's creation as "good", although somehow wounded by the introduction of evil and sin into human experience. Mercy calls creation and our wounded humanity back to its origin and nature in God. Mercy sees the hurts and pain caused and in need of healing and it, above all, recognises and confesses the abounding power of God's grace and love and a fundamental trust in human person's profound capacity and need to begin again – to rise and walk again -- after a fall.

Mercy is God's love, revealed in God's intentions, attitudes and behaviours toward us. It is God's *love* that creates; it is God's *compassion* that sees and understands what has been broken in his creation, in our humanity; it is God's *forgiveness* that redeems his creation and our humanity, despite itself, and makes us whole again. And just when mercy seems beyond our undeserving grasp, at that very moment, God enters into his creation anew, enters into human experience again as the mystery and grace that is God's loving presence and mercy takes us in his embrace.

2.2. What Jesus and His Gospel say about Mercy

When we not turn to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, who enlightens our minds, what do we hear him say to us, what do we see do? What do we learn about the value of His Mercy for people? Through his actions and words Jesus teaches many things about mercy. Mercy helps us to understand several aspects of the mystery of Christ and of His Church.

- ❖ *Mercy helps us understand the Incarnation.* Jesus came into the world, became human, because of God's mercy and love towards us. "The Word become Flesh and dwell among us" (John 1: 14) for a purpose: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him (John 3: 16-17)."
- ❖ *Mercy helps us understand the Eucharist.* It is for a purpose that the Lord Jesus gives us his own Body and Blood as food and drink. Because of his mercy and love for us, Christ gave us himself, whole and entire, in the Eucharist. He does not want us to hunger and thirst (John 6: 35). He wants us to always remember him, he sealed a new covenant with us in his blood (Luke 22: 19-20).
- ❖ *Mercy helps us understand the forgiveness of sins.* The evangelist Luke narrates: "The Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them" (Luke 9: 56). From the Cross, the Lord Jesus forgave those who offended him (Cfr. Luke 23: 24).
- ❖ *Mercy helps us understand the Passion.* Jesus tells us: "Truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it

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dies, it bears much fruit (John 12:24).” And: “Greater love than this no one has, that one lay down his life for his friends (John 15: 13).”

- ❖ *Mercy helps us understand the Resurrection.* Mercy gives rise to a hope that would not be possible had Jesus not risen from the dead. Peter teaches: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who, according to his abundant mercy has begotten us again to a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Peter 1: 3).”
- ❖ *Mercy helps us understand the Church of Christ.* Jesus tells Peter: “You are Peter and upon this ‘rock’ I will build my Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have be loosed in heaven (Matthew 16: 18-19).” Pope Francis reminds us: “Mercy is the very foundation of the Church’s life. All of her pastoral activity should be caught up in the tenderness she makes present to believers; nothing in her preaching and in her witness to the world can be lacking in mercy. The Church’s very credibility is seen in how she shows merciful and compassionate love (VN, 10).” And Paul writes that we “do not lose heart by the mercy of God (2 Corinthians 4: 1).”
- ❖ *Mercy helps us understand Truth.* Authentic mercy always leads us to the recognition of Truth because mercy is based upon Truth. The Psalmist sings “Mercy and Truth shall embrace (Psalm 85: 10).” In Christ, mercy and truth embrace together. It is unmistakably clear in his intentions, attitudes and behaviours throughout the Gospels. I do not believe that we can experience authentic mercy without the simultaneous experience of Truth, because one really does not really exist without the other.

Jesus also teaches that:

- ❖ *Proclaiming the Gospel to the poor is Jesus’ first pastoral priority.* Announcing the jubilee year, Jesus describes in Lk.4:16-19 his mission is to announce the good news to the poor, liberating the captives and giving sight to the blind. In organizing our individual actions, priorities, plans and strategies of evangelization, we, too, should also make it priority the sharing of the Gospel with the poor. Pope Francis, in his *Evangelism Gaudier*, states, albeit with regret, “that the worst discrimination which the poor suffer is the lack of spiritual care. A great majority of the poor have a special openness to the faith (...); our preferential option for the poor must mainly translate into a privileged and preferential religious care.”
- ❖ *Mercy comes from God, who is our merciful Father.* The Parable of the Prodigal Son shows this fact. Upon welcoming h home his lost son, the father rejoices. Mercy brings joy to both the reconciled sinner and to God. It gives to the repentant sinner the courage to arise and begin again. And with this certainty, Ven. Lanteri says:

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“Above all, I recommend with all my heart that you guard against discouragement, disturbance, and sadness. Seek always to keep your poor heart in peace, and encourage it, and always to serve God with holy joy.”

- ❖ *Jesus is the face of the merciful Father.* Jesus is the Good Shepherd who takes the first step to seek out and find those who are lost. He first meets with Matthew, the tax-collector who became an Apostle; from this encounter we learn that Jesus seeks to be with us sinners and help us return to the Father. He looked on Matthew with mercy and chose him for a great mission; similarly He wants to do the same with each of us. When he saw a large and hungry crowd, Jesus felt compassion and fed them. When the sick were brought to him, he healed them. Jesus was sent by God to reconcile us to the Father.

- ❖ *The true disciple of Jesus is the one who practices mercy.* In the Parable of the Good Samaritan, after the priest and the Levite pass by the beaten and dying man, Jesus tells us of the Samaritan who overcomes prejudice and existing cultural norms to care for the wounded man. The true neighbour is the one who shows mercy. Jesus concludes the parable, saying: “Go and do likewise”. As disciples of Jesus, we must strive to be a face of mercy with our families, parishes, religious communities, schools, places of work. Frequently, we can be quick to criticise, to pay back for offence received, to be cynical and to complain. We must practice mercy with those closest to us and be people of reconciliation in a world of such polarisation. At the same time, we ourselves need to, with trust and courage, open up to and receive mercy. Hence, Lanteri suggests: “Therefore, be of good courage. Let your heart be joyful, give yourself as completely as you can to God, banish any doubts, and tell God that you never wish consciously to do anything that would displease him. For the rest, do not be troubled. God is with you and will help you, and will not let you fall.”

- ❖ *The Father’s mercy and forgiveness are limitless and we, like the Father, should forgive others repeatedly.* When St. Peter asked him how often he should forgive and Jesus replied, “seventy times seven” times. Jesus then told Peter the parable of how the king had mercy on a servant who couldn’t repay his debts, forgiving him of what he owed. The servant then didn’t do likewise to his fellow servant who was in his debt. The king was furious, asking him: “Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow servant, in the same way that I had mercy on you”? Lanteri explains that: “It is very important that we understand deeply how good God is, and not measure him by our own limitations or think that he tires of our wavering, weakness, and negligence. Our God is not such. Let us think of him as he truly is, filled with goodness, mercy, and compassion, and let us know him as the loving Father he is, who raises us when we have fallen, who never tires of forgiving us, and to whom we give great joy and honor when we seek forgiveness.”

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❖ *Mercy and forgiveness will be ours if we practice it. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy". In the Our Father, Jesus taught us to pray, "Forgive us our trespasses (debts), as we forgive those who have trespassed against us (debtors)". After teaching us that famous prayer, he taught those with him very directly that, "For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions."*

Mercy, therefore, is of great benefit to all, for it helps us to appreciate aspects of the life and mission of Jesus and His Church.

Practically, how do we in the Church, the family of God, show mercy? *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) reminds us of the long-standing practice of mercy in Christian tradition: the spiritual works of mercy and the corporal works of mercy:

"The works of mercy are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbour in his spiritual and bodily necessities. Instructing, advising, consoling, comforting are spiritual works of mercy, as are forgiving and bearing wrongs patiently. The corporal works of mercy consist especially in feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead. Among all these, giving alms to the poor is one of the chief witnesses to fraternal charity: it is also a work of justice pleasing to God" (CCC, 2447).

These are good, practical embodiments of what the Church encourages us to consider and practice throughout our Christian life. In addition, there are, of course, many other little or big ways we can show mercy in the various environments we find ourselves – be they in interpersonal relations, in family, in religious and seminary communities, parishes, schools, health care institutions, offices and other work places.

Consecrated men and women and the clergy are especially pastoral agents of God's mercy. As such they are called to be good shepherd, to promote conversion of other persons to know and follow Jesus Christ, and to live out the religious vows of chastity, poverty and obedience as witness of God's love and mercy to all.

It must be added, however, "terms and conditions apply", to borrow an expression from advertisement. There are conditions to be fulfilled in order to obtain the mercy of God. These include: (1) there must be repentance and conversion of heart. (2) Be merciful to others. (3) Forgiveness of others who offend us. (4) Complete trust in Jesus Christ. In this regard it is perhaps helpful to keep in mind the encouraging counsels of Lanteri:

- ✓ "Holiness does not consist in never failing, but in rising immediately, recognizing our weakness and asking God's forgiveness, and in doing this with peace of heart, without letting ourselves be troubled."
- ✓ "Say, then, with boldness, "Now I begin," and go forward constantly in God's service. Do not look back so often, because one who looks back cannot

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run. And do not be content to begin only for this year. Begin every day, because it is for every day, even for every hour of the day, that the Lord taught us to say in the Our Father, 'Forgive us our trespasses,' and 'Give us this day our daily bread.'"

2.3. Renewing the faith in God's Mercy: Insights from Ven. Lanteri

Faith must always be kept new, live, and young. To achieve this, we must proclaim, celebrate and transmit joyfully new thrusts of faith; these will lead us to live, in words and actions, the fundamental truths of Christianity. Faith must be rooted in the heart of the people, such that they themselves will introduce it into the world of day-to-day living. Faith is fecund when rooted in the heart and it becomes culture. Inspired by St. Francis de Sale, Ven. Pius Lanteri¹¹⁰ recommends that the person who preaches should do it with "great devotion", proposing compassion and mercy¹¹¹, which were the characteristics of Jesus¹¹². Jesus shows compassion for both those with natural and moral defects¹¹³. The preacher, therefore, must beware of discouragement and lack of trust, since "discouragement is the great error on the road to salvation."¹¹⁴ Further, Lanteri says:

"Be on guard against discouragement and lack of trust. Strive to do well all that you do, but do this with respect for your humanity, without striving for an impossible perfection, focusing simply on the day at hand. Remember that 'The just man falls seven times a day,' and so you will find blessing in beginning not only every day, but every hour."

He further recommends: "Do not let yourself be troubled by anything, not even by your own failings, taking care to overcome them immediately by an act of love of God."

Lanteri recognises that a person's soul is precious to God, and that God has a great esteem of it.¹¹⁵ He considers how Jesus publicly treated sinners with mercy and compassion.¹¹⁶ One cannot otherwise promote the glory of God, nor can he love God otherwise. Everyone, especially clergy and consecrated persons, must have compassion of the danger of souls.¹¹⁷

Intelligent and truly spiritual persons know that even the most delinquent person has some elements or points in him that are sensitive to good. There is an opportunity of salvation for everyone, for "there is no heart that is invulnerable."¹¹⁸ Here, it is a question of reading the most intimate sentiments of the other person, to discover and reawaken that element which is sensitive to

110 Some points in this section are based on the studies of the Church historian, Andrea Brustolon.

111 Asc,2278:T1,11.

112 Asc,2278:T4,16; cfr. Asc,2285:T12,2.

113 Pre,2314:T3,5.

114 C2,128:T6,8.

115 Org,2223a:T5,2.

116 Asc,2278:T4,16.

117 Org,2223a:T5,2

118 Org,2262:T6,1.

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good, especially through prayer, in order to draw from it unsuspected positive energies. Lanteri gave this line of conduct to his spiritual children: “never judge any heart invulnerable, but through continuous and fervent prayer and with industrious charity they will do everything possible to not let anyone perish.”¹¹⁹ Priests in fact are not mere dispensers of sacraments: they must make visible, through sacraments, the fact that Jesus heals the wounds of humanity. They must make visible the merciful face of God.

To all priests Jesus says: “go...heal the sick. Resuscitate the dead”. These words are not restricted to the time of the Apostles and to the Early Church. Lanteri, too, was attentive to pray for the sick, to console those who feel in anguish, to cure the wounds of the heart, re-give life to those who have lost hope, to abandon himself to the will of God, etc. The Word proclaimed must be able to pierce the heart and lead to conversion. The preacher must touch the heart and the Word converts and heals. The ministry of Lanteri was specially a ministry of consolation and then of help to know how to accept suffering as a participation in, as St. Paul says, what lacks in the passion of Jesus.

The aspect of healing the sick is quite relevant for priests and consecrated persons today. Interior healing leads to true freedom also in priestly ministry, not to frenetic apostolic activity. Healed interiorly, one is ready to announce the Gospel – and with joy and passion.

However, it is with love that one is healed. Peter is healed when Jesus asked him three times: “Do you love me?” The more you love a person, the more you heal.

In his pastoral ministry, Lanteri tries to cast away every fear concerning the Mercy of God. He exhorts consecrated persons and the clerics to do same. He says:

“We have offended God the Father a thousand times; the prodigal son offended only once. But God the Father is Infinite in Mercy, while the father of the prodigal son wasn’t. Then, the prodigal son did not have -- as we have – the promise of forgiveness.

The Lord makes us understand this, with the parable of the woman who lights the lamp to search for money and with that of good shepherd who work hard to find the lost sheep; from these two parables we learn how greater His Goodness is than that which the parable of the loving father could express.

The Lord does not want even that we fear reproaches inasmuch as “None of the sins committed will be remembered” (Ez. 18:22). In His life Jesus gives us a proof in regard to Magdalene at His feet: He defended her; he did the same in relation to the Samaritan woman and to the adulterous woman.

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We experience the affection of admiration and of acknowledgement for so great goodness of God in stimulating us to return to Him. We also feel pain for our past obstination".¹²⁰

In explaining the Parable of the Prodigal son Ven. Lanteri invites us to consider "the goodness and charity of the Father in welcoming the son, indeed in seeking him, in bringing him on his shoulders, since the sinner was not capable of walking by himself".¹²¹

In addition, there is today an increasing need for initiators, and of directors, that is, those who accompany others in the spiritual journey, as Lanteri himself and many others were, so that life may be more authentic, freer, more Christian, better ordered to the Lord. Thus, Fr. Lanteri learnt from Fr. Nikolaus von Diessbach, SJ, to dedicate more time to the sacrament of Reconciliation and to individual accompaniment in the spiritual progress, showing with words and with witness of life the face of God's Mercy. Following the example of St. Francis de Sales and of St. Alphonsus Maria de Liguori, Lanteri particularly studied to imitate Jesus in welcoming and treating everyone, especially most needy, greatest goodness and tenderness. For Lanteri, "Human beings are nothing but misery, God is nothing but Mercy; the means of uniting misery to Mercy is confidence." Consecrated persons and the clergy are specially called today to this ministry of initiators and of spiritual accompaniment, while they themselves should be open to be initiated and accompanied by others.

The Church invites clergy to «rediscover our priesthood as mystery of mercy». ¹²² The medicine of fraternal love and of mercy is the only one in which the Church believes firmly.¹²³

St. Pope John Paul II calls on Christian communities to propose in a convincing and efficacious way the practice of the sacrament of Reconciliation.¹²⁴ Today, too, there is need to firmly propose the ministry of Reconciliation (cfr. 2 Cor. 5, 18) entrusted by Jesus Christ to his Church.¹²⁵ And this is in order that man, "renewed in the Spirit, may live in Christ the new life in the perennial praise of the Father and in the service of his brothers."¹²⁶

Most consecrated persons, clergy and laity share the conviction that, in the face of an image of a god of anguish, of sense of guilt, and of revenge, we should promote a pastoral of welcome and of mercy, and thus render oneself particularly available for the sacrament of reconciliation, and they are to be creative in

120 Pre,6201c:T4,4,2; Vol. 4, p. 3857.

121 Pre,2322:T4,1; Vol. 4, p. 2689.

122 Cfr. *Sacerdote, sei mistero di misericordia*, Prefazione.

123 Cfr. *Comunicare il Vangelo*, 52

124 Cfr. John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte. Apostolic Letter at the Conclusion of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000* (6 Jan 2001), 37

125 Cfr. Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life, *Starting Afresh From Christ: A Renewed Commitment To Consecrated Life In The Third Millennium. Instruction* (19 May 2002), 27

126 Cfr. *Eucharistic Prayer of Reconciliation 1* ; Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, Decree of Approval of the Constitutions of the OMV (15 August 1987).

charity.¹²⁷ They desire to encourage a sense of confidence in the immense goodness and mercy of God that is revealed in Christ the Saviour. In this spirit Lanteri counsels: "In this especially you must grow in strength, in resolving to seek always to have an unshakeable hope, whatever may happen and however weak you may seem to yourself; because on our part, the basis of hope is our very weakness, and on God's part, his mercy, which is simply his heartfelt compassion for our weakness."

To achieve this he believes it is necessary to have recourse to the Blessed Virgin Mary, throne of divine mercy and channel of all graces, requesting from her a likeness with Jesus. Like Mary, Christians should offer ourselves to care for the salvation of persons wherever they may be called to do so. The "sublime throne where our dear Mother stays is the throne of divine Mercy"¹²⁸ And St. Louis Maria Grignon de Montfort explains it in this way:

"It is the throne of the mercy of God in relation to us. In this mystery, in fact, one cannot come near to Jesus unless through Mary; one cannot see Him nor talk to Him if not through the Virgin, His Mother. It is Jesus who hears always His dear Mother, from that throne. He concedes His grace and his mercy to the poor sinners: 'Let us come near, therefore, with confidence, to the throne of grace' (Eph.4:16)".¹²⁹ Confidence in the mercy of God opens hearts and helps us to see others' needs and practice mercy towards our neighbour.

3. THE SIGNIFICANCE, SEEKING AND COMMUNICATION OF "TRUTH"

According to Pope Benedict XVI,

"It is obvious that the concept of truth has become suspect. Of course it is correct that it has been much abused. Intolerance and cruelty have occurred in the name of truth. To that extent people are afraid when someone says, "This is the truth", or even "I have the truth". We never have it, at best it has us. No one will dispute that one must be careful and cautious in claiming the truth. But simply to dismiss it as unattainable is really destructive.

"(...) We must have the courage to dare to say: Yes, man must seek the truth; he is capable of truth. It goes without saying that truth requires criteria for verification and falsification. It must always be accompanied by tolerance, also. But then, truth also points out to us those constant values which have made mankind great. That is why the humility to recognize the truth and to accept it as a standard has to be relearned and practiced again.

The truth comes to rule, not through violence, but rather through its own power; this is the central theme of John's Gospel: When brought before

127 Cfr. *Epifania dell'Amore Misericordioso*, n.54; *Una vita per il nome di Cristo*, 49

128 Asc.2268a:T27,2.

129 St. Louis Maria Grignon de Montfort, *Treatise on the True Devotion to Mary*, n. 248.

Pilate, Jesus professes that he himself is The Truth and the witness to the truth. He does not defend the truth with legions but rather makes it visible through his Passion and thereby also implements it."¹³⁰

3.1. *The Value of knowing Truth*

Why is it important to know the Truth? Word and truth are facts that together reveal themselves to human beings. Knowledge and word are means that render possible a human discourse in as much as they permit interpersonal recognition and promotion of the humanity of person. The diligent search for truth is at the service of human life. Knowledge is a means that permits a person to be and to act as human being, not simply oriented to existence. In this perspective of knowledge of truth, three fundamental factors characterize the desire and search of truth:¹³¹

First, the desire for truth responds to *the need to live*. The human instinct is insufficient to confront the complex problems of the world which man must confront: e.g., problems of food, poverty, housing, communication, commerce, etc. To affirm himself and live in the world, a person needs to know nature. These needs led to the advancement of science and technology, scholastic instruction, scientific research, etc. It is the technico-scientific eros. The promotion of truth through science and techniques, poems and thinking does not mean only that a better understanding of the world is possible, but above all that it is possible to establish a dialogue, enrich ourselves with the experience of others, and communicate with others.

Second, the desire for truth responds to the need to *give a meaning or significance to existence*. In order to live in human way, it is necessary to know what man is and why he lives. The promotion of technical science must be oriented toward the realization of human being, not only toward the knowledge of the material world. It is necessary to clarify the significance of existence itself. This corresponds to anthropologico-metaphysical knowledge, which illuminates the fundamental significance of existence.

The third aspect is that the desire to know the truth refers to *judgment on ways to carry out human existence*. It is necessary to judge the concrete conditions in view of the fulfilment of man, in such a way that it is possible to act humanly. This is the field of ethics or moral science.¹³²

¹³⁰ Pope Benedict XVI, *Light of the World: The Pope, the Church, and the Signs of the Times - A Conversation with Peter Seewald*

¹³¹ J. Gevaert, *Il Problema dell'uomo*, 120.

¹³² Max Scheler proposes an analogous distinction, in relation to the approach to the search for the truth, using the categories of the sociology of knowledge. Scheler, *Die Wissensformen und die Gesellschaft*, reprinted in Basel-Munchen (1960) distinguishes three types of approaches to the search for truth: 1) the knowledge oriented towards salvation (*Heilswissen*); 2) the knowledge of being, the theoretical knowledge (*Seinwissen*); 3. the knowledge that aims at dominion, control, the knowledge in view of dominion (*Herrschaftwissen*). From perspective of theology, the moral

These three aspects concern the actualization of the knowledge of the world and are always, in some way, presented together. However, they may present emphasis and proportions that are quite different. It is mainly the second and third aspects or reasons that concern us here, dealing as they do with religious and moral beliefs and practices.

3.2. *The foundations of Truth*

Most people acknowledge the need and responsibility of seeking and knowing truth. The human intellect has the duty of learning every useful truth; and truths are to be “comprehended and enjoyed.”¹³³ Truth has foundations. According to Lanteri, as far as truth is concerned, one must “reason seriously”; it must be proved, unless it is self-evident. Obviously, the type of reasoning will vary according to different sciences or fields of knowledge. The form of reasoning in theology or philosophy is distinct from that of social anthropology or empirical sciences like physics. But it is always the activity of reason. Such proof, he argues, must be founded on reason, on authority, and on “examples and similitudes.” Arguably, in Lanteri’s writings emphasis is placed mainly on *reason* and authority as the foundations of truth. *Reason*, because through it one can penetrate and comprehend religious truths as well. *Authority* (*auctoritas*) refers to the divine and ecclesiastical authority, that is, the Sacred Scriptures, the Fathers of the Church, and teachings of the Pope and Magisterium of the Catholic Church. Lanteri considers that the authority of the decision of the Church constitutes a means of refuting errors, and of assuring the triumph of every truth. To this authority is “opposed the private spirit of the Innovators”, whom he

theologian Bernhard Haering, *Free and Faithful in Christ*, vol.1, pg.44-45, presents a critical explanation of these approaches: the *Heilswissen*, which is a search truth and testifying truth, is concerned above all with salvation insofar as it comes from God: in so doing it conserves respect for the whole person, the integrity and the integration of the person, caring for healthy relations before God and with a desire for a greater integrity and salvation. It implies trust in God, and it is characterized by a joyful and grateful faith as response to God who reveals himself as salvation. The second type of the search for truth (*Seinwissen*) refer to the “knowledge of truths in themselves”, to philosophical speculations concerning primarily the metaphysical categories of being and of beings. It treats the truths but referring specifically to salvation, to the integrity of person or to healthy human relations. However, as Haering noted, in history one meets also an existential philosophy that pays great attention to the ultimate significance of human life, to the dignity and freedom of person, to the aim of the community and of the society in view of human relations. This type of philosophy belongs to *Heilswissen* in the broad sense. Finally, the *Herrschaftswissen* is a knowledge that refers to the “structure of the society, especially the significance and aim of the authority and the authoritarian structure in its effective interaction with the global system of the economic processes, of the cultural relations and of the political structures. It pays particular attention to the problems of social justice and of international peace.” Haering further makes perspicacious observations about the knowledge of being or theoretical knowledge and about the knowledge that aims at dominion and control. The question of the types of knowledge or search for truth should lead us to wonder and reflect which type of truth *de facto* predominates in or underpins the theological and religious discourses and the pastoral attitudes and practices in the religious communities, parishes, Formation houses, educational institutions in Nigeria today .

133 *MF*, XI, 140; *ESL*, 122, 203-204.

sometimes describes as promoters of errors. He favourably quotes the observations of La Mennais who said Authority and Innovators propose opposing principles:

“One is the catholic principle which subjects all particular opinions to the authority of general beliefs, establishing a perfect society between the intelligences, and puts them in the fortunate necessity of conserving them at the same time for all the truths; the other is the philosophical principle, which subjects general beliefs to the caprices of particular opinion, establish an anarchy between intelligences and gives them a fatal freedom to adopt at their wish all errors.”¹³⁴

Thus, in Lanteri’s view, the principle of the authority of the Church is a criterion or the guarantee of “all truths” [*toutes les vérités*]. Such affirmation might have sounded irritating and appeared arrogant to the ears or sensitivities of some modern thinkers who deemed it necessary to separate and recognise the fundamental and irreplaceable place of human reason. However, even St. Thomas Aquinas teaches that one thing is the question of reason when we speak about human knowledge, and quite another is the question of truth seen in the divine mind – in which truth is at the same time the *causa rerum*, the cause of things.¹³⁵ Whatever may be meant by Lanteri’s “all truths”, he certainly upholds the principle that man must act in truth. *Act in truth*, since it is not sufficient to conceptually *know* the truth. Acting in truth must characterise one’s motivations and ideals or values of reference. This matter applies, for example, to various situations of marriage and family life, carrying out one’s professions; it applies to living the religious vows, community life and initial formation in consecrated life; and indeed to the following of Christ.

There are Truth and truths. Which truth are we talking about? Philosophers and theologians speak of various types of truth. For instance, scholars speak of ontic (or logical) truth, historical truth, metaphysical truth, religious truth, scientific truth, moral truth, etc.¹³⁶ Much of religious and theological teachings relate to metaphysical, religious and moral kind of truths. In his spiritual discourses, Lanteri sees, for instance, in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius a synthesis of all the principal truths of Religion, that is to say, the truths to be believed and the truths to be practiced.¹³⁷ Truths are understood, for Lanteri, not simply as an abstract entity but in relation to human person; he believes truth is meant for forming and reforming a person. He sees truth in the perspective of fulfilment and perfecting of one’s self and of other

134 Lanteri, *Memorial Catholique* 1. Année pag.6. La Mennais, *Defence de l'Essai sur l'indifference*, in fine.

135 THOMAS AQUINAS, *De Veritate*, Q.2, a.14. In fact, for Thomas Aquinas, the concept of truth is not univocal nor equivocal but it is an analogy.

136 See THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologica*, I, Q.16, a.1c; P. GILBERT, *Corso di Metafisica*, 257-273; G. ROMITI, *Filosofia e Fede*, 1981, Cap.II.

137 Org, 2262:T. Thematically, the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius reflect the sequence of the *Symbol* or the Catholic Creed.

persons. In other words, truth is seen and understood in the perspective of salvation.

3.3. *What is Truth?*

We are all familiar with the tense moment of confrontation between Pontius Pilate and the Lord Jesus when Pilate demands "What is truth?" in response to the Lord Jesus' revelation: "I have come into this world to testify to the truth" (John 18: 37-38). Pilate was not the first to ask such a question, and the Lord Jesus was not the first to be subject to interrogation on this matter. "Truth" has been the subject of study, inquiry and debate throughout most of recorded history. Philosophers, theologians, scholars, students, people of faith, people of no faith have questioned and argued its meaning down through the ages. Sooner or later, we simply have to settle on an idea or definition of truth and go with it.

According to St. Thomas Aquinas, in his *Summa Theologiae* (ST), "truth is the conformity of the mind to that which exists in reality" (ST I.16.1). Note that there are two parts to his definition: (a) that which exists in reality --- in other words, that which *is*; and (b) the conformity of the mind, the intellect, to it. It is not the case here to go into the breakdown of philosophers' reactions over the centuries, both "pro" and "con," to Aquinas' idea, because it seems accurate to me and it is, in any case, the definition adopted in this article.

The disciples of Jesus are called to live in the truth. The Bible attests that *God is the source of all truth*. His Word is truth. His Law is truth. His "faithfulness endures to all generations."²⁵⁵ Since God is "true," the members of his people are called to live in the truth.²⁵⁶ (CCC, n.2465).

In Jesus, the whole of God's truth is revealed. The Lord Jesus says, "I have come into this world to testify to the truth." I earlier referred to Jesus' dialogue with Pontius Pilate. Elsewhere in the Gospels, the Lord Jesus reveals *himself* as "truth" when he says to Thomas, the Doubting Apostle, later in John's Gospel: "I am the way and the *truth* and the life (John 14: 6)." Truth is, as was acknowledged, that which is, and our ability to see, comprehend, understand and conform our minds to it as it actually is: in this case, the Lord Jesus.

As Catholic Christians, we believe the Bible is the "Word of God, the Word of the Lord" and, therefore, the truth. Scholars refer to this truth as the "inerrancy of Scripture." There are all kinds of literature and literary forms employed by the inspired authors of biblical texts, some which even differ from one another, but the truth of their revelation is not contradictory. They indicate the same reality. That is what we believe as Catholic Christians. Different literary forms or genres are used to make truth accessible and known to the human mind and intellect. Truth, therefore, has a claim on our human minds and intellects, which results in human behaviours and conduct that conform to it.

Elsewhere in the New Testament, the Lord Jesus presents himself as "the Truth":

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In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God ... all things came to be through him and without him, nothing is. What came to be through him was life, and his life was light for the human race; the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it (John 1: 1-35).

For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. For no one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known (John 1: 17-18).

Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free (John 8: 31)."

The Spirit of truth has come. He will guide you into all truth (John 16: 13).

Sanctify them in truth, your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, I have also sent them into the world. For their sakes I sanctify myself that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth (John 17: 17-19).

The Lord Jesus called to himself Apostles upon whom and through whom he established his Church. They, in turn, preached truth to the early Christian communities:

- ❖ And I tell you, "You are Peter and upon this 'rock' I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18).
- ❖ If we claim to have fellowship with him (the Lord Jesus) and yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth (1 John 1: 6).
- ❖ Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth (1 John 3: 18).
- ❖ In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1: 13).
- ❖ Speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is Christ (Ephesians 4:15).
- ❖ Stand, therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth (Ephesians 6: 14).
- ❖ We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God (2 Corinthians 4: 2).
- ❖ Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved ...rightly handling the word of truth (2 Timothy: 2: 15).
- ❖ I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth (3 John 14).
- ❖ (God our saviour) wants all people to be saved and to come to acknowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2: 4).

In the Lord Jesus, we walk in truth. That has been and is the long journey of the Church, unparalleled anywhere else in human history.

As Catholic Christians, we believe that not only the Holy Scriptures but also the Church's teaching and Sacred Tradition are fountains of God's revealed truth. Knowing truth, trusting truth should make a genuine difference in our lives.

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Certainly, the Catholic Church has had some hard times over the centuries. But there have also been many more positive developments and external changes over the ages, including the ways we express the truths of our Faith. Truth itself has not changed. The Lord Jesus Christ "is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13: 8)!" The Lord Jesus has not changed his mind about the Catholic Church he established either. This Church is still responsible for revealing truth, presenting truth, teaching truth and witnessing truth, day in and day out, every day. We read in the Second Letter to Timothy:

I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance with their own desires and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths (2 Timothy 4: 1-4).

St. Paul has gotten to the heart of the matter here. People have been "tickling the ears" of Christians sincerely seeking truth from the earliest days of the Church, setting themselves up as "teachers in accordance with their own desires," working for their own ends trying to turn faithful "ears from the truth" in favour of "myths" they propose instead. It still happens today. But, as Jesus cautions in the Gospel of Matthew, "the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and only a few find it (Matthew 7:14)." The Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us:

- ❖ In Jesus Christ, the whole of God's truth has been made manifest. "Full of grace and truth," he came as the "light of the world," he is the Truth. ... To follow Jesus is to live in "the Spirit of truth," whom the Father sends in his name and who leads "into all the truth." To his disciples Jesus teaches the unconditional love of truth ... (CCC 2466).
- ❖ Man tends by nature toward the truth. He is obliged to honour and bear witness to it: "It is in accordance with their dignity that all men, because they are persons . . . are both impelled by their nature and bound by a moral obligation to seek the truth, especially religious truth. They are also bound to adhere to the truth once they come to know it and direct their whole lives in accordance with the demands of truth (CCC 2467)."
- ❖ Truth or truthfulness is the virtue which consists in showing oneself true in deeds and truthful in words, and in guarding against duplicity, dissimulation, and hypocrisy.(CCC, n.2468).
- ❖ The disciple of Christ consents to "live in the truth," that is, in the simplicity of a life in conformity with the Lord's example, abiding in his truth. "If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth."²⁶⁵ (CCC, n. 2470).

This is why the “One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church” believes what it does, professes what it does, teaches what it does, practices what it does: the “deposit of faith”, as it is known. This “deposit of faith” in the Catholic Church includes a comprehensive creedal statement of truth(s) as well as a set of valid moral teachings and expectations based upon it for a reason: to lead faithful Catholic Christians through that “small gate and narrow way that leads to life,” away from “myths” and the “tickling of ears.” Truth is not truth *because* we believe it. Truth is true whether we believe it or not. Truth is not true today and false tomorrow. Truth is not the object of whims; it is not the subject of opinion polls or majority votes; it is not the “stuff” of arbitrary decisions based upon what is easiest or most convenient to follow or what “feels good” at any particular point in time. Truth is the Lord Jesus dwelling among us in the Church he established. Truth is what the Church teaches based upon his revelation, unfolding in tradition from generation to generation. Truth is “Peter” upon whom the Lord Jesus built his Church so that, as he said, “what is bound on earth is so bound in heaven (Matthew 18: 18).”¹³⁸ So, in a sense, one could say that no one owned truth, but rather that truth advances toward individuals. Truth is not the fruit of reciprocal concessions. It is not an object of negotiation.

3.4. *The Causes of Error*

Human beings can err. Today, as in the past times (when current errors¹³⁹ were identified and confronted), the question of the possibility and causes of errors must be acknowledged and addressed. Error is opposed to truth: both are found in judgement or in the act by which the intellect affirms or deny a predicate of a subject; this judgement can be expressed by a single person or by an institution or by an authority.¹⁴⁰

138 Bishop David M. O'Connell, C.M. Pastoral Letter for the Holy Year of Mercy, *Mercy and Truth Shall Meet* (14/9/2015).

139 The “current errors” of the time of Lanteri were of different nature, content and type; among them there were errors of the Movements (Gallicanism, Jansenism, Deism, Quietism, illuminism [*Aufklärung*], the Encyclopaedia, Jurisdictionalism, Febronianism, Richerism) and the doctrinal errors of ecclesiological character. Among the “current errors” the *Social contract* of Rousseau insinuated itself, inasmuch as it holds that authority resides in the Community and not in the Head of the Community, that is in the Church and not in the Pope: cf. *MF*, III, 19. I do not intend to speak about the individual current errors and their doctrines with which, historically, Lanteri addressed.

140 As a matter of fact, institutions, or authorities exists in concrete human persons who compose them, or are invested with or incarnate them: one can therefore say that only persons make judgement. Persons can have an authority that is given or evidently acquired, and therefore their judgement ought not to be easily put into doubt or rejected. The theologian Lanteri is convinced that the authority of the Head of the Church is given by God Himself and it is the most certain or sure; consequently, he recommends one “follows exactly” (“seguire esattamente”) her decisions or judgment (Org,2262: T3,1,1). At times, one’s “own” or “private” judgment is looked upon with suspicion, especially when it appears clearly different from that of the authority. Suspicions, however, ought not inhibit or prevent one from freely engaging in critical thinking, study and reflection. In any case, such intellectual endeavours require both humility (to listen, dialogue, learn or

The causes of errors come from different factors regarding the intellect, the senses, the will, and other elements. We list here some of the basic causes of errors. Lanteri, too, recognises them. First, there is the limits of the intellect itself, together with the complexity of the object to be known. This is the principal cause, for human reason can find itself in uncertainty and in obscurity. Secondly, there can be ignorance and lack of sufficient reflection before judgement. Thirdly, a preconception or prejudice of an individual or social kind, etc.. Fourthly, particular mental form (*forma mentis*) such as excessive intellectualism or excessive empiricism, excessive politicization, and extreme ideological inclination about issues (such that almost any issue, including clearly religious issues, is interpreted from the prism, for instance, of either liberal or conservative, right-wing or left-wing, race, economic status). With this basic mental attitude or mind-set, almost every things will probably appear to the intellect and be read according to the colour or shade of the "lenses" or eye-glasses that one puts on. And fifthly, "To consider opinions as truth easily opens the road (...) to errors, to heresies."¹⁴¹ Errors are neither always nor necessarily due to bad faith, they are not always voluntary. On the other hand, man is capable of overcoming errors. Vincible and culpable ignorance can be corrected.

It is necessary to follow a process of formation that facilitates the search and knowledge of truth and creates an atmosphere that encourages a balanced critical thinking and that is healthy, less exploitative and contaminated by falsity, uncertainty and deliberate ambiguity. This is important in order that one may, in freedom, encounter He who is the Truth -- that is, He who liberates from errors and illuminates minds--,¹⁴² the Way and the Life, and in order to promote and respect the dignity and rights of fellow humans.

3.5. Truth and Morality: Authority and Tolerance

There are practical issues connected with the recurrent and closely-related themes of truth and morality. One of the concrete problems concerns the question of human freedom. The issue of human freedom presents itself also in relation to conscience, opinion, thought, and religion. Two among the fundamental problems concerning truth and morality relate authority and tolerance.

First, the issue of truth and authority. Truth is based on *authority* [*auctoritas*]. The concept of "authority" is pregnant. There are different kinds and levels of authority, each of which has different weight, as earlier mentioned. Lanteri is concerned, first of all, with divine and ecclesiastical authorities, and then with human reason, without ignoring, of course, also the authorities of

even to admit one's own errors – if any) and the courage to search for and embrace the truth. The demands of honesty and mutual respect must be met on the path of the parties involved.

141 Lanteri speaks here with reference to matters of Dogma, though it could be applied to matters of Morals. Cf. Org, 8052:T1,4; LANTERI, *Riflessioni*, 102 nota 1, 111.

142 *MF*, XIII, 398.

conscience, of authors, of the civil State, etc. The worth and place of divine authorities and of the authority of human reason are clearly emphasized.

As regard Divine and Ecclesiastical authority, some theologians and thinkers taught the philosophico-political position according to which the source of authority resides in the community of believers, that is, in the Church, and not in the head of the Church, the Pope. (Thus, some claimed that the appointment of bishops, if not of the Pope himself, should be made, in some way, by the people of God and that their teachings should be approved or authorised by the community). Because they held such position, Lanteri would rebuke Jacques Rousseau and those whom he (Lanteri) judged as “incredulous Modern Philosophers”, “modern” or “false” politicians, and certain other authors. He reproached them because he saw in their positions an indirect or veiled denial of, or an implicit attack on the ecclesiastical (and on Religion) and civil authority and power. Rather, Lanteri considered valid the principle which says that authority resides in the head of the Church, a Christian Community, and not in the members of the Community itself. He taught that truth (that is, divine and ecclesiastic truth) must be defended by everyone, not only speculatively but also privately and practically.¹⁴³

Reason has an obliging power. Through it a person can really know truth, including religious truths. However, reason is limited. Reason needs divine light. In Lanteri’s view, human reason should be submissive to God.¹⁴⁴

Second, truth and tolerance. Tolerance can be understood in the strict sense and in the broad sense. In the strict sense, tolerance is the practical attitude of a person that, though he condemns on principle the philosophical and moral convictions considered erroneous or reproachable held by others, he acknowledges them and does not attempt to suppress their legitimate expressions with his/her own attitude, much less by violence. Such position does not mean the approval of such convictions, nor an indifference concerning truth and goodness that must be sustained, and neither does it necessarily mean that one is agnostic.

Different motives urge one to tolerance. These factors include:

- Respect for the conscience and freedom of other persons;
- The indubitable fact and the greater understanding of the almost universal capacity of man to err, or of salvation;
- Motive of practical convenience or of lesser evil.

Therefore, tolerance is distinct from the acceptance of something (say, someone else’s viewpoint, practice or attitude). Tolerance is an exigency of justice, which requires that to everyone we give what is due. Tolerance is not a

143 LANTERI, "Dell'obbligo di difendere le decisioni emanate dalla Santa Sede circa li errori correnti", In *MF*, III, 17-18. According to Lanteri this principle, already confuted by Bossuet, “was the cause of errors of the last Revolutions which saw the dominations of the Philosophers, the Heretics, the modern Politicians, the Richerists, the Febronists, the Jansenists that is those who recognise that the source of authority is in the community and not in the Head.” Cf. LANTERI, *Riflessioni*, 200-208.

144 *MF*, XIII, 411.

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right to error!. However, the human person who errs or that others think has fallen into error continue to deserve respect and comprehension due to any human being. No individual has a right to fall into error *as* error, but (s)he has a right to his/her convictions that comes from his experiences and knowledge.

In the broad sense, a meaning which is already common even at the time of Lanteri, tolerance means: to respect the freedom of opinion, freedom of the press, freedom of conscience, etc. When it is a matter of man's absolute and objective possession of truth, every tolerance towards what contradicts such truth, that is error, will theoretically be absurd; it is the case of *dogmatic* tolerance (which is an attitude of indifference towards dogmatic truths, or towards different or opposed religious beliefs); however, in this case, it would be possible to have a *practical* tolerance towards the person who may have professed or sustained an error.¹⁴⁵

Tolerance has its *limits*. The limit is found in an attack against the principle of tolerance: personal rights are, as a matter of fact, limited by the rights of other persons. For this reason, opposed to tolerance are all those activities which appeal to freedom of conscience or of opinion but in reality they are opposed, even sometimes aggressively and violently, to the rights of other persons and the society, even though, on the other hand, no one – normally – must be forced to act against the judgement of his/her conscience. Benedict XVI's expression of "dictatorship of relativism" easily comes to mind here.

The theme of tolerance is delicate and complex. Beyond the single acts of intolerance or of tolerance, in my view, Lanteri's attitude toward tolerance can be better understood if we keep in mind his firm adherence to St. Augustine's principle on unity, freedom and charity, a principle to which he frequently refers: "*In necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus caritas*". Augustine recommends that we seek unity in things that are necessary, freedom – and with this tolerance and mutual respect -- where there are doubts and things that are not defined or infallible, and in all things let there be charity. In the sphere of doctrines, it seems that Lanteri did not see reason to tolerate different opinions. In these matters (of doctrine) Christian teachers and thinkers should not tolerate indifference or apathy; they must profess full unity also in the Articles or Truth of Faith. They, like evangelisers, must be disposed to defend it in season and out of season, "even at the cost of one's own life."¹⁴⁶ However, in other cases, especially as regards the day-to-day life, relations and apostolate, he encourages all to seek and practice tolerance and respect for freedom, opinion or views of other people, etc. This tolerance is necessary, he argues, in order "to conserve good harmony among all, and peace of heart with ourselves."¹⁴⁷

Therefore, tolerance is necessary and beneficial but only in certain areas and on appropriate conditions. The Catholic Christian must show tolerance and be welcoming in their concrete relationships, and living and working together with others, but they are clearly aware that they are not expected to

145 Cf. Phil. Dict., 421-422.

146 Org., 2262:T6,5; *MF*, III, 19.

147 Org. 2262:TT5,1,2; Cf. Org,8052:T1,3 – T1,4

nor must they twist, dilute or compromise the Catholic teaching in the name of tolerance and respect of other persons' opinion. Tolerance contributes to harmonious relation in community, but it cannot be promoted at the expense of the Christian faith and Gospel values of the community itself. The theme of tolerance introduces us to the question of the offences or sins against the truth, and the duty to bear witness to the truth -- that is, the communication and defence of truth.

3.5. Offences Against the Truth

The eighth Commandment states: *Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour*. This commandment obliges us to use the power of speech according to God's plan, that is, to tell the truth. It forbids misrepresenting the truth in our relations with others. This moral prescription flows from the vocation of the holy people to bear witness to their God who is the truth and wills the truth. Offences against the truth express by word or deed a refusal to commit oneself to moral uprightness: they are fundamental infidelities to God and, in this sense, they undermine the foundations of the covenant (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* [=CCC], n.2464). For this reason, the Apostle Paul says: "*Wherefore putting away lying, speak ye the truth every man with his neighbour; for we are members one of another*" (Ephesians 4:25). And the Apostle James admonishes all:

"And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is placed among our members, which defileth the whole body, and inflameth the wheel of our nativity, being set on fire by hell. For every nature of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of the rest, is tamed, and hath been tamed, by the nature of man: But the tongue no man can tame, an unquiet evil, full of deadly poison. By it we bless God and the Father: and by it we curse men, who are made after the likeness of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be." (James 3:6-10).

So, what are the sins against the eighth commandment, telling the truth? The main offences against the truth include:

i) *Public Statements against Truth*: The disciples are to "put away all malice and all guile and insincerity and envy and all slander" (1 Pet 2:1). A public statement contrary to the truth has particular gravity. The statements include *false witness*, and *perjury* (cfr. Proverbs 19:9). These acts can condemn the innocent or exonerate the guilty, therefore they compromise the justice needed in judicial decisions. (CCC, nn. 2475-2476).

ii) *Unjust Injury*

Respect for the reputation of others forbids every attitude or words which inflict unjust injury, hurting someone's reputation. These include:

❖ *Rash judgment*. This assumes as true the moral fault of another without sufficient evidence.

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- ❖ Detraction. This discloses a person's faults to another without any valid reason.
- ❖ Calumny (slander). This offence harms another's reputation by saying what is not true. (CCC, nn.2477-2479).

A disciple of Jesus avoids rash judgment by being careful in interpreting the deeds of another. "Every good Christian must be more ready to give a favourable interpretation to a person's words than to condemn them" (St. Ignatius of Loyola). Everyone has a right to their good name. Therefore, detraction and calumny (which destroy that reputation) are sins against justice and charity.

iii) Some other Offenses against the Truth

Every word or attitude, such as adulation, flattery which encourages or confirms a person in their evil deeds is forbidden. This adulation is grave if it makes someone an accomplice in a grave matter. Adulation is venial if done to be agreeable or to meet a need. Friendship (or any other reason) never justifies duplicitous speech. Boasting and bragging offend truth. Irony (aimed to hurt another by maliciously caricaturing them) also offends truth.

In addition, offences against the truth include: making known the sins of others; unjust criticism; judging another person without sufficient evidence; gossip; suspecting another without sufficient evidence; and insults (CCC, nn.2480-2481).

iv) The Lie: a direct offence against truth

A lie is a falsehood spoken with the intent to deceive. Jesus denounces lying as the work of the devil. "He is a liar and the father of lies" (Jn 8:44).

Lying - i.e., the attempt to lead into error someone who has the right to know the truth -- is the most direct offense against the truth. Lies injure man's relation to the truth, to his neighbour, and to the Lord. The gravity of a lie depends upon the truth which it deforms, the circumstances, the intentions, and the harm suffered by the victims. A lie is usually venial and becomes mortal when it does grave injury. (CCC, nn.2482-2484).

Lying has negative effects. Lying is condemned because it profanes speech which is meant to communicate truth. The culpability is greater if the lie entails the risk of serious consequences for those who are led astray. Moreover, lying does violence to the other person by affecting his ability to know (which is a condition for every decision). It sows discord, destroys society, undermines trust, and tears apart social relationships. (2485-2486).

Reparation is demanded for lying: The person who lied must make reparation, even if this can only be done secretly. The victim must be compensated, or (if that is impossible) be given moral satisfaction. The reparation of harm or of a good reputation must be judged according to the extent of the damage inflicted. (CCC, n.2487).

Truth - A Correct Response

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The right to be told the truth is not unconditional. Everyone must conform his life to the Gospel precept of fraternal love. The person must judge if it is appropriate to reveal the truth to someone who asks for it. (CCC, nn.2488-2489).

Both truth and charity dictate the correct response to someone seeking information. Some reasons (safety, privacy, the common good) allow silence or discreet language. Avoiding scandal demands great discretion. The truth needs not be revealed to someone who has no right to know and at the appropriate time.

Special Cases (CCC, nn.2490-2492)

Not keeping secrets is an offence against the truth. However, there are exceptions or special exceptional cases. The priest cannot violate the secret of the sacrament of Reconciliation. "The sacramental seal is inviolable. It is a crime for a confessor in any way to betray a penitent by word or any other manner for any reason" (CIC, Canon 983).

Professional secrets (known to office holders, doctors, lawyers, etc.) or confidential information given under secrecy must be kept secret unless grave harm to the person, to the confidant, or to a third party can be avoided only by divulging the truth. Private information prejudicial to another (even when not given under secrecy) cannot be divulged without a serious and proportionate reason. "Everyone should observe an appropriate reserve concerning persons' private lives." (CCC, n.2492).

3.6. *Bearing witness to the Truth: the Communication and Defence of the Truth*

3.6.1 *Duty to bear witness to the Truth*

The Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds everyone of the responsibility in this regard. Before Pilate, Christ proclaims that he "has come into the world, to bear witness to the truth."²⁶⁶ The Christian is not to "be ashamed then of testifying to our Lord."²⁶⁷ In situations that require witness to the faith, the Christian must profess it without equivocation, after the example of St. Paul before his judges. We must keep "a clear conscience toward God and toward men."²⁶⁸ (CCC, n.2471).

Every Christian has a duty to take part in the life of the Church. This duty obliges him to act as witness of the Gospel and of the obligations that flow from it. This witness is a transmission of the faith in words and deeds. Witness is an act of justice that establishes the truth or makes it known. *Martyrdom* is the supreme witness given to the truth of the faith: it means bearing witness even unto death. The martyr bears witness to Christ who died and rose, to whom he is united by charity. He bears witness to the truth of the faith and of Christian doctrine. (CCC, n. 2473).

3.6.2. *Communication and defence of the Truth*

What I synthesize here by the word, “communicate” (the truth) appears in the writings of Lanteri under various words or expressions; he speaks of: “announce” (or “proclaim”), “spread”, “make known”, “propagate”, “defend”, “combat”, and other similar expressions. It involves bearing witness to the truth in words and actions. Lanteri acknowledges that one must highlight the nature, the necessity and the value of communicating truths. He knows that human being, particularly the Christian, has responsibility and commitment toward truth.

As regard the necessity and responsibility of communicating the truth, it is clear to him that truths must be “understood and enjoyed”. They are subjects to be meditated upon:¹⁴⁸ this is particularly valid for truth of religious and moral kind, but it seems valid also for truths of other spheres of knowledge.

Some of the responsibilities or commitments that man has toward truth are indicated.¹⁴⁹ Lanteri proposes that, in general, the communication and defence of truth must be:

- at the speculative and personal level, as well as at the practical and public level;
- The duty of everyone: the clergy, consecrated persons, the laity, and other people.

In particular, toward the truth every individual has the following fundamental responsibilities:

a) *Knowledge*: This refers to knowing the truth about one’s self and on other human person, on God, on our historical times,¹⁵⁰ on creation, and all that are oppose to such knowledge (the “errors”, falsehood). This implies undertaking a “serious study” of the truth and related errors; in these areas too, as in every action, the intellect must “learn every useful truth” and arrive at seeing and judging everything according to Jesus and his Word.¹⁵¹

b) *Communication*: Communicate and spread the truth. There is an obligation of not keeping silent about the truth known. This could be harmful to everyone – persons, the family, religion, community the state, the society. “It is never licit to keep silent about the truth when one has the obligation to profess it when it is attacked and such persons (who keep silent) render themselves guilty of the baneful consequences, that is, of the very grave harm that there from results against the Church, persons and the State.”¹⁵²

c) *Unity in freedom*

148 Org, 2262:T2

149 For example, Cf. Org, 8052:T1,3 – T1,4.

150 Regarding the need for a knowledge of the time and of its evils, and on the reading of journals according to Lanteri, see A. BRUSTOLON, *Alle Origini della Congregazione*, 85-86, 86-88.

151 Org, 2262:T1,1,5 (pg.1857); *MF*, XI, 140.

152 LANTERI, “Dell’Obbligo di diffendere le decisioni e condanne emanate dalla Santa Sede circa gli errori”, In *MF*, III, 11.

We must seek and promote unity in relation to what the truth is. It is a grave and ineluctable responsibility. It does not, however, exempt from the duty of tolerance and respect for different opinions that other persons may have.

d) Formation

Another responsibility is to form or educate persons towards the search for truth in view of an efficacious and fruitful mission. Everyone is responsible for education to truth. Emphasis, however, may be placed in this sphere on the role of leaders of community, such as are parish priests, Rectors of Students' Colleges, Formation Houses, of Religious Communities, presidents and principals of schools and other educational institutions, leaders of the laity and professional associations or organizations, all in addition, of course, to parents. Formation has many dimensions; it is a life long process and demands periodical renewal.

3.6.3. Education of Persons toward the search for Truth

It is a duty to educate people for truth. "It is necessary to be formed on principles that are certain and not on opinions", Lanteri said in his Letter to Bishop Bigex (1822).¹⁵³ Perhaps this is in order ensure a solid foundation and not to create confusion and mislead the faithful. Still, beyond the context of polemics and apologetics, it is reasonably arguable today that, in general, certain thinkers and authors can, within their area of expertise, be quite helpful in education of persons in the light of Catholic teachings. At the same time, in addition to the formation of conscience, it is noteworthy that, in Lanteri's view, the formation should be what could today be describe "holistic", that is, it includes other aspects of the human person – the will and affections, the intellect -- , in short, the whole person. On this issue, interestingly, Lanteri uses the term "form"/ "reform". The intention is to form persons in order "not to err"¹⁵⁴ and, positively, to form or reform in view of one's growth and maturity and of a better world.

3.6.4. Some means of Education for Truth

How can we educate for Truth? There are various means or ways of communicating truth. In Lanteri's view, these include but are not limited to the following ways: (a) the Spiritual Exercises according to the Ignatian method. This kind ("genere") of preaching is the preferred or privileged type,¹⁵⁵ one of

153 C3,339:T6 (pg.292)

154 For example, "form" / "reform" man (Pre, 2392b: T1,2, T2,4,1 (pg.3669), T2,6); "reform" the world (Pre, 2392b: T1,1, T2,1,2, T4), taking into account the aims and the means to be used (Pre, 2392b: T2,1,1 - T2,1,2) in order not to err.

155 One must make an observation on the significance of the word, "genere", which Lanteri frequently uses, also in relation to the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises. The term "Genere" (from *genus*, *genera*) is a philosophical term, though it remains part of a common (Italian) vocabulary; it has various meanings or nuances. Lanteri very often uses it in its philosophical and common sense to indicate a type, a sort, kind, a quality or a species (of something, or persons), theme, topic, matters. A comparative study of the use of this term ("genere") shows that the word was used in these senses in

the means of spreading religious truths. They are a “true source of eternal truth,” a “meditation of truth”; (b) catechesis; (c) Means of Social communication, including the print media and Good Books¹⁵⁶. The Catechism teaches that within modern society the communications media play a major role in information, cultural promotion, and formation. The information that the media provides is at the service of the common good.²⁸⁵ Society has a right to information based on truth, freedom, justice, and solidarity. (CCC, nn.2493-2494). In his famous classification of the Catalogue of “good press”, he contemplates making the truth -- that is, religious truths, the Word of God, the teachings of the Church’s Magisterium -- known to diverse categories of people.

3.7. Attitudes and Dispositions of Communicating the Truth

3.7.1. *Proclaim the Truth in Charity, Witness to Mercy in Truth*

It is one thing to know the truth, and have the instruments to spread it, it is quite another to possess the appropriate and necessary attitudes and dispositions to communicate it to others. Lanteri frequently refers to the idea of St. Paul when the Apostle teaches that we must always exercise the zeal for the truth in the spirit of love (Cf.Eph.4:15). He is convinced about the *motives* for which we must love our neighbour. In communicating what we believe to be true there is need, in addition, to highlight the *qualities* of this love; it is also necessary to ensure one practices them towards our interlocutors. Some of the qualities of this love are universality, totality, reality, and sincerity. Love is universal, because it must be extended to all and it refers to the integral good of the person. It is real and sincere, because, as regards the means, it is necessary to adopt every real instrument, use all the faculties of soul and body, demonstrating interest not only in the temporal good but also in the spiritual good of the neighbour.

Different methods are proposed in order to ensure and maintain a love and peace that facilitates the communication of truth. Giving instruction on false teaching, St. Paul suggests that Christian evangelizer do not fight over or dispute about words, but should be eager to “impart the word of truth without deviation” and “avoid profane and idle talk.” “avoid foolish and ignorant debates,” believers “should be gentle with everyone, able to teach, tolerant, correcting opponents with kindness” in the hope that “God will grant them repentance that leads to knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim 2:14-25). Along the same line, first, one must acknowledge that there are things that do not favour honest communication of truth in charity. These include doing harm to another person

many of Lanteri’s writings, as is evident, for instance, in the *ESL*, where the word “genere” is used with reference to different elements, relating to: “study”, “moral matters”, “of doctrine”, Truth/current errors, the good that others do, “politics”, “politics and of government”, “of Institute”, “matters of the probable” (opinions), “preaching”. See *ESL*, pp. 142, 143, 148, 149, 150, 191, 204, 248, 225 ;Lanteri, *Riflessioni*, pp. 101,n.1. 102-103. However, the term (“genere”) was also used to mean “general”, as in “in genere”, that is, “in general”: for instance, see: Pre,2392b:T4. 156 Org, 8052:T1,4; Org, 2262:T6,3 Art.1, n.2).

on the basis of honour and money, speaking ill of others, brood hatred or grudges, nourishing suspects or prejudice. Earlier in this reflection, we saw some offences against truth. In order to communicate truth in charity, Lanteri suggests that our concern must be to practice a mutual love which is “*cordial, affable, anticipating, enduring*” and that knows how to forgive offences. One should interpret all in good faith, and should excuse the other person’s intention from one’s heart and in the face of other people – even though the act itself is reprehensible and perhaps not excusable -- and without seeking contrasts or conflicts with other persons. Nevertheless, since there are diversities of opinion, it is important to know where and how to dialogue, always proposing one’s own reasons with clarity, firmness, modesty, gentleness and humility. Thus, in communicating truth with charity, one strives to conserve good harmony and peace. Still, precisely for the sake of love, one is duty-bound to fraternally correct a person who errs.¹⁵⁷ For this reason, Lanteri recognizes that charity is an *inestimable good*, a *noble* virtue. It is so precious that it is better to sacrifice everything rather than break or offend it.

From this perspective of truth in love, Lanteri recommends that it is more important to seek to first win the heart before the intellect, making the interlocutor to love the truth itself which one presents and defends. Truth of Christian religion need not be imposed on, but one must propose it to others. On the question of proclamation and defence of truth, especially religious truth, it is relevant to reread the Vatican Council II’s Declaration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis Humanae*, on the Right of the Person and of Communities to Social and Civil Freedom in Matters Religious (December 7, 1965).

3.7.2. *The Exposition of the Truth*

In presenting the truth, in addition to charity or mercy, it is necessary to also take some pedagogical criteria into account.¹⁵⁸ For Lanteri, such exposition must be made with: (a) simplicity, (c) clarity and (c) *serious reasoning* on truth: “giving it, proving it with reason, with authority”, “with examples as well as with similitudes”. The expected result is that the intellect of the hearer will remain convinced and impressed. Moreover, it is suggested that, in the communication of truth one should use *opportune* and *calm* reasoning or arguments. (d) Apply truth to morals and customs, relating to practical life of the people;¹⁵⁹ (e) Propose solutions for the future, and overcome the difficulties.

157 Pre, 2313a, *passim*; Si veda anche *Org*, 2262:T5 – T 5,1,3

158 Although Lanteri speaks here in the context of preaching the Ignatian Exercises, the criteria indicated have a wider sphere of application.

159 This orientation is a reflection of the constant interest and concern of Lanteri for a moral life, that is the real behaviour of persons, and from which the communication of truth must not dissociate itself but rather continually take into account. |

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According to Lanteri, one must not present doctrinal propositions founded on systems and human opinions, or on “expressions of the Sacred Scriptures that are isolated and too literal”, or are not founded on the universal teachings of the Church. However, he also advises against presenting propositions or teachings that in practice serve more to pull people away from God rather than to draw people nearer to the love, service and mercy of God. That is why he advises that one must instead present arguments that are “*certa et perspicua*” (certain and evident), and not “doubtful”. Consequently, to achieve this, some ways are suggested. First, persuasion: it is necessary to persuade persons, that is, whoever is listening. Second, a profound study: one needs to undertake an in-depth and critical study of the pertinent field of knowledge in question (e.g. Sacred Scriptures, dogma, moral theology, culture, philosophy, theology, etc.), examining well “the principles and the reasons.”

The point is this. The Church can be truthful without being merciful. But she can't be merciful without being truthful. Our task as bishops at the synod this month, and frankly what God asks from every Christian all the time, is to speak the truth with patience, humility and love. Truth without compassion wounds and repels; mercy without truth is a comfortable form of lying. Thus, as a proof of our love, we still do need to speak the truth. Then we need to live it in our service to our families, to society and to the Church. We may now turn to briefly consider the relation between truth and mercy.

4. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN “TRUTH” AND “MERCY”

It is important to seek an understanding the balance of Mercy and Truth. As stated earlier, mercy appears in the forefront of many conversations in the Catholic Church today at almost every level. Sometimes we are given the impression that the expression of mercy is something “new” in the Church. What “tickles the ears” in many of these conversations is the notion that if mercy prevails, “anything goes” and “everything is all right.” It does not matter who you are or what you believe or say or do, mercy is a guaranteed safety net that you can count on when you fall. This kind of “tickling” suggests that the Church's teachings should be tempered with mercy – perhaps even changed or eliminated – so that the “sting” will be taken out of them. In this way, the teachings do not inconvenience or offend anyone, nor appear as a discrimination to anyone; they do not cause anyone to be singled out or made to feel different from the rest of society, or community; so that we can better “tolerate” and get along with each other, no matter what; in this way, we can better “co-exist”.

Those thoughts do “tickle the ears” but, unfortunately for those who propose or believe them, they are “myths.” They misrepresent or, at the least, exaggerate the idea of mercy as we have come to know and understand it here. Simply stated, they do not express truth. For example, could the joy of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus have ever taken place without the suffering of his

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Cross, the ultimate truth of Divine mercy? “Whoever wishes to be my disciple must deny himself, pick up his cross and follow me (Matthew 10: 38; Matthew 16: 24; Luke 14: 27),” the Lord Jesus said. In the life of the Catholic Christian, adherence to the truth is often the cross we bear and mercy, the consequence of carrying it.

From what has been said in these pages, and as experience shows, there are few things more difficult to navigate in our Christian walk than this beautiful dance between mercy and truth. This is clear in that moment, for example, when we encounter a friend or stranger who lived a wayward lifestyle clearly full of sinful, destructive activities; or we meet a wounded family, or encounter member of one’s religious who for a too long period had chosen to *practically* separate him/herself from the Religious family and “set off to a distant country” (Lk 15:13) where he/she lives at the margin or outside of the Institute-- therein ignoring his/her vows. Then, in either case, he/she meets with you and presents an inviting laugh hoping that you will reciprocate and affirm his/her behaviour. In those moments, it is an absolute art to know how to show grace and mercy to that person in their broken state while also not condoning the behaviour but tell him/her the truth.

The Psalmist proclaims “mercy and truth shall embrace” (Psalm 85: 10). What happens when they do meet together? Do they recognize one another as coming from the same source? Do they embrace one another and work together in search of what is good and right, beautiful, unites and just? Or do they cancel one another out, as some suggest, or exist in some competitive hierarchy where truth is acknowledged as good but mercy is better, preferable, presumed to be even “more Christian.”?

Mercy and truth are sometimes presented as an “either/or” proposition, as if they are competing. In the Catholic Church, the same type of argument is often made regarding what the Church asks and requires of Catholics in her law and policy versus what is perceived as “more pastoral.” How can something truly “pastoral” or “merciful” not flow from what we profess and believe?

The word “mercy” appears as many as 276 times in the Bible, depending upon what translation is used; the word “truth” is used almost as many times. In the Gospels, there are numerous accounts of the Lord Jesus – who revealed himself as “the truth (John 14: 6)” – extending mercy to those who crossed his path. The Gospel story of the woman caught in the act of adultery (John 8: 1-11) seems one of the narratives that best highlights how “mercy and truth embrace.” Here, an angry mob lead by the Scribes and Pharisees brought to Jesus a woman who had committed and was caught in adultery, and Jesus’ response reveals a perfect balance of truth and mercy. The law of Moses required that such a woman should be stoned to death. The Lord Jesus knew the law and its demands and was well aware that those leaders were testing him. He remained quiet in the face of their accusation and test, bent down to write something on the ground, and became the focus of their persistence. He stood up, glanced around at the crowd and uttered his famous words, “Let the one without sin be the first to cast a stone at her.” No stones were lifted, the crowd dispersed and in that moment,

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in the encounter of the Lord Jesus with this sinful woman, mercy and truth met. Dietrich Bonhoeffer reportedly once said, "It's not enough to help hurting people; you must also stop the things that hurt them"; in the Bible, we call this the balance of truth and mercy. In fact, the Lord Jesus looked at her and asked, "Has no one condemned you?" "No one, Lord," she answered. "Neither do I condemn you." "Go. From now on, sin no more (John 8: 10-11)."

God has always expected similar, make mercy and truth to meet together. God commands that His followers show mercy by helping wounded or hurting people (cfr. Lam.3:22-23; Prov.14:21; Lk6:36-37; Mt.5:7; 9:13; 18:33; 25:31-46; James 2:13; Ps.40:11-12; Ps.23:6), yet He also requires that they expose the things that hurt them, and offer fraternal correction and admonishment (Cfr. Prov.6:23; Ps.15:1-3; 34:13; 43:3; Zechariah 8:16; Mt.18:15-17; Prov.12:17; Gal.6:1; 2Thess.3:15; 2Tim 3:16-17; Jn. 8:32; 17:17-19; 1Jn.3:18; Ex.20:16; Eph.4:15, 25), so they can be led to the truth. As humans, this requires supernatural balance, because there are ditches on both sides of the road if you err to the extreme of either side. To be all merciful and yet refuse to speak the truth is like building a hospital at the bottom of a cliff without also installing a guardrail at the top. Certainly, you had help plenty of wounded or hurting people, but you would stop no one from falling off. To be all truthful and yet lack mercy would be like installing a guardrail without also building the hospital. You would definitely prevent a lot people from hurting themselves, but you would have no way to help those who fall.

Human nature is to err to the extreme of either side of truth or mercy - to be all one and very little (or none) of the other. It's just hardwired into us because of sin. But Jesus' life clearly shows we that can - and must - be both.

Although Jewish law called for stoning as the punishment for infidelity, Jesus had mercy and removed the punishment for the woman's sin. Yet He still upheld the truth that her actions were indeed sinful. He protected the person while upholding the principle. Because Jesus was filled with mercy for this woman He protected her life. Yet He also spoke the truth to her about her lifestyle.

In today's culture, people have been led to believe that rejecting someone's lifestyle is a rejection of them as a person. To tell a person that his/her practices of adultery is evil is considered rejecting, indeed not loving him/her as person. To tell a person who practices homosexuality that his behaviour is wrong is interpreted as rejecting, discriminating him/her as a person; to caution (rather than covering up) a consecrated person or a clergy man provably involved in the practice of a sexual relationship contradictory to his/her chosen state of life is wrong, or to denounce that his/her stealing or embezzling the community's fund is evil, is construed as rejecting and not wanting him/her well as a person. Yet nothing could be further from the truth. Jesus didn't reject people, nor should we.

But embracing a "life of sin" (as Jesus puts it) by not speaking the truth about it is also not fully following Jesus. Jesus didn't abandon the truth, nor should we. Telling the truth in love is itself an act of mercy, just as to show mercy to neighbour is an expression of the truth of the Jesus's Gospel and of nature of God who is love and mercy(Eph.2:4-8). Jesus helped wounded people, yet He also

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exposed the things that hurt them. And, as a result, some people despised Him for it. Jesus said, "The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify that its works are evil" (Jn. 7:7).

The same thing happens today, so it's all right to be hated for speaking the truth. It happened to Jesus – it will happen to us. But what is not all right is to be hated for showing no mercy. "For judgment is without mercy to the one who hasn't shown mercy" (James 2:13a). One Facebook message puts it in this way:

Mercy without Truth is a cheerleader without a team.

Truth without Mercy is surgery without anesthesia.

Truth without Mercy is mean and

Mercy without Truth is meaningless.

We need both of them.

*We need to be kind in what we say but,
we need to speak the truth.*

Our lives should be characterized by a deep desire to help wounded people while also stopping the things that hurt them. And the only way to perfectly balance the two is to walk in the Spirit of God and not the flesh. "I say, then: live by the Spirit and you will certainly not gratify the desire of the flesh. For the flesh has desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you may not do what you want (Galatians 5:16-17). Although our flesh pull us consistently to err to the extreme of either side, we must be a people of the Spirit, walking in the balance of truth and mercy. This is one way we can help wounded or hurting people today while also stopping the things that hurt them.

So, what is the glue that brings these two apparently opposite values – mercy and truth – together and makes them dance together so beautifully? The answer is unconditional love. This is the same love that God showed for us when He sent His Son to die on the cross. While we were still sinners in opposition to God, and in no way deserving of His mercy, He showed it to us anyway. That is the reason that Jesus could look at Peter and call him Satan, or look at the Pharisees and call them vipers, and be doing it out of complete love. He knew that He had been sent to save them, and His motive with every single word was 100% love for them and a desire to see them set free.

It is the same love that he shows to the woman brought to him so as to be stoned to death. Notice that the law was clear. The Lord Jesus did not deny the truth of its demands nor did he change the "law." Notice, too, that the aforementioned adulterous woman did not deny the truth of the accusation and asked for nothing. She did not earn forgiveness or even ask for it. The Lord Jesus, however, did not condemn her as he confronted the truth of her situation. The Lord Jesus showed her mercy. And then he sent her on her way, without compromise, reminding her to follow truth, to act in truth. "Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them around thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart" (Proverbs 3:3).

What does this mean for us? It means that the condition of our heart is one of the most important elements of our own dance with mercy and truth. If our heart is in the right place, then we can speak truth to others mercifully and out of love, perhaps persistently. If our heart is in the wrong place, we could be speaking the truth with the wrong motives, such as a desire to manipulate and control, humiliate and for self-aggrandizement. So, each one today may take a few minutes to stop and ask God where his heart is. Ask God to help us fix our heart, our gaze in Christ, so that we not only have the right motives and attitudes but also receive the strength to live truth and mercy in every sphere of relationships, actions and situations.

5. TRUTH AND MERCY MEET IN ACTIONS AND SITUATIONS

The Holy Year of Mercy concluded as a celebration. The liturgical Season of Lent comes and goes. We conclude the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Indeed, at the end of each celebration of the Holy Mass where we acknowledge our sins and confess them to Almighty God and to our brothers and sisters, listen the Word of God and are nourished by the Eucharist, we hear the priest by saying to us (according to one of the formulas): "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord." We are always offered the opportunity for a new beginning, for a new life. We make resolve. With hope, we begin again. We have with new opportunities and occasions for growth.

However, there challenging call to live truth in mercy, to witness to mercy in truth, continues. The witness to mercy and truth is a multifaceted and on-going commitment, expressed in words and action, with freedom and faithfulness in Christ in different spheres of our lives. Here, rather than examining one or two selected and specific practical cases or situations in some areas of consecrated life where truth and mercy shall meet or should unite -- and that could be another interesting area of studies, with all the information and discernment that would need to be involved -- , I wish here to briefly list some vital spheres or settings of life where Christians must strive to ensure that truth and mercy meet, not opposed, if we want to love and serve God and our neighbour. Surely, truth and mercy shall meet in our pastoral mission and ministry. There are, as a matter of fact, many particular environments and situations where truth and mercy meet or shall meet, even in the face of serious crisis, difficulties and at times pains and sufferings. Truth and mercy shall meet in our own encounter with the Lord Jesus and in our personal witness and style of life. Truth and mercy shall meet in our schools and other educational institutions. Truth and mercy they shall meet in marriage and family life when they married couple live in unity and happiness, or educate their children or even when they experience the situations of, say, separations, divorce, divorce and remarriage, polygamy, or have members with homosexual tendency. Truth and mercy shall meet in the life and mission of consecrated life, and as their members strive to live the exigencies of: religious vows, a fraternal life in common, the formation of candidates, an administration (governance), and any apostolate within the Institute. Truth and mercy shall meet in the administration of the sacrament of reconciliation;

to this sphere, too, applies the exhortation to “believe what you read, teach what you believe, and practice what you teach.” Truth and mercy shall meet in the education of students, and in the medical and health care services and institutions; truth and mercy shall meet in the legal and judiciary practices, as well as in other workplaces and environments. Truth and mercy shall embrace, because they remain a basis of the justice, healing and peace so much need and desired in our family, in religious communities and institutes, in the parish communities, places of work, and in the Church as well as in the society today.

CONCLUSION

This reflection started with the recognition that the theme of “mercy” and “truth” has featured prominently in recent times in the debates and polemics surrounding the pastoral care. The discussion is frequently around the pastoral care that should be given to wounded families, and to persons in the existential peripheries of church and society. This issue is not less present and relevant in Consecrated life and in other spheres of Christian life. However, as was noted, “mercy” and “truths” are sometimes presented as if one is pitted one against the other; “mercy” shown in pastoral care appeared as opposed to “doctrinal truths,” as an appeal to dilute ecclesiastical practice. The emphasis on the value and necessity of proclaiming “truth” is presented as to sometimes give the impression that its sustainers care less, if at all, about the pastoral implications of the divine attribute and the virtue of mercy in specific practical situations that humans experience.

The paper, therefore, tried to explore the theme of *truth* and *mercy* in order to show that, if well understood, both are inseparably connected and complete each other. “*Truth* is an inseparable companion of justice and mercy,”¹⁶⁰ a message Pope Francis has reiterated on several occasions. The study invites the reader to consider the full significance and the relationship between both values. Truth and mercy, which are attributes of God, converge in Christ, who taught them in words and action. Mercy and Truth meet in the Church, in the family, in the Consecrated life, and in every pastoral situations and spheres of Christian life.

Some implications or demands of the meaning “truth” and “mercy” were suggested, considering what Jesus and His Gospel teach us about mercy. Mercy is not merely an abstract and lofty doctrine: it has practical requirements in every sphere of life, in relationship with other persons, and in apostolate. Well known are the works of mercy. Everyone, especially consecrated persons, has the responsibility to bear witness to truth, that is, to communicate and defend truth, but also the need to acquire the necessary attitudes, dispositions and ways that are appropriate to communicate the truth.

In addition to raising awareness about the causes of some errors and the offenses against truth, the important question of the relation between truth and morality was touched upon, especially as it relates to the fundamental and

¹⁶⁰ Pope Francis, Twitter message, 8 Sept. 2017.

recurrent issues of authority and tolerance, which are still relevant and hot-button issue today.

The persistent great challenge today is to overcome the dualist dangerous tendency to create an artificial and, at times, radical divorce between “faith” and “life”, “doctrine” and “pastoral practice”, “theology” and “pastoral”: in other words, a dichotomy between “truth” and “mercy” in pastoral mission and generally in evangelization. At both the level of reflection and of pastoral practice, an adequate understanding of truth and mercy must take both values into consideration and harmonize them and their particular demands in concrete cases, while pedagogically respecting the law of graduality in the growth and maturity of individuals. After all, from the mouth of the Lord Jesus who said the “you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (Jn 8:32) came also commanded that his followers should: “Be merciful, just as your father is merciful”(Lk. 6:36; cfr. Mt.5:7). The inclusive or integrating understanding of *mercy* and *truth* aims, not at dominion and control of persons and their consciences, but at the authentic and integral liberation and at Christian maturity of the whole persons, such as to be set free from the obscurity that leads people into errors and to various forms of slavery, manipulation and oppression and, on the other hand, to be faithful in Christ, that is stand firm in freedom for service (cfr. Gal.5).

The fear of even a radical and annihilating subjectivism and relativism that tyrannize and its sometimes intolerant and dictatorial tone ought not intimidate and compel the Christian to fall into the opposite extreme of a abstract, alienating and lifeless absolutism, with a rather arrogant and a cold and dry attitude that, notwithstanding its rhetoric, practically tends to asphyxiate human persons and divorce them from the God of unceasing love and mercy and, consequently, separate such persons from fellow humans and their own concrete real life situations which is sometimes dramatic, agonizing.¹⁶¹ Instead, the experience of the joy of consecrated life, like the joy of love, is obtainable when truth and mercy meet together.

Also, it is necessary to build on the Christian teachings and on a holistic African vision of life, human persons and its authentic values. On this basis, African theologians, pastors and consecrated persons can contribute to intensify and enrich Catholic efforts to promote and sustain a holistic or inclusive and balanced understanding of *truth* and *mercy*, as Christian evangelizer encounter persons and strive to address their particular pastoral situations. While emphasizing that theological and pastoral reflections in Nigeria need to draw from truly African and truly Christian roots, values and traditions, it is also pertinent and helpful to always keep in mind this Augustinian principle: “In

161 African scholars and decision-makers must avoid the risk of being entangled, again and almost forced, as it were, into unwittingly opting for either one or the other camp of the new kind of “cold-war”; this appears as a far-reaching ideological and, one may add, anthropological battle between supporters of contemporary “relativism” and “absolutism” movements in the world and in the Church.

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necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus caritas – that is, “unity in things that are essential, freedom in things that are doubtful, charity in all things.”

Evidently, many are the teachings that the Church presented to us as the truths of the Catholic faith and morals. Theologically, there is an hierarchy of truths. Not all Catholic teachings have the same degree of doctrinal authority, value and weight; not all command an identical degree of obedience and assent of the faithful (as one can see LG,n.25; Formula of the *Profession of Faith*, 29/6/1998). Some of them are, indeed, difficult to hear and accept for some peoples. That does not diminish or negate their truth. Some of them are, indeed, difficult to follow and obey; they are crosses to bear. That does not diminish or negate their truth. Some of them run counter to popular opinion or prevailing social practices. That does not diminish or negate their truth. Luke tells us in his Gospel “there will always be temptations to sin” (Luke 17: 1). At the same time, we must remember the words of the Psalmist: “put your hope in the Lord because with the Lord there is mercy and unlimited forgiveness” (Psalm 130: 7). Truth is mercy that binds and obliges us.

The medieval philosophers and interpreters of the law already reminds that: “no one is bound to the impossible.” Jesus says in Matthew’s Gospel, however, “with God, in God, all things are possible” (Matthew 19: 26). St. Paul reminds adds: “No trial has come to you but what is human. God is faithful and will not let you be tried beyond your strength; but with the trial he will also provide a way out, so that you may be able to bear it” (1 Cor.10:13) We should never abandon what is true simply because it is not easy, convenient or popular. In the Lord Jesus, all things are possible, mercy *and* truth are possible. The Holy Year of Mercy reminded, as does the Lenten Season and the Sacrament of Reconciliation we celebrate, that Christians are to put our faith, trust and hope in Christ, in his mercy, in his truth.

Noteworthy, also, is that the teaching of Lord Jesus Christ on mercy – and proclaimed by the Church -- is truth, it is message that engages all areas of our life, be it of married or celibate persons. And, as Ven. Lanteri puts it, “there is no heart that is invulnerable.”¹⁶²

In the Lord Jesus, mercy and truth meet together. In the Catholic Church that he established, mercy *and* truth embrace. “Mercy cannot become a mere parenthesis in the life of the Church; it constitutes her very existence, through which the profound truths of the Gospel are made manifest and tangible.”¹⁶³ In our daily lives as Catholic Christians, as well as in our specific vocations, mercy *and* truth embrace. Truth and mercy meet together in Consecrated life, whether in the specific spheres of initial formation, community life, apostolic mission, administration (governance). This article has tried to highlight that everyone has the duty to communicate and defend the truth, a responsibility that is vital for the life and mission of Christians. For us, as Catholic Christians, truth always

162 Org,2262:T6,1.

163 Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter, *Misericordia et misera*, At the Conclusion Of The Extraordinary Jubilee Of Mercy (20/11/2016), n.1.

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allows for mercy, not as a replacement, but as a consequence. And authentic mercy always includes and never denies truth. Thus, as Lord says, "Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart." (Proverbs 3:3).

Let us, therefore, humbly and without fear acknowledge the necessity to stress God's mercy so that, through an experience of that mercy, people would come to know God's truth. And to tell the truth in love is itself an act of mercy. It is within that dyad of truth and mercy, closely interrelated, I suggest that we should read and absorb the rich teachings of the present pontificate of Pope Francis, especially on the pastoral mission of consecrated persons and of the clergy, on the pastoral care of family, on the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and on the poor and marginalized persons and people in the existential peripheries in the society and in the Church of our time.

CONSECRATED PERSONS AND COLLABORATIVE MINISTRY

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Abstract

The theme of collaborative ministry in mission is one that is of particular importance in every discussion on mission in any part of the universal Church. It is used within the context of coming together of two people or groups that are different, but who for a common purpose, must put aside their differences in order to achieve a common goal, in this context, the mission of the Church, which is the salvation of souls. This notwithstanding, the focus of this piece is collaborative ministry among Religious and between the Religious and Diocesan priests and the lay faithful. It understands collaborative ministry as an indispensable instrument for effective witnessing. It does not understand collaboration as a principle to be applied while at the office or while in the church, it is a way of life to be lived out from the smallest sociological unit of the Church to the largest. It has no limit to its practice, from the home, places of business to the church. This work argues that the result of effective collaboration in the Church is that it would make the ministry of evangelization more effective, and Religious Institutes more relevant to the contemporary world.

Keywords: Consecrated Persons, Collaboration, Ministry, Religious, Diocesan, laity.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most interesting images of the Church is that of the Church as 'the body of Christ'. The theologico-Biblical basis of this ecclesiology is 1 Cor 12:12-30: "Christ is like a single body, which has many parts; it is still one body, even though it is made up of different parts. In the same way, all of us, whether Jew or Gentile, whether slaves or free, have been baptized into one body by the same spirit, and we have all been given the one spirit to drink". The content of this text was reiterated by the Second Vatican Council:

In the building of Christ's body there is engaged a diversity of members and functions. There is only one spirit, who, according to his own riches and the needs of the ministries, gives his different gifts for the welfare of the church¹⁶⁴.

This notwithstanding, a cursory glance at the reality of the Church, with many kinds of multi-polarizations, reveals that this image of the Church does not always match with concrete circumstances. The clergy are polarized into blocks, the incardinated against the *fidei donum*, the diocesan priests against the religious priests, parish priests versus assistant priests, diocesan priests against female religious, and male religious against female religious etc. According to John Aniagwu:

¹⁶⁴ Lumen Gentium, 7

Where relations with female religious are concerned, the problem has been mainly one of a servant-master relationship. For some priests, it seems that religious should only be seen and not heard. They should wait on the priest to tell them what to and do only what they have been told¹⁶⁵.

With the indices of clericalism, parochialism, anti-clericalism and individualism making their appearance, it has become important to reflect on collaborative ministry in the church. This piece would, therefore, focus on collaborative ministry in relation to Consecrated Persons as pastoral agents with a unique and specific role to play.

UNDERSTANDING CONSECRATED PERSONS

Consecrated persons are members of the Religious Institutes and Societies of Apostolic Life¹⁶⁶. 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 church¹⁶⁷. 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. "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"¹⁶⁸. These counsels 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 consecration¹⁶⁹. 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 Christ¹⁷⁰. The first person in this line was Anthony of Egypt. He was followed by a line of disciples, until it became an institution in the Church¹⁷¹.

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

¹⁶⁵ John Aniagwu, *Collaborative ministry in the Church*. A paper presented during the Mutual Relations between Bishops and Religious in Nigeria. 2014, 9.

¹⁶⁶ Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony, *Africae Munus and Consecrated Persons*, In *The Catholic Voyage: A Publication of the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria*. Vol. 11. January 2015. P.4.

¹⁶⁷ canon 573.2

¹⁶⁸ Lumen Gentium 43

¹⁶⁹ Fleming, D. L., *Understanding a theology of Religious Life*. In G. A. Arburckle and D. L. Fleming (Eds.), *Religious Life: Rebirth through Conversion*. New York: Alba House, 1990, p. 22

¹⁷⁰ ¹⁷⁰ Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony, *Africae Munus and Consecrated Persons*, In *The Catholic Voyage: A Publication of the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria*. Vol. 11. January 2015. P.4.

¹⁷¹ Mary-Sylvia Nwachukwu, *Consecrated: A Vision of Religious Life from the Point of View of the Sacred*. Lagos: Change Publications, 2010, pp. 34-35.

'to consecrate'¹⁷². 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 does not in any way imply superiority¹⁷³, or complete severance from those the consecrated are called to serve¹⁷⁴. The Second Vatican Council Document 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"¹⁷⁵. 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"¹⁷⁶. Thus, another Second Vatican Council Document 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 sin¹⁷⁷ 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"¹⁷⁸.

THE MEANING OF COLLABORATION

Collaboration in the contention of Echema is the "coming together of two people or groups that are different, but who for a common purpose, must put aside their differences in order to achieve a common goal"¹⁷⁹. This definition presents what could be understood as a general understanding of collaboration, which also indicates its necessity in virtually every sphere of human endeavour, be it civil or ecclesiastical. In the ecclesiastical circles, it is often used with the addition of the word *ministry*, giving to birth the nomenclature: Collaborative ministry. It is employed to imply the identification, release and union of all baptized persons¹⁸⁰. This union is aimed at all the baptized making their contributions, in terms of gifts, towards the good of the Church. Collaborative ministry must involve the clergy, religious and the laity. Words that could describe the phenomenon of collaborative ministry include team ministry, group ministry, partnership, co-responsibility, co-discipleship, collegiality, shared ministry and mutual ministry.

THE THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF COLLABORATION

¹⁷² Leviticus 15:31; Ezekiel 14:7

¹⁷³ Myers, A. C. *Holiness*. The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1987, p. 493.

¹⁷⁴ Myers, A. C. *Sanctify, Consecrate*. The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1987, p. 493.

¹⁷⁵ Lumen Gentium 44

¹⁷⁶ Lumen Gentium 42

¹⁷⁷ Romance 6:11

¹⁷⁸ Perfectae Caritatis 5

¹⁷⁹ Austin Echema, *Priests and laity collaboration in the postmodern church*, Assumpta Press, Owerri, p. 25

¹⁸⁰ Loughlan Sofield and Carrol Juliano, *Collaborative ministry: Skills and guidelines*. Notre Dame: Ave Marie Press, 1987, p.11.

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In the Old Testament, precisely, the book of Genesis, the idea of collaboration is seen in the Trinity itself. When God wanted to create man he said: "Let us make man in our own image and likeness"¹⁸¹. When human beings prided themselves in the building of the Tower of Babel, God said, "Let us go down and mix up their language so that they would not understand themselves again"¹⁸². In the Trinity, we find the absolutely one, undivided and indivisible, although distinct, they are united in carrying out the eternal plan of God. Again, when Moses sat as judge over Israel, to avoid working himself to death, he appointed men of integrity to be in charge of tens, fifties, hundreds and thousands of people. This he did that they might be able to deal with minor cases that may not necessarily require his attention. Beyond these texts in the Old Testament, little attention has been paid to the delegation of authority and power¹⁸³.

In the New Testament, the ministry of Jesus was highly collaborative. After the twelve disciples had been with him for some time, Jesus sent them out in pairs, giving them authority over unclean spirits. Jesus empowered them with the authority to teach, heal the sick and cast out demons in his name¹⁸⁴. When Jesus sent out the 72 to towns that he would eventually visit, he made it clear to them that anyone who listens to them listens to him and that anyone who rejects them rejects him¹⁸⁵. In the Acts of the Apostles, the Apostles selected from among the people seven men who were of good reputation, filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom for the distribution of food¹⁸⁶. These are great examples of collaboration in the ministry from the Old and New Testaments.

In the wake of Greek neo-Platonism, the Church was seen as 'the school of truth and the fellowship of adepts'¹⁸⁷. To Roman Stoicism, the Church is principally seen as 'a well ordered community governed by laws'. In the early Church, they were referred to as 'the people of God' or 'the Church of God'. St Paul speaks of the Church as "the fullness of Christ and of fellowship"¹⁸⁸. He also speaks of the Church as "a mystery and sacrament of salvation"¹⁸⁹. The Second Vatican Council speaks of the Church variously, as 'the people of God', "Bearer of the message of salvation"¹⁹⁰, "Mystical Body of Christ"¹⁹¹ etc. These notwithstanding, the African Synod of 1994 brought out and shared with the universal Church the richness of the African cultural concept of family when it defined the Church as the family of God. This is

¹⁸¹ Genesis 1:26

¹⁸² Genesis 11:7

¹⁸³ Exodus 18:13-27

¹⁸⁴ Mark 6:7-13

¹⁸⁵ Luke 10:16

¹⁸⁶ Acts 6:1-6

¹⁸⁷Kung H. (1981). *The Church*. New York: Image Books.

¹⁸⁸ Ephesians 3:19

¹⁸⁹ Ephesians 3:4

¹⁹⁰ Gaudium et Spes (1965). In A. Flannery (Ed.). *Documents of the Second Vatican Council* (pp.903-1001). Dublin: Dominican.

¹⁹¹ Indulgentiarum Doctrina (1967). In A. Flannery (Ed.). *Documents of the Second Vatican Council* (pp.62-79). Dublin: Dominican Publications.

significant because as Cecil observes, in African culture, the family is the cradle of culture, the fundamental base of humanity and society and the sacred place where all the riches of our tradition converge¹⁹². These images of the church emphasizes the circular or communo image of the church and de-emphasizes the pyramidal or hierarchical image of the church¹⁹³. If the church is a communion, a fellowship and a body, it can only be healthy and efficient when each part functions perfectly as interdependent dimensions.

COLLABORATION BETWEEN RELIGIOUS AND THE DIOCESAN CLERGY

In 1978, the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes and the Sacred Congregation of Bishops issued the document known as *Mutuae Relationes* in which they directed that:

Efforts should be made to renew the bonds of fraternity and cooperation between diocesan clergy and communities of religious... Great importance should therefore be placed on all those means, even though simple and informal, which serve the increase of mutual trust, apostolic solidarity and fraternal harmony¹⁹⁴.

Since the diocesan priests and religious groups are distinct groups with particular charisms, the incorporation of religious in the different dimensions of the evangelical ministry of the diocese would help the fostering of all areas that require attention. Therefore, the *Mutuae Relationes* goes further to say:

In order that the diocesan presbyterium express due unity and that the various ministries be better fostered, the bishop should with all solicitude exhort the diocesan priests to recognize gratefully the fruitful contribution made by religious to their church and to approve willingly their nomination to positions of greater responsibility, which are consonant with their vocation and competency¹⁹⁵.

During any kind of collaboration between the religious and diocesan clergy, it is necessary that due respect be given to the character and purpose of each Religious Institute and the laws of foundations¹⁹⁶, this is to help them remain faithful to the grace of their vocation¹⁹⁷. However, for this to be realized, diocesan priests and the religious must learn to dialogue together for "Openness to dialogue is the Christian attitude inside the community as well as with other believers and with men and women of good will. Dialogue is to be practiced first of all within the family of the Church at all levels"¹⁹⁸. From the teaching of *Ecclesia in Africa*, collaborative in

¹⁹²Cecil, M. (ed) (1995). *What Happened at the African Synod*, Nairobi: Pauline.

¹⁹³ John Aniagwu, *Collaborative Ministry: Priests, sisters and brothers*. Abuja: Gaudium et Spes Institute, 2001, 14.

¹⁹⁴ *Mutuae Relationes*, no. 37.

¹⁹⁵ *Mutuae Relationes*, 38.

¹⁹⁶ Code of Canon Law, No. 680

¹⁹⁷ Code of Canon Law, No. 676

¹⁹⁸ *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 65

evangelization, catechesis, policy formation and decision making in the diocese and parish, therefore, becomes a kind of dialogue. And for dialogue to bear fruit, there is need for knowledge. The diocesan priest needs to know the religious and the religious needs to understand the diocesan priest. As such, *Ecclesia in Africa* teaches that “better reciprocal knowledge will result if the theology and spirituality of consecrated life are made part of the theological preparation of diocesan priests, and if adequate attention to the theology of the particular church and to the spirituality of the diocesan clergy is included in the formation of consecrated persons”¹⁹⁹.

While the diocesan clergy has a role to play in collaboration, consecrated persons “For their own part... will not fail to cooperate generously with the particular churches as much as they can and with respect for their own charism, working in full communion with the bishop”²⁰⁰. They need to understand that they are not strangers of birds of passage in the diocese.

COLLABORATION AMONG RELIGIOUS MEN AND WOMEN

Since the religious life bears witness to the life of heaven, and with her emphasis on community life, it would be expected that there should be more collaboration among religious than among other groups in the church. Having been called to restore beauty and purpose, truth and peace to a broken world, it would be scandalous to discover that the religious are themselves the harbingers of division and strife. Consecrated persons, therefore, particularly leaders of Religious Institutes must stimulate fidelity and commitment to mission, promote a sense of well being among members and encourage unity so as to inspire creativity and vitality in the apostolate given the particular religious institute. In order to promote collaboration among members, leaders must stay close to them, listen to them and dialogue with them. Once there isn't unity and understanding among a community of brothers or sisters, there can hardly be collaboration in ministry.

Members of Religious Institutes must learn to accept each other and relate amicably as true brothers and sisters who are engaged in the same one mission of Christ. Relationships must be permeated by mutual respect and fraternal charity. Religious who are in-charge should treat their associates and collaborators as co-workers and not subordinates. Responsibilities must be defined and everyone given the opportunity to carry out his or her responsibility as a free and responsible agent. As a requirement of natural justice, religious authorities must cater for the needs of the members of their communities. Wherever, this fails, it has its effect on collaboration.

COLLABORATION BETWEEN RELIGIOUS AND THE LAITY

Consecrated persons cannot do everything for themselves and by themselves. Following the nature of the apostolates they engage in. The laity are indispensable agents in the missionary activity of the church, thus, the church teaches that “the church is not truly established and does not fully live, nor is it a perfect sign of Christ

¹⁹⁹ *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 50

²⁰⁰ *Vita Consacrata*, no. 49

unless there is a genuine laity existing and working alongside the hierarchy”²⁰¹. Moreover, the laity constitutes the majority among the people of God with about 99% while the clergy and religious constitute about 1%²⁰². In the various ministries of consecrated persons, ranging from schools, hospitals, houses for the care of the aged, businesses, accommodations, pastoral centers etc., if the laity are kept out of it would be isolated from the creative currents of the times. They are the link or the point of intersection between the church and the world. They are at the front line²⁰³ and therefore need to have a clear consciousness of their being the Church²⁰⁴. Without the laity, the contributions of the consecrated persons would remain in the convents and rectories without reaching the world.

CONCLUSION

This piece has studied the Biblical and theological foundations of collaborative ministry in the Church, precisely, among Religious and between the Religious and Diocesan priests and the lay faithful. It understands collaborative ministry as an indispensable instrument for effective witnessing. To avoid the discussion of collaborative ministry only at a theoretical level without praxis, some basic realities will have to be known. The first is spiritual maturity; where there is no spiritual maturity, there cannot be the exercise of ministry in a collaborative manner. Spiritual maturity like any other maturity requires time, for we are always learning, always finding and always challenged. It actually requires dying to the self, multiple deaths and burials, and the resurrection of a new self that is open to people, free from fear and anxiety over loss of control and competition, respectful etc. It is not to be understood as a principle to be applied while at the office or while in the church, it is a way of life to be lived out from the smallest sociological unity to the largest. It has no limit to its practice, from the home, places of business to the church. The result of collaboration in the Church is that it would make the ministry of evangelization more effective, and Religious Institutes more relevant to the contemporary world.

²⁰¹ Ad Gentes No. 21

²⁰² Echema, A. *Autonomy of the local churches of Africa and the question of foreign aid*. In *JIT* 9, 2007, 61.

²⁰³ Peter Schineller, *The role of the laity in moral transformation of Nigeria*. In *Lucerna* 6, January-June, 1986, 12.

²⁰⁴ Pius XII, Address to the college of Cardinals, 20 February 1946

**THE THREAT OF PENTOCATHOLICISM TO THE CATHOLIC PRIESTHOOD:
TRIBUTE TO MONSIGNOR RAPHAEL CHUKWUBUNNA ANASIUDU²⁰⁵ - AN
OLD SCHOOL PRIEST**

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ABSTRACT

The history of the Catholic priesthood in Nigeria began a little less than a century ago with the ordination of the first Nigerian priest, Rev. Fr. Paul Obodochina Emechete (1884-1948), who was ordained on January 6, 1920 at Asaba by Bishop Thomas Brodrick, SMA. From its earliest beginning to the present the Catholic priesthood has been embraced by young men from all walks of life and from virtually all areas of the Nigerian territory. One of such men is Msgr. Raphael Chukwubunna Anasiudu, former Secretary General of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN). Of the one hundred years of Catholic priesthood in Nigeria, Msgr. Anasiudu has been part of this history for fifty years. The occasion of the Golden Jubilee of his sacerdotal life and his eightieth birthday provides an auspicious opportunity to reflect on the changing face of the Catholic priesthood in Nigeria. This paper sets out to examine the factors that account for this change and the implication of this change for the future of this sacerdotal ministry in Nigeria.

Key Words: Catholic, Priesthood, Pentecostalism, Pentocatholicism, Old School, Anasiudu.

INTRODUCTION

In his recent encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis wrote extensively on the damage inflicted on the ecosystem by a certain kind of contemporary lifestyle, driven by the principles and norms of techno-science and techno-economics. This lifestyle, which he describes as a *culture of more*, has set off a process of *rapidification*,²⁰⁷ which not only has unbalanced the delicate equilibrium in the ecosystem but has also led to the disappearance of certain life forms while at the same time placing many more at risk of extinction. The underlying argument in Pope Francis' *Laudato Si* is that certain ways of thinking and acting, i.e., certain lifestyles are antithetical to the continuation and prolongation of life on earth. This thesis can be analogically applied to the theme of our discourse – the Priesthood. As will be expounded in this essay, it could be held that there are certain ways of living

²⁰⁵ Msgr. Raphael Anasiudu was the Secretary General of the Catholic Secretariat and the Catholic Bishop's Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), 1985-94.

²⁰⁶ Rev. Fr. Emeka Nwosuh, OP is a Dominican Priest of the Province of St. Joseph the Worker, Nigeria and Ghana. He's the current President of the Dominican Institute, Samonda. Fr. Nwosuh's area of academic interest is the writings of the early Church Fathers and the History of Theology. But he also teaches Trinity, Ecclesiology, Eucharist, Holy Orders and Early Christian Philosophy. Fr. Nwosuh was once the President of the Catholic Theological Association of Nigeria (CATHAN).

²⁰⁷ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si, On the Care for our Common Home*, 2015

which gravely endanger the Catholic Priesthood in the church in Nigeria. Like some endangered animal and plant species, it appears that the catholic priesthood might, if care not taken, also become an endangered specie.

The twin celebration of the golden jubilee of the priestly ordination and the eightieth birthday of Very Rev. Monsignor Raphael Chukwubunna Anasiudu provide an auspicious occasion to pause for a moment to take a good look at that way of life, which he embraced half a century ago. As our ancestor and father in the priestly lineage, which he pioneered in Igboukwu, in Aguata Local Government Area of Anambra, State, I believe that it would be of great interest to him to want to take a close look at the long line of heirs that have followed or tried to follow his steps in the priestly life. And so, as we roll out the drums, dress up in colorful priestly vestments, lay out the dinner tables, in short as we celebrate (something we do very well and too frequently), we must at the same time put on our thinking cap (something we do not do very often and with great rigor and vigor), so that our celebration of this servant of God may be fruitful and meaningful.

A BRIEF INSIGHT INTO THE PERSON OF MSGR. ANASIUDU

Born on the 24th day of October, 1936 to the Catholic family of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph and Susanna Anasiudu, Monsignor Anasiudu is a second generation Catholic. His father, Mr. Joseph Anasiudu is listed as one of the pioneers of Catholicism in Igboukwu. And so, the son of a pioneer²⁰⁸, Msgr. Anasiudu will himself become a pioneer by laying a firm foundation of a priestly lineage in Igboukwu when on April 25, 1965 he was ordained as the first Catholic priest of Igboukwu by the then Bishop of Warri, Bishop Lucas Nwezeapu of blessed memory.²⁰⁹

Although Msgr. Anasiudu enjoys the privilege of being the pioneer priest of the church in Igboukwu, he, by no means, enjoys such privilege when it comes to the Catholic priesthood in the church in Nigeria or even of the church in Awka diocese, his home diocese. Msgr. Anasiudu was ordained a little more than forty-five years after the first Nigerian priest, Rev. Fr. Paul Obodochina Emechete (1884-1948), was ordained at Asaba on January 6, 1920 by Bishop Thomas Brodrick, SMA.²¹⁰ Bishop

²⁰⁸ The Catholic Church came to be established in Igboukwu in 1912 through the efforts of Chief Ezenwosu Udo (Ejekam) of Ezigbo village, Igboukwu. Chief Ezenwosu's move to bring Catholicism in Igboukwu was to counter the growing influence of his rival, Chief Ezudgbune of Ngo village, Igboukwu, who had earlier invited the Christian Missionary Society (CMS) to establish their church in his domain. To realize this project of establishing the Catholic Church in Igboukwu, eight young men were chosen from the four kindred families that make up Ezigbo village to go to Nnobi town and learn about the Catholic faith and return back to Igboukwu and teach it to others. . The eight men included the father of Msgr. Anasiudu, Mr. Joseph Umeokafor Eze Anasiudu. Others include Simon Ijezie, James Ofodum, Okeke Unegbu, Michael Okafor, and Peter Okafor. These eight men will constitute the foundation members of the church in Igboukwu, cf. John N. P. Okonkwo, *The History of the Catholic Church in Igboukwu*, 2014. See also *Awka Diocese at 25: A Historical Review*, Revs Frs. Ikem Oliobi, T. I. Onwuasoanya, W. N. Ofojebe (Eds.).

²⁰⁹ Fr. John Arinze Anasiudu, "Biography of Very Rev. Msgr. R. C. Anasiudu" edited and updated by Fr. Malachi Chukwuma Maduewesi; in *50th Golden Jubilee Celebration Brochure of Very Rev. Fr.. Raphael Chukwubunna Anasiudu*, Sunday, 12 April, 2015.

²¹⁰ Cf. Cosmas Nwosuh, *Cardinal Dominic Ekanem and the Growth of the Catholic Church in Nigeria*, (Iperemo: Ambassador Publications, 2012), 20.

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Ferdinand Terrien, SMA, ordained the second generation of priests for the church in Nigeria nine years later in Lagos. These were Rev. Frs. Stephen F. Adewuyi, Lawrence Layode, and Julius Oyebode Oni.²¹¹ A year later, on December 8, 1930, Bishop Shanahan would ordain Fr. Anyogu in Onitsha.²¹² It is evident, then, that Msgr. Anasiudu does not even fall among the third or fourth generation of Catholic priests of the church in Nigeria. Yet, there is something remarkable about his priesthood in the history of the Catholic priesthood, not only of the church in Nigeria but the entire Catholic world. Msgr. Anasiudu was ordained at the threshold of history, a moment the Catholic Church was experiencing a *aggiornamento*. And so, Msgr. Anasiudu is a priest of two epochs. Formed and trained as a seminarian in the spirit of the Council of Trent and the First Vatican Council, he will, however, be ordained and minister as a priest in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council. It will be right, therefore, to describe him as a priest of transition.

What Sort of Priest is Msgr. Anasiudu?

Though not belonging to the class of priests who were ordained and who ministered during the Pre-Vatican II era, Msgr. Anasiudu, nevertheless, can be described, using a popular Nigerian slang, as an *Old School*. He is an *Old School* not only because he has gracefully advanced in age, but because he belongs to a class of Catholic priests whose notions, values, formation, and lifestyles are remarkably different from that of many young priests of today. In fact, he does not only belong to the class of *Old School* priests, but could also be said to belong to the class of an endangered species of the Catholic priesthood. Ordained in an epoch when the Catholic priesthood was a phenomenon largely unknown and barely understood, among both the Christian faithful and non-Christians alike, Catholic priests were seen as rare and strange breed of human beings. A lot of mystique and myths oftentimes surrounded the personality of Catholic priests. Many thought them as belonging to both the human and spirit worlds (*nmadu na nmuo*). For long, many were under the impression that Catholic priests did not engage in the mundane routines (e.g. toileting!) which ordinary mortals engage in.

Unlike what could today be seen among many contemporary priests who guzzle down bottles of larger beer in public, Catholics priests of Msgr. Anasiudu's generation will not be caught dead drinking even a glass of water in public not to mention eating in public. I recall a recent incident that illustrates this. At one of the annual meetings of Igboukwu Priests and Religious Association, hosted by my elder brother, Fr. Cosmas Nwosuh, MSP and myself, Msgr. Anasiudu was present. At the end of the general discussions, when it was time for the meal and drinks to be served, one of the young priest causally remarked that the Monsignor should be served his meals right there among other priests. An older priest looked at him questioningly and asked him how he could even consider serving the Monsignor "in public"! And yet, this was a gathering of fellow priests and religious men and women. Monsignor had to be accompanied into a private section of the house where

²¹¹ Cf. Nwosuh, *Cardinal Dominic Ekandem*, 21

²¹² Cf. Nwosuh, *Cardinal Dominic Ekandem*, 21

his meal and drink was served him. For many, this might seem rather exaggerated and even obtuse but a contextual reading of the situation will place this rather strange way of acting in a proper and better light. One can also better appreciate this seemingly reclusive lifestyle of *Old School* Catholic priests like Msgr. Anasiudu, by understanding the two currents of thoughts that fed and shaped this form of lifestyle that shuns certain public life.

THE TRADITIONAL CONCEPT OF THE PRIESTHOOD

One of these currents comes from traditional African setting. Still fresh from and, indeed, still very close to the African traditional religion and culture, it is not unlikely that both the Christian converts and those who still pledged allegiance to the indigenous religion and culture, viewed the Catholic priests from categories drawn from the local milieu. One of such categories is the masquerade who once had a revered and unique role in the traditional Igbo society. Masquerades were, in fact, considered to be spirits rather than humans. For that reason, masquerades cannot be seen performing those simple human activities or actions that ordinary human beings do. Until very recently, Catholic priests were seen from that same prism. And so, one can understand why Catholic priests can't or shouldn't be seen eating or drinking in public, after all, who has ever seen a masquerade eat or drink?

The second category, which consciously or unconsciously shaped the way Catholic priests were viewed and held, comes from the category of priests of local deities, especially the very powerful ones. Priests of local deities were held in very high esteem but also feared. Though not considered spirits like masquerades, priests of local deities, nevertheless, have very strict rules of public comportment. In fact, not even titled men, *ndi nze na ozo*, are allowed to eat and drink in public. Certainly, in the light of today's mentality and culture, this will be dismissed as obscurantist. But what lies beneath this strict rule of public conduct? It is, in summary, the dignity and honor that these offices bear as symbols of public authority. Imagine the Queen of England eating ice cream while casually taking a walk on the streets of London or the Chief Justice of any Supreme Court, guzzling bottles of beer in a public bar or at a public function. Therefore, far more than the external gesture of observing certain form of public comportment, the Catholic priesthood, like some other public figures, both traditional and modern, was seen and held as symbols of authority. Holders of such offices are, therefore, expected to act with certain decorum in both public and private. This is, indeed, the basis of what is commonly known as priestly decorum.

It is this public decorum, or priestly decorum, as it is usually referred to among the older clergy that the traditional seminary formation will instill in the lives of candidates for the Catholic priesthood. This second current of thought, in synergy with the first current, shaped the image of those priests that the younger generation of priests will refer to as *Old School*. But far more than just instilling priestly decorum in this fast *dying* generation of *Old School* priests, the seminary formation, which they received, impressed in *Old School* priests like Msgr. Anasiudu, the rich traditional ideals of Catholic priesthood. Perhaps, it may be more appropriate to speak of the values, which *Old School* priests like Msgr. Anasiudu *imbibed* during their seminary

formation, for it is, indeed, one thing for the seminary formators to seek to instill certain values and entirely another thing for candidates in formation to imbibe these values.

PRIESTLY VALUES AMONG OLD SCHOOL PRIESTS

One such important values of the priesthood that Monsignor imbibed and lived out these past five decades of his sacerdotal life is the sacrificial character of the priestly life. The priesthood is a life of total sacrifice. It is a sacrifice not only in the basic sense of giving up family, marriage, properties, career opportunities, etc. to follow Christ, but more importantly a daily pouring out of one's life as libation (2 Tim 4: 6; Philp. 2:17). It is a sacrifice in which one dedicates oneself totally and joyfully to the service of God's people even under the most difficult and sometimes hostile conditions. A priest who is properly schooled and who has well ingrained this ideal is ever willing to work even in the remotest and poorest parish and outstation. He is ever eager to construct from scratch and from very meager resources new communities of God's people. And so, he is imbued with a missionary spirit and zeal. He is, therefore, not content with simply managing the parish to which he has been assigned, but he is eager to open up new outstations and mass centers and also make concerted efforts to visit them regularly and celebrate the sacraments for them.

Old School priests like Msgr. Anasiudu, are usually driven by certain concerns and motivations because their vocabularies are different. The word "comfort" does not exist in their lexicon. The priesthood is not, for them, associated with a life of comfort but of sacrifice. The reason is very simple. Their motivations for entering the priesthood are different. For Msgr. Anasiudu and his *Old School* colleagues, one does not enter the priesthood to be comfortable. Rather, the priesthood is a life of continuous self-giving, which is offered as a libation to Christ and his Church. And so, for him and for others like him who belong to this *Old School*, their primary anxiety is not to be posted to the must "luxuriant and buoyant" urban parish. They are remotely anxious about what kind of car will be given to them at their ordination or at their priestly anniversaries, even their first priestly anniversary! They are least concerned about becoming well connected to financial heavy weights in and outside their parish. They are even less worried about finding favor with the diocesan consultors and the Bishop himself, so that their chances of being sent for further studies in Europe or America will be brighter. Never mind that, upon finishing their studies, if they ever do, they will manufacture a million and one reason to stay back and build a small financial fortune for themselves and possibly for their immediate family members. If one, therefore, is to examine very closely the attitude, speech, and comportment of *Old School* priests like Msgr. Anasiudu, one will find anything but a sense of entitlement. The reason is very simple. For them, the priesthood is an undeserved privilege and not a right. The priesthood is a gift of grace and not an entitlement to which one lay claims. For Msgr. Anasiudu and his *Old School* colleagues, the priesthood is not an opportunistic calling that affords one to carve out a comfortable niche in society.

MSGR. ANASIUDU'S PRIESTLY LIFESTYLE

Looking at the lifestyle of Msgr. Anasiudu it is quite easy to see that he clearly understands and believes that the priesthood is a gift of grace given for the service of Christ and of his Church and not an opportunity for self-enrichment. Anyone who is even vaguely familiar with him will attest to his simplicity, modesty and humility. These are qualities that are essential to the priesthood. To a great degree, these three qualities are intimately connected. The nature of the priesthood demands a simple and modest lifestyle. As one chosen for the ministry of service, a priest should be distinguished by his humility. Like his Master Jesus, who came to serve and not to be served (Mt 20:28 parallel), a priest must live and act like a humble servant. Simplicity and modesty are themselves expressions of humility. And so, simplicity and modesty are distinctive qualities that characterize the lifestyle of a humble priest. These qualities are crucial in helping a priest remain focused on the primary mission for which he was ordained and not become caught up with pursuits which have little or no bearing on his primary mission as a priest.

When a lifestyle of simplicity and modesty is thrown overboard a priest becomes entangled in a web of material pursuit. His attention shifts from preaching the Gospel and ministering to the spiritual and even material needs of the flock of Christ, to ministering to his own insatiable desires. His concern would no longer be the spiritual wellbeing of his flock but his own material wellbeing. He becomes less and less concerned with building up the faith and moral of his parishioners as he increasingly becomes more engrossed with building up his bank account balances. His passion and zeal for his priestly duties takes a back seat as his ardent passion for the latest toys: smartphones, electronic and technological gadgets, cars and houses, etc. dominate the horizons of his mental space. Increasingly, he becomes an expert in everything else but his priestly duties. Caught up in the cycle of mundane activities, he hardly has time to refresh and improve his knowledge on recent teachings of the Church even though he can access these teachings from his latest expensive smartphone. And so, as years wear on, he slowly and steadily slips into deeper ignorance which he tries to mask with inflexible exercise of power and an air of clerical superiority. Having abandoned intellectual self-improvement, he not only becomes incapable of detecting and correcting errors in matters of faith, but becomes himself a purveyor of errors. The homily which ought to be a medium for spiritual formation and nourishment becomes an ecclesiastical version of "A Night of a Thousand Laugh". The liturgy is mangled and turned into a quasi-magical ritual. Having thrown overboard the virtues of simplicity and modesty, the priest begins to feel and also make others feel the weight of his importance, not minding the fact that he has to ingratiate himself with the rich in order to maintain his lavish lifestyle.

This seemingly exaggerated picture which, nonetheless, fittingly describes the lifestyle of many young contemporary priests does not in any way fit the image and character of Msgr. Anasiudu. This is another reason why he is an *Old School* priest. Were it possible for his car to speak like Balaam's mule, his car would have protested vehemently when Msgr. Anasiudu parks his beside any of the cars of some recently ordained priests. I can bet that Msgr. Anasiudu will be shell shocked to

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learn of the large sum that is sitting coolly in the bank accounts of many young priests whose parents weren't even yet married when he entered the seminary. I am certain that Msgr. Anasiudu would have wondered many times if he still belongs to the same Catholic priesthood with others priests who have erected big mansions in their father's compound whereas, he has to content himself with a single room in his brother's house.

But is it that he was not smart enough or that there were no opportunities for him to secure these comforts of life for himself? Certainly not! As the first Secretary-General of the Catholic Secretariat, Msgr. Anasiudu was in a vantage position to feather his nest. After his return to his home diocese, he had been assigned to important parishes where he could have made a little fortune for himself. There is no question as to his intellectual capability. In fact, he was among the first batch of young priests who were sent to University of Nigeria, Nsukka for their post-ordination studies, that is, further studies. There he studied History and Journalism.²¹³ Therefore, he could have pulled the right strings that could have paved the way for him to pursue higher studies abroad and thereafter, permanently establish himself in the rich American or European society. Msgr. Anasiudu wasn't lacking in sagacity and opportunities. He had these and more but choose to remain a simple, modest and humble local priest. He opted for the ideals and virtues of the priesthood over and above personal interests.

If Msgr. Anasiudu is said to be an *Old School* and to belong to an endangered species of Catholic priests, it is even more because of his identity as a Catholic priest. In other words, there is no ambiguity as to his true identity as a Catholic priest. In sharp contrast to what obtains among so many contemporary young and not so young priests, one can discern from both his preaching and liturgical celebration of the Eucharist, that he is firmly rooted in the Catholic tradition. Many traditional lay faithful who have been nurtured and weaned in the Catholic tradition are often left in a state of perplexity and bewilderment when they listen to the homilies or attend the liturgical celebration of some young “modern” priests. They often wonder if they are listening to a clone of T. B. Joshua, Pastor Adeboye, Pastor Oyedepo, Pastor Oyakhilome, or any of those “mega pastors”. Many can attest to the perplexity and sense of frustration of many traditional Catholics, who wonder if the Mass they had just attended was a catholic version of a Pentecostal fellowship jamboree. Although one cannot but feel certain consternation yet one must not be totally surprised at these aberrations.

THE THREAT OF PENTECOSTALISM TO CATHOLIC PRIESTHOOD

Sadly but increasingly, Priests like Msgr. Anasiudu have long ceased to be models for many seminarians and young priests. Enthralled by the celebrity status of these mega-pastors, and of course, the attendant pecuniary benefits that flow from having a large followership, many seminarians and young priests have adopted these mega-pastors as spiritual mentors. They are not satisfied with merely copying their

²¹³ Fr. John Arinze Anasiudu, “Biography of Very Rev. Msgr. R. C. Anasiudu”

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delivery style in their preaching, which admittedly may sometimes be quite impressive; but they go on to imitate their theatrics and worse still their poisoned theology, if one can, indeed, call it theology. Thus, so many seminarians and young priests have jettisoned their rich Catholic spirituality for a cheap shallow and questionable spirituality. Since gullible, ignorant and superficially minded persons are not always lacking, even within the Catholic Church, these priests are never lacking in followership. There is, alarmingly, a growing pentecostalization within the Catholic Church and among the Catholic clergy, thereby giving rise to a new brand of Catholics and catholic priests, who may aptly be described as Pentocatholics and Pentocatholic priests respectively.

A growing but worrisome phenomenon which highlights the emergence of Pentocatholic priests within the Catholic Church is private ministries. This phenomenon further underscores the fact that Msgr. Anasiudu really belongs to the *Old School* and a dying breed of ordained ministers of God. While there are priests, some barely a year old in the priesthood, who boast of flourishing private ministries, it is highly improbable that Msgr. Anasiudu ever toyed with the idea of establishing one. Msgr. Anasiudu belongs to the *Old School* which understands the Catholic priesthood and its mission, not as a private ministry but a public or better still an ecclesial ministry exercised for and on behalf of the church. He clearly understands that even when a priest is graced with unique charisms, they are not meant to be deployed towards creating a personal fiefdom that thrives on personality cult. The establishment of private ministries, most of which are dedicated to healing, is an idea that would leave *Old School* priests like Msgr. Anasiudu perplexed. One would ordinarily expect that with the upsurge in the number of young priests desirous of undertaking the healing ministry, there ought to have been a corresponding increase and development of a more robust hospital apostolate within the church in Nigeria, after all it is in hospitals that those who need healing (both physical and emotional) are found. But the reverse is the case. The hospital apostolate in Nigeria remains one of the most neglected apostolates in our local church. Although most of the healing ministries would claim that they are more involved in spiritual healing, that is, healing of spiritual ailments purportedly caused by demons, we do know, however, that these private healing ministries do often claim to heal all manners of psychophysical illnesses.

A cursory look at the phenomenon of private healing ministries within the Catholic Church would immediately reveal that this phenomenon is the direct influence of the deregulation and privatization process that is endemic in and characteristic of Pentecostalism. It appears that just as we have several individuals establishing their own Pentecostal “churches” and miracle centers, some young priests set up their own mini-churches under the guise of healing ministries. And so it may well be that the Catholic hierarchy in Nigeria is unwittingly ordaining crypto-Pentecostal pastors as Catholic priests. Incidentally, this deregulation and privatization phenomenon has also caught up with the lay faithful. Today there are several prayer houses or prayer ministries established and operated by lay Catholics. Often operating under the name and goodwill of the Catholic Church, like business franchises, they attract

hapless and gullible members of the Catholic Church. But it does not take much to discern that what goes on in these prayer centers is anything but Catholic or at best pseudo-Catholic. This, indeed, calls for serious reflection and a well-articulated response. If this phenomenon is left unchecked, the prediction of Rev. Fr. Anthony Akinwale, OP, may well come to pass. He predicts the eclipse of Catholicism in Nigeria within a couple of decades.²¹⁴ The ferment for this disintegration is found among the crypto-Pentecostal pastors who dress up in the white suntan of Catholic priests and in these crypto-Pentecostal sects that masquerade as prayer centers.

Having gracefully retired from active priestly ministry after half a century of committed service as a priest of the Roman Catholic Church, there is no doubt that Msgr. Anasiudu will be filled with a deep sense of satisfaction and gratitude to God Almighty who graciously granted him the privilege of participating in the priesthood of His only begotten Son. Accompanying, most possibly, this sense of gratitude may be the feeling of anxiety; anxiety about the future of this ministry to which he so dedicated himself. This anxiety may not so much be about the availability of young men willing to embrace the sacerdotal ministry. For now and most hopefully in the foreseeable future there are and, hopefully, will still be many young men willing to enter into the priesthood. For instance, in Msgr. Anasiudu's hometown, Igboukwu, a small town that numbers about three-quarter of million people; Msgr. Anasiudu stands as the head of a priestly lineage that numbers a little above a hundred (100) priests. And so, thanks to the courageous and generous response of Msgr. Anasiudu to God's divine call some fifty years ago, the church in Nigeria still has many young men who dare to respond to the call to the priestly vocation as he did. And so, his anxiety may not be about numbers, rather his worry might be of a different kind. As a true and dedicated priest of the Catholic tradition, he will be no doubt concerned about the quality of the priestly life and ministry of these men who, particularly in more recent time, followed his footsteps in the Catholic priestly ministry. Msgr. Anasiudu's Golden Jubilee celebration and eightieth birthday anniversary may, therefore, be indeed one of mixed emotions. On one hand he will be filled with great joy and gratitude for God's immense blessings during his fifty years of priestly ministry and eighty years of fulfilled earthly life. But on the other hand, there might be a sense of pain and sorrow for the burgeoning number of crypto-Pentecostal pastors who wear the priestly garb and who distort the true identity and ministry of the Catholic priesthood.

And so, his fiftieth anniversary celebration and his eightieth birthday entail both a joyful celebration and a sober reflection. It is an occasion to pause and ask very salient questions about the future of the Catholic priesthood in the Nigeria Church. It calls for a critical appraisal of the present seminary/priestly formation which may not be unconnected with the dark ominous storm that is gathering over our local church. Without courageously undertaking this self-appraisal, the church in Nigeria risks an eclipse of Catholic priests of the kind and caliber of Msgr. Anasiudu. If the

²¹⁴ Cf. *Understanding Pentecostalism in Nigeria*, paper presented at the Provincial Workshop on Pentecostalism, "The Challenge of Pentecostalism in Nigeria: A Dominican Response", held at St. Thomas Aquinas Priory, Samonda, Ibadan, Monday October 17 to Friday, 21, 2016.

present threats remain unaddressed, we may witness, in years to come, an eventual substitution of authentic Catholic priests with crypto-Pentecostal pastors in the guise of Catholic priests. Perhaps to many this may sound far-fetched or alarmist but for anyone with a discerning mind and who is attentive to the present situation, he/she does not need much convincing as to the gravity of the situation. He/she knows that this is no mere doomsday prophecy.

THE SOCIO-RELIGIOUS CONTEXT OF PRIESTLY FORMATION IN NIGERIA

We cannot, however, begin to address the problem without first undertaking an anatomy of the problem or threat. This will necessarily require understanding the nature and even scope of the problem. The danger of a complete loss of the essence of the Catholic priesthood through the combined influences of Pentecostalism and materialism and some other factors not immediately or directly connected to these two are, indeed, real. If priests like Msgr. Anasiudu, are said to be *Old School*, it is largely because of the context of their priestly formation which is remarkably different from the context which many young priests are formed. This context has two dimensions: the ecclesial dimension which has to do with the internal context of the priestly formation and the secular sociological dimension which pertains to the external context of the priestly formation. Let us examine these dimensions beginning with the latter.

Nigeria, right from its constitution as a single State, has always been a religiously diverse society. This diversity is even more evident within the Christian fold. And so, besides Catholicism, there are the Anglicans and other mainline protestant churches and indigenous African churches, each sometimes having particular strongholds or areas of geographical spread or influence. There was, however, a great degree of insularity and sometimes, hostility among these different Christian traditions. This rigid line of separation was, indeed, palpable and, thus, did ensure that there was little or no exchange between different religious traditions especially between Catholics and Anglicans/Protestants. In fact, in certain parts of the country, especially in Eastern Nigeria, where Catholicism has its strongest foothold, it was inconceivable for Catholics and Anglicans to mingle. The socio-religious context in which Msgr. Anasiudu and so many other priests up to the late 70s and early 80s were formed and ministered as Catholic priests was not only one that was characterized by religious insulation, but more importantly one that was almost completely devoid of the Pentecostal influence.

The explosive spread of Pentecostalism in Nigeria²¹⁵ and as well as the rest of Africa, beginning from the mid-80s will not only redraw the religious map of Christianity in

²¹⁵ For more details on the spread of Pentecostalism in Nigeria and Africa, see Paul Gifford, *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*, (Oxford: Oxford Press, 2016); Pauline Aweto Eze, *The Changing Landscape of Christianity in Africa* (Nairobi: Paulines, 2012); Kenneth Enang, *The Nigeria Catholics and the Independent Churches: A Call to Authentic Faith* (Nairobi: Paulines, 2012); Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford Press, 2008); Traditions and Compromises: Essays on the Challenge of Pentecostalism, A. Akinwale & J. Kenny (eds.), (Ibadan: Michael Dempsey Center for Religious and Social Research, 2004).

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Nigeria but will also introduce a portent but dangerous element in the external context in which Catholic priests are formed in Nigeria and Africa as a whole. In sharp contrast to the quasi-iron-clad walls that insulated one Christian tradition from others, the Pentecostal tidal wave will sweep through each religious traditions leaving behind its debilitating effects in each of these Christian traditions. Within Catholicism itself, the emergence of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement (CCRM), though having its own distinct origin and impetus, will largely serve as an easy conduit for Pentecostal influence within the Catholic Church. This is largely owing to its close affinity to Pentecostalism, particularly in terms of its features and mode of worship. Thus, many Charismatics were easily predisposed to share fellowships with non-Catholics, i.e. Pentecostals. The long drawn battle between early Charismatic members and the hierarchy of the Church over several questions of doctrine is largely the result of the Pentecostal influence on Catholic Charismatics. After a lot of purification, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement will eventually find a somewhat reluctant welcome in the womb of the Catholic Church. Those who have drunk deep in the wells of Pentecostalism will remain dissenters, many of them either joining other Pentecostal churches or establishing rival Charismatic groups within or outside the Church, e.g., the Catholic Charismatic Revival Movement (The Watchman Charismatics). A significant event in the history of the Charismatic Movement is the establishment of Charismatic groups within different Seminaries and Religious houses of formation in Nigeria. I am unaware of any study that details the impact of this movement on the formation of future priests in Nigeria. But what cannot be disputed is that the early pioneers of healing ministries within the Catholic Church were directly or indirectly connected with the Charismatic Movement which as I said earlier shared close affinity with Pentecostalism. One of the earliest pioneers of a private healing ministry is Rev. Fr. Prof. Emmanuel Edeh, CSSP, whose Holy Ghost ministry swept like a forest wild fire across the country.

From the late 90s onwards, a new brand of Pentecostalism with far more pernicious or debilitating effects will sweep across Nigeria and the rest of Africa like a tsunami. The emergence of personality cult mega-Pentecostal “churches” will further complicate and muddy the socio-religious context in which future Catholic priests are formed. This brand of Pentecostalism which is propelled on the wings of spiritual materialism and material spirituality will prove an irresistible force not only to the hapless economically deprived common man on the streets but also to business executives, university professors and top government officials, many of whom will effortlessly assume the role of pastors in these mega “churches”. Taking great advantage of the growing and powerful influence of the electronic media and Internet and computer technology, these sleekly dressed pastors who, often, have perfected the art of public speaking did sooner than later capture the hearts and minds of millions of people including seminarians and young priests. Fed on the daily diet of the gospel of prosperity, i.e. spiritual materialism and material spirituality, many Catholic seminarians and young priests will become hooked on like drug addicts to these mega-pastors. Completely overawed by the success of these mega-pastors, particularly in terms of the huge numbers of “clients” who filled

their miracle arenas, many seminarians and young priests will consciously or unconsciously enroll themselves as faithful disciples of these mega-pastors. And so their lecture halls will shift from the seminary lecture halls to the television rooms where these "anointed men of God" are "powerfully" preaching the word of God and performing miracles. Their spiritual directors and mentors ceased to be those assigned to their respective seminaries and houses of religious formation but rather those "anointed men of God". Expectedly, the idea of Catholic priesthood and ministry espoused and lived by priests like Msgr. Anasiudu will cease to hold any attraction for them.

And so one can notice two different socio-religious contexts in which candidates for the Catholic priesthood were then formed and now being formed. Priests like Msgr. Anasiudu were formed in a socio-religious context that largely insulated them from influences of other religious traditions. It is possible, therefore, to refer to *Old School* priests like Msgr. Anasiudu as *Berlin Wall priests*. Today, however, candidates for the Catholic priesthood do not enjoy similar insulation. The advances in modern technology have created a socio-religious context *sans frontier*. But for all its benefits, this technological advancement has impacted negatively on the formation of future Catholic priests. Modern technology has in a certain respect facilitated the emergence of *priests and seminarians sans frontier*. *Priests and seminarians sans frontiers* appear to be oblivious of the peculiarities or uniqueness of different Christian traditions and as such, are much easily predisposed to borrow, often in an indiscriminate manner, from other Christian traditions particularly Pentecostalism. A similar phenomenon obtains among the lay faithful. Increasingly, there is a growing number of *Catholics sans frontier*. Although, these claim to be Catholics they are quite comfortable moving in and out of one Pentecostal church or the other, while at the same time participating often in the sacramental life of the church. But worse still the effective use of modern technology by Pentecostal mega-pastors has created a new species of Catholic priests and seminarians, namely, *crypto-Pentecostal pastors and seminarians*. That makes priests like Msgr. Anasiudu, not only *Old School* but an endangered species.

A second element of the socio-religious context which has grave impact and consequence for priestly formation in Nigeria is the growing specter of anti-intellectualism. The take-over of missionary and private schools by the military government in the late 70s set the stage for the collapse of education in Nigeria. But beyond destroying the fabrics and structures of the educational institution in the country, it did a more grievous damage by subtly and insidiously instilling a culture of anti-intellectualism. Once, Catholic priests like Msgr. Anasiudu were known and respected for their intellectual culture. Indeed, Catholic priests were often numbered among the most intellectually cultured men in the society. Msgr. Anasiudu belonged to that generation. In fact, his intellectual formation, which includes a Doctorate degree in Communication studies, adequately prepared him to assume the role of the Editor of the once famous national Catholic magazine, *Catholic Life*, a position he held for five years (1980-85). Subsequently, he was appointed Secretary General of

the CBCN for three consecutive terms, from 1985-1994.²¹⁶ Sadly, one cannot boast of the same quality of intellectual culture among many new breed priests even though they have more and better opportunities for intellectual advancement than during the days of *Old School* priests like Msgr. Anasiudu. For many seminarians, academic study, particularly during the years of basic formation is a mere waste of time. They fail and refuse to see the relevance of their philosophical and theological studies for their future pastoral ministry. Rather than dedicate themselves to assiduous intellectual formation during their seminary years, many of these seminarians spend much of their time planning and mapping out strategies for establishing a prayer or healing ministry soon after ordination. The consequence of a lowering in the intellectual culture among Catholic priests is obvious. Even for some who decide to pursue higher studies, the motives for such higher academic pursuits are anything but academic or intellectual. A significant number of these priests end up never making use of the degrees obtained in promoting academic and intellectual studies. The degrees merely serve as decorative ornaments to be displayed on the shelf or aphrodisiacs to boost their ego.

But it is not only the seminarians and young priests that are stricken with the virus of anti-intellectualism. Worryingly, a number of bishops suffer from this malaise. Although there are local churches in Nigeria which have done well in promoting the continuous intellectual formation of their priests in different fields of study, there are, on the other hand, local churches which appear to be averse to ensuring the continuous intellectual formation of their clergy, even when there are ready opportunities. But it is important to stress that while it is important to have priests acquire degrees in different fields of learning, it is essential that they are first grounded in their own primary field, that is, theology and philosophy. Prior to branching out to any other field of study, it is crucial that every priest goes beyond the basic theological formation acquired at the seminary. Only then, will he make a much qualitative difference as a philosopher, psychologist, political scientist, communication expert, etc.

While we examine the external factors that might have contributed to the emergence of a new breed of priests, completely out of synch with *Old Schools* priests, it is equally important that we examine some of the internal factors that may have also contributed to this phenomenon. Key among these is the internal formation process and ambient itself. The last decades have witnessed a burgeoning of vocation to the priesthood and consecrated life. Unlike the era of Msgr. Anasiudu, where it was a rare thing for a young man to want to go into the seminary, today several young men, including professionals are very eager to embrace the priestly life and ministry. Our seminaries are therefore teeming with young men. But how much has this rise in the number of candidates to the priesthood been matched by a corresponding increase in resources, both human and otherwise, needed to ensure

²¹⁶ Msgr. Anasiudu was appointed as a staff of UNN in 1981 two years after completing his doctorate studies in University of Illinois. He, however, had to forgo this appointment in obedience to his bishop, Most Rev. Dr. Albert Kanayochukwu Obiefuna, who seconded him to the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria in Lagos, cf. Fr. John Arinze Anasiudu, "Biography of Very Rev. Msgr. R. C. Anasiudu".

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that these young men are given qualitative formation? This is a critical question the church in Nigeria must address. It is no secret that most, if not all, seminaries in Nigeria are both understaffed and underfunded. The problem of understaffing is becoming even more acute in recent times as more and more priests take up fulltime teaching appointments in universities and offer their services as part-time teachers in the seminaries. The reason for that choice is obvious. Is it then reasonable to expect that we form seminarians and priests of the caliber of Msgr. Anasiudu in seminaries that suffer from acute resource deprivation?

CONCLUSION

If there is any expression that can aptly capture the sentiments of Msgr. Anasiudu as he engage in a less active phase of his priestly ministry, it is the words of St. Paul: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing (2 Tim 4: 7-8)." Yes, of the eight decades of his earthly life, Msgr. Anasiudu had dedicated five of them to a life that he cherished; a life to which he has inspired hundreds of young men to embrace. There is no doubt, therefore, a sense of fulfillment as he hands over the baton for others to continue the race. But as he watches from his retirement home, I guess his sense of fulfillment will also be spiced with some anxiety. Like Paul, he certainly will be concerned and worried about the fate of that ministry to which he totally poured out his life. Will those who come after him keep the faith and tradition he too has received?

**THE STUDY OF CONSECRATED LIFE IN DIOCESAN SEMINARIES AND
INSTITUTES FOR THEOLOGICAL FORMATION: THE VALUE, URGENT
NEED AND IMPLICATIONS**

Rev. Sr. Dr. M. Nkechinyelu Ezeanyino, DDL²¹⁷

ABSTRACT

The Theology of Consecrated Life should be made part and parcel of the Diocesan Seminaries' and Institutes for Theological Formation's Academic Curriculum to help eliminate the stark ignorance manifested by many diocesan priests, especially the young ones, of the nature, place and functions of Consecrated persons in the Church. Such ignorance is evident in the misguided spiritual direction given to young consecrated persons by such priests, lack of appreciation and respect for consecrated persons, and poor collaboration between such priests and the consecrated persons ministering in their parishes. This poor collaboration and its consequent effects have been a source of counter witnessing to the Gospel and grave scandal to the faithful.

Their formation should therefore be geared towards holistic personality formation to enable them appreciate who they are, thereby modelling their lives and ministry on that of the person of Christ Who they represent – they act “in persona Christi”. They need an in-depth understanding of the composition of the Body of Christ which is the Church, so as to minister adequately to each part. The Church which is hierarchical is composed of various members, just as the human body, each with its specific function for the orderly functioning of the whole Body. If they understand the Church as “mystery” and “communion” and behave accordingly, there will be more effective ministry in the Church, all the members playing their respective roles to the best of their abilities, after the example of the early Christian Community.

When candidates to the priesthood understand better the nature, place and function of consecrated persons in the Church, they will collaborate with the Bishops in fostering and promoting consecrated life in the Church, as well as teach the lay faithful to do the same.

INTRODUCTION

Seminary formation, a continuation of the basic formation acquired from the family, primary and secondary levels of education, is expected to be a higher and more comprehensive, all-round type of formation. Not only is the seminarian expected to be knowledgeable in the secular subjects and the world in which he lives, but also in the life of the Church which he is being prepared to serve. Besides the normal theological studies comprising the Scripture, dogma, liturgy, the

²¹⁷ 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 Councilor 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.

sacraments, et cetera, he should equally be conversant with the existence, nature and functions of all the various members of that body of Christ, the Church, in which he is to be the overseer. One of those members is the consecrated persons.

Experience, however, has shown that many of the products of our Diocesan Seminaries and Institutes for Theological Formation are very ignorant of the nature and value of consecrated persons in the Church. This ignorance is being manifested in some misguided spiritual direction of young religious women by their so-called “fathers, brothers or friends”, and lack of cordial collaboration in the ministry, hence bearing counter witness to the Gospel. Here lies the need for this write-up, to underscore the urgent need, value and implications of including the study of consecrated life in the Seminary Curriculum.

To continue however, we need to survey briefly the nature of the Church with regard to her members, Seminary Formation for holistic personality, the need and urgency for this formation, and then the conclusion.

THE CHURCH

The documents of the Church have different symbolic images of the Church. Such images include: **a sheepfold** whose only necessary gateway is Christ; **a flock of sheep** of which Christ is the Good Shepherd – the function of which He handed over to Priests; **a cultivated field** in which both Jews and Gentiles are branches of the true vine, Christ, who gives them life; **the building of God** with Christ as the cornerstone; **that Jerusalem and our Mother**; **the body and bride of Christ** in which every member works for the good health and well-being of the whole body²¹⁸.

In this body *“He continually provides ... for gifts of ministries through which, by his power, we serve each other unto salvation so that, carrying out the truth in love, we may through all things grow unto him who is our head (cf. Eph. 4:11-16)²¹⁹”*. The Council Fathers made it clear that the whole body of Christ is charged with the continuation of Christ’s saving ministry, though some are specially chosen for directing the smooth running of the ministry²²⁰, just as any group of people gathered for the same purpose must have a leader as well as other functionaries for the smooth running of the organization.

It follows from the above that this “body and bride of Christ” is made up of many and varied members whose common identification mark, baptism, makes each and every member a stakeholder in the affairs of the Church. But the Church is hierarchical and this hierarchical nature is a self-evident fact which is established by the Founder, Christ Himself. He handed over the mantle of leadership of the Church which He established to St. Peter after his profession of faith in Mt. 16:11-19. Peter had his collaborators in the persons of the other apostles and disciples. Today we have the Pope, Bishops, Priests, Deacons, Religious men and women and the

²¹⁸ Cf. Vatican 11, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, 21 November, 1964, nos. 5-7.

²¹⁹ Vatican 11, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, op. cit., n. 7.

²²⁰ Cf. Vatican 11, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 7 December, 1965, n. 2.

laity. The Council Fathers expounded this very clearly in numbers 18-29 of *Lumen Gentium*.

This hierarchy is graded into clerical, lay, and the religious states. While the clerical are the ordained members of the Church, the laity comprises “*all the faithful except those in Holy Orders and those who belong to a religious state approved by the Church*”²²¹. Some people, in their confusion or ignorance think that the religious state is a state midway between the clerical and lay states. But the Council Fathers tell us that religious state should rather “*be seen as a form of life to which some Christians, both clerical and lay, are called by God so that they may enjoy a special gift of grace in the life of the Church and may contribute, each in his own way, to the saving mission of the Church*”²²².

Those in this state are otherwise called consecrated persons or religious. The Church’s law aptly described Consecrated State thus: “*Life consecrated through profession of the evangelical counsels is 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 supremely loved. By a new and special title they are dedicated to seek the perfection of charity in the service of God’s Kingdom, for the honour of God, the building up of the Church and the salvation of the world. They are a splendid sign in the Church, as they foretell the heavenly glory (Can. 573§1)*”²²³. From the above, we note that Consecrated life is not just an appendage to the life of the Church but that which “*belongs to the life and holiness of the Church. It is therefore to be fostered and promoted by everyone in the Church (Can. 574§1)*”. We need to emphasize here that the fostering and promotion of consecrated life is the duty of each and every member of the Church. Most of the Bishops understand this very well and are doing whatever they can to foster and promote Consecrated life in their respective dioceses. It is however regrettable that some of the Bishops’ collaborators, the priests, have a very low understanding and image of consecrated persons, hence the relationship of cat and dog or that of rivals between them, which very often is a source of scandal to the people of God.

These consecrated persons as we have seen, are those called by God to follow Christ more closely in their lives by the profession of the three evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience, after the example of Christ, the chaste, poor and obedient; as well as that of the chaste, poor and obedient Mother of God. These vows liberate the consecrated person from all encumbrances to loving and worshipping God ardently and perfectly, in the service of God through the mission of the Church. The consecration by vows makes the consecrated visible sign of that eternal kingdom to which all God’s people are invited. By consecration, they are set apart solely for God and His service – through the Church. Candidates for priestly formation therefore, need an in-depth understanding of this consecrated state for a better understanding of the Church, and for more efficient ministry.

SEMINARY FORMATION - FOR HOLISTIC PERSONALITY

²²¹ Vatican 11, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, op. cit., n. 31.

²²² Ibid., n. 43.

²²³ The Code of Canon Law, New revised English Translation. St. Paul Publications, Nigeria.

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According to the Council Fathers, the object of training in the Major Seminaries should be “to make them (Seminarians) true shepherds of souls after the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, teacher, priest and shepherd”²²⁴. Moreover, the onerous task facing Priests as ministers of God’s Word, the Sacraments, the Eucharist, and as Rulers of God’s people²²⁵, demands a corresponding type of formation to prepare them adequately for the task. The Church is doing her best this wise. But because of some misguided spiritual direction of some young consecrated persons, and some scandalous show-off between some diocesan priests and some consecrated persons working either directly in their parishes, or as administrators of other establishments under the parish like schools, hospitals, *et cetera*, it becomes expedient that candidates for priestly formation be exposed to the nature, life and mission of consecrated persons. After all, the Council Fathers stated that “Priests should keep in mind that all religious, men and women, being a particularly eminent group in the Lord’s house are deserving of having special care directed to their spiritual progress for the good of the whole Church”²²⁶, not forgetting however their material progress, since a healthy mind needs a healthy body.

Their formation should be such as to incorporate the study of the different components of the Church, and in our case, the consecrated persons in particular. They should be formed to understand, from their study of the theology of mission, that the work of evangelization is the principal responsibility of each and every member of the Church – the baptised, thereby making the whole Church missionary. This consciousness will foster proper cooperation with all the members of the Church, the consecrated persons inclusive.

Their formation should be such that makes them real or polished human beings, those who are educated and not just learned²²⁷, hence the need for holistic formation. This involves human, spiritual, affective, intellectual and pastoral formation. For the purpose of this write-up, emphasis will be on human and pastoral formation; human as the basis of all types of formation since ‘grace is built on nature’. Moreover, the Synod Fathers opined that “the whole work of priestly formation would be deprived of its necessary foundation if it lacked a suitable human formation”²²⁸.

The importance of human formation can never be over-emphasised knowing that he is to be acting ‘**in persona Christi**’, the Head and Shepherd of the Church. He should therefore be helped to develop those human virtues of Christ which will enable him “know the depths of the human heart, perceive difficulties and problems, make meeting and dialogue easy, create trust and cooperation, express serene and objective judgments. ... They need to be educated to love the truth, to be loyal, to respect every

²²⁴ Decree on the Training of Priests, *Optatum Totius*, 28 October, 1965, n. 4.

²²⁵ Cf. Vatican 11, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 7 December, 1965, nn. 4-6.

²²⁶ *Op. cit.*, n. 6.

²²⁷ Cf. Nkechi Ezeanyino, “Being Learned or Being Educated? A Critical Question”, in Benjamin Ike Ewelu, ed., *Philosophical Reflections on African Issues*. Enugu, Nigeria: Delta Publications (Nig.) Ltd., 2010, pp. 1-12.

²²⁸ Cited by Pope St. John Paul II in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastorale Dabo Vobis*, 1992, n. 43.

person, to have a sense of justice, to be true to their word, to be genuinely compassionate, to be men of integrity and, especially to be balanced in judgment and behaviour"²²⁹. Here, humility as the queen of all virtues is indispensable. With humility true respect and appreciation of the other will be easy, and the application of justice in relationships will become natural. All these imply that human formation should help the seminarians develop the personality of communion required of the leaders of communities.

The formation should be such as to make the seminarians aware of the Church as "mystery" in which case it is the work of the Holy Spirit while human beings are merely "unworthy servants". Hence whatever function one is performing, he/she is doing it only as an instrument under the direction of the Holy Spirit. They should also be made aware that the Church is a "Communion", and as such the pastor should imbibe community spirit to enable him collaborate effectively with other members of the Church - the Bishops, priests, consecrated persons and the laity²³⁰. In other words, they should, *ab initio*, imbibe the spirit of collaborative ministry in which every member of the Church will be given ample opportunity to contribute his/her quota towards the development and progress of the Church and subsequently of the society. This is the spirit that characterized the early Christian Community and contributed to the fast spreading of the Good News.

THE NEED AND URGENCY FOR THIS FORMATION

The need and urgency of this kind of formation are self-evident since an adage has it that 'ignorance is the worst disease' and ignorance is the principal suspect in misunderstandings between peoples. Again, half education on its part is very bad because it equally contributes to misunderstanding and misinterpretation of issues. As future leaders of God's people, seminarians should be conversant with the constitution of the Body of Christ, the Church, as well as the nature and function and usefulness of each part. This knowledge will no doubt enhance appreciation of, and respect for those parts and eventual harmonious working together with them. That peace, mutual understanding, respect and acceptance are ingredients for meaningful progress and development in any society, the Church inclusive, is an incontestable fact. This is especially true with the understanding of the Church as "Communion".

It is very important that candidates to the priesthood be well informed on the nature, necessity, and function of consecrated persons, especially in these days and age when traditional values are fast eroding. With all the confusing and contrasting ideologies of this technological age, in which some traditional teachings are being subjected to ideological criticisms and questioning, there is need for proper understanding of the consecrated state in the Church.

It is not uncommon to see some diocesan priests of this age questioning the validity and compatibility of the vows especially that of chastity and poverty, to human nature, and even to God's purpose of creation. Such people, instead of being

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Pope St. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastore Dabo Vobis*, 1992, n. 59.

spiritual fathers that they should be, advising and encouraging the young consecrated persons who come to them for help, turn out rather to be wolfs in sheep's clothing. How many consecrated persons have lost their vocations through the instrumentality of those so-called "spiritual fathers, brothers or friends"?

Moreover, manifestations of strained relationships that exist between some parish priests and the consecrated persons ministering in their parishes are evidences of counter witness to the Gospel. Many a time lay faithful are scandalized, and in some cases they are called in as arbitrators. Such incidences no doubt are very ugly ones which proper understanding of consecrated state in the Church will help to eliminate.

Besides, there are cases where some diocesan priests, especially those of the new age look down on consecrated persons - Rev. Brothers and Sisters as not being knowledgeable enough. They see them as those whose duty is only to teach catechism, wash sacred linens and decorate altars. This mentality has given rise to questions like: "What do the religious do in the Church?" And this question is equally found on the lips of many lay people. If candidates for priesthood are well-informed about the nature, place and function of consecrated persons in the Church, they will in their turn enlighten the lay faithful, exercising their function as teachers of the faith.

CONCLUSION - THE IMPLICATIONS

The implication of this formation is that it will help in presenting the Church as "**The Family of God**" which she is, in which all the parts are working harmoniously for the wellbeing of the whole body, each performing its specific function according to its nature, cf. 1Cor. 12:4-30. The early Christian Community which represents a true example of the Church in collaborative relationship, cf. Acts. 1:12-14 should be our model. Here, the Mother of Jesus, the apostles and some other women were in the upper room united in prayer **with one heart**. They did everything **with one heart**, - remaining faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers, cf. Acts 2:42-47; 4:24, 32. They showed us good example of division of labour during the ordination of the first deacons in Acts 6:1-7. This respect for division of labour which prevailed among the apostles and early Christians contributed to the spreading of the Gospel message like wild fire, as their unity and mutual cooperation attracted the pagans to join the Christian Community.

It is our humble opinion therefore that "**Theology of Consecrated Life**" should be included in the Seminary Academic Curriculum, to be handled not just by any theologian but by a mature religious with years of practical, pastoral experience. The Course should have both theological and pastoral orientation and should necessarily incorporate canonical regulations on the issue of Contracts between the Dioceses and Religious Institutes as juridical persons. Besides, we recommend that all Catholic Christians irrespective of their positions should study carefully the nature of the Church in the Vatican 11 Document, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium, 21 November, 1964. The understanding and assimilation

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of its contents will help to eliminate causes of discord, dissension, and disenchantment in the Church, the human elements notwithstanding.

Again, it will not be out of place if the Parish Priest and his collaborators – his vicar/s, consecrated persons (if the parish is lucky enough to have some), catechist/s, and some lay faithful make out time to prepare the parish pastoral plan together, where such does not yet obtain, subject to periodic review. Since a tree cannot make a forest, and since united we stand, there is need for honest and meaningful cooperation between all the members of the Church for the good of the Church herself as well as that of all her members.

MERCY IN THE DYNAMICS OF RELIGIOUS AND PRIESTLY FORMATION²³¹

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ABSTRACT

This article conveys the understanding of mercy and formation and how the two can relate in discerning the suitability of a candidate for admission into religious profession or/and priestly ordination. We emphasized that in the collaborative venture that formation is, the Church or religious community, the formator and the candidate must all cooperate with the grace of God in ensuring that no dimension of formation as outlined in Pastores Dabo Vobis is neglected. At the heart of the account of the dynamics of formation offered is the understanding of formation as conversion by way of internalization of Gospel values. Using Kelman's study of attitudinal change and the Christian idea of conversion, we explained how formation is meant to bring about a conformity to Christ in the candidate. With some citation from Dives in Misericordia and Misericordia Vultus, we then used Akinwale's explanation of the inseparability of justice and mercy to explain that formation is, at the same time, a work of mercy and a work of justice. It is about the good of the candidate and the good of the people of God whom the candidate will serve.

This article was originally presented as Paper during the Year of Mercy to the Formators Association of Nigeria; it is of relevance especially to those involved with formation.

INTRODUCTION

I wish to begin this intervention by expressing my gratitude to the Formators Association of Nigeria, organizers of this workshop, for inviting me to share my reflections on this topic. While writing this paper, I became conscious of the fact that your invitation gave me an opportunity to reflect, once again, on the different stages of formation in which I have been involved for the past twenty years. It has become increasingly clear to me, over the past years, that religious or priestly formation is the Lord's work. He shows you what you need to see if you are attentive and observant, and if you are willing to cooperate with the grace necessary for the work of formation. In my present apostolate, I have come to learn and deepen my conviction that formation is more than a combination of programmes.

Upon further examination of the theme you have invited me to speak on, "Moulding the Hearts of Mercy in Formators/Formandi and Managing Tensions of Formation in the Light of the Year of Mercy", I have come to the conclusion that

²³¹ Paper presented to Formators Association of Nigeria, on the occasion of the Year of Mercy, November 2016

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there are in fact four topics in the theme as formulated, namely: moulding hearts of mercy; managing tensions; formation, and Year of Mercy. Whereas it is impossible to do justice to these topics in just one short intervention – each of them would in fact demand a paper of its own – it is permissible, necessary and prudent to reformulate the topic. As a result, I suggest that we reflect on the theme, ‘Mercy in the Dynamics of Religious and Priestly Formation,’ and that is what I shall be doing here.

The theme, as reformulated, informs the division of this intervention into two sections. The first part attempts to present an understanding on the dynamics of formation of candidates, while the second part explores the place and role of mercy in formation.

The need for a proper understanding of mercy in the dynamics of formation is exemplified by a report in *The Cross News*, the Newspaper of the Catholic Archdiocese of Kaduna. According to the newspaper, Archbishop Manoso N’dagoso had responded that ‘Mercy does not destroy justice’ to pleas and suggestions that former seminarians who had been asked to discontinue their formation for the priesthood be asked to return in the spirit of the Year of Mercy.²³³ The response of the Archbishop echoes St. John Paul II’s reflection that ‘Mercy differs from justice but is not in opposition to it ... true mercy is, so to speak, the most profound source of justice.’²³⁴

DYNAMICS OF FORMATION

Pope St. John Paul II, in his post-synodal exhortation *Vita Consecrata* dedicates a lot of attention to initial and ongoing formation. According to the document, the primary objective of formation is the preparation of the candidate for total self-giving to God, in the footsteps of Christ at the service of mission while the path leading to this total consecration is the ‘progressive assimilation of the sentiments of Christ towards the Father’. The document further presents formation as a vital process ‘by means of which individuals are converted to the Word of God in the depths of their being and at the same time, learn how to discover the signs of God in earthly realities’.²³⁵ In this respect, there is no formation without conversion, that is, without internalizing the values of Jesus Christ to the point where the person puts on Christ and imitates Christ. This transformation is a lifelong journey which leads the person to the point of saying with St. Paul, ‘it is no longer I that live but it is Christ who lives in me’ (Gal. 2: 20). Formation aims at the transformation of the person and precisely because it does, the work of formation never ends. It is a lifelong process that affects every attitude and action in the big and small events of life. Conversion is always a transforming experience and the concern of the formator is to elicit and order the desire for conversion in the candidate who professes a vocation to the priesthood or the religious life.

²³³ Cf. *The Cross News*, 291, May 2016

²³⁴ *Dives in Misericordia*, n. 14

²³⁵ Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, pp. 65-71.

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The concept of vocation is central to understanding the relationship between divine initiative and human response. In the story of God's call of Abraham, we see that there is first a call, a free election on the part of God, who chooses Abraham and raises him to the dignity of father of many nations. On the part of Abraham, there was a turning away from one style of life to a new life, a 'conversion' toward God in total obedience to do whatever God would command. There would be duties and obligations to love God alone and there was also an action that sealed the covenant (cf. Gen 17: 2-11). *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality* states that the partnership between God and humankind finds expression in the theme of covenant: "'I will be your God and you will be my people'. Through Israel humankind is called into a deep, interpersonal relationship with a caring Creator."²³⁶ In the case of a candidate for religious or priestly life, vocation entails a call within the call to holiness which is already addressed to every baptized Christian. While the time, attention, and encouragement which are needed for someone to reach the point of saying 'yes' to God's call must be offered by the Christian community, the invitation and response lie in the realm of grace and freedom. Willingness to joyfully assume the obligations that go with this call must be an important sign for one who feels called to the priesthood or the religious life. Nevertheless, vocation though an initiative by God, must be tested by the Church which is the sign and instrument of God in the world and in the individual person. In his fidelity, God who calls us ultimately takes care of our growth in the way of holiness. But he uses human leaders who, with the whole community, must set examples of love and loyalty. *Vita Consecrata* further reminds us that 'God is the educator *par excellence* of those who consecrate themselves to him'.²³⁷ God uses human mediation to accomplish his purposes and so when a new candidate arrives, another person walks beside the one called, in the role of 'elder brother or sister'. Formation, then, is a sharing in the work of the Father who, through the spirit fashions the inner attitudes of the Son in the hearts of young men and women.

Formation presupposes that from among the options for living the Christian faith within the Church open to the candidate, he/she chooses to pursue and to explore further the already growing conviction that the Lord is calling him/her to the priestly or religious life. It is on this freely and consciously made choice that formation builds. The arena for that pursuit is the formation house or seminary as the case may be. Formation is a process involving identifiable stages of growth. Each of these stages has its own immediate goals and dynamics within the entire integrative process that leads to the ultimate goal. It is necessary to know the different stages of growth of each candidate so as not to accelerate or slow down the maturation process. Pope St. John Paul II wrote in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, following Vatican II's *Optatam totius*, of the spiritual, intellectual, pastoral and human dimensions of priestly formation. These also apply to religious formation.²³⁸ Every candidate should be assisted by suitable direction in order to develop in harmony

²³⁶ *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, Ed. Michael Downey, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 1993; p. 1009.

²³⁷ *Vita Consecrata*, n. 66

²³⁸ Cf. *Vita Consecrata* n.65

these dimensions. Attainment of the goal is the sign that the candidate is ready to move on to the next phase of the formation process.

To identify the stage that an individual has attained in the growth process, determine the right environment for development during each stage and provide the right experience at the right time for integrative growth of the candidate, continual reflection on all the above mentioned dimensions is expedient. Such reflection facilitates the concrete designing of a programme of formation that would take into consideration the needs of each candidate and the provision of a programme that will be operational throughout the entire process of growth. Approaching formation planning in this way may require radical changes in existing programmes in our seminaries or formation houses as well as extensive re-education of the entire religious community or diocese.

Since formation is a 'process of integrative personal growth',²³⁹ it is important to begin where the person is. Concretely, a diocese/community has to decide where an individual needs to be to begin initial formation within the diocese/community. In this respect, the first requirement is a good discernment process to verify the candidate's aptitude for formation, that is, whether the candidate already possesses adequate human and spiritual maturity, and whether the candidate gives sufficient indication of a possible authentic vocation before being admitted. The adequacy or otherwise of that initial discernment will determine the success or failure of formation.

Although the dynamics of mercy would be considered in the second part of this paper, it would suffice to say at this point that the requirement of discerning suitability for formation is hardly met when admission boards, in the name of mercy, accept candidates lacking in aptitude for formation. When this happens, the stage is set for formators to begin to lower standards in formation. A subtle, unintended process of accommodation begins to take place, in which the limitations of weaker candidates, rather than the ideals of the priesthood or religious life, determine standards of acceptable conduct and ability. When this type of shift starts to occur, any member of the formation team who raises questions about a candidate's suitability does so at considerable risk. And if the environment appears to lack consistency in the legitimacy of its challenges, a climate of uncertainty is created and the candidate begins to weigh which standards he/she must try to meet, and which standards can be safely ignored. Such an attitude does not rightly serve the process of formation.

The formator needs to be familiar with the path of seeking God, possess a profound knowledge of the Church, together with solid theological principles and adequate knowledge of psychology. These are essential as he/she is challenged to combine the 'illumination of spiritual wisdom with the light shed by human means, which can be a help both in discerning the call and in forming the new man or woman until they become genuinely free'.²⁴⁰ This becomes even more necessary when one admits individuals with serious unresolved psychological issues into formation programmes. We must bear in mind that the formation house is not an

²³⁹ Futrell J. C. 1981 *The Dynamics of Religious Formation in Human Development*, Vol. 2, No. 4, p.15

²⁴⁰ *Vita Consecrata*, n. 66

asylum nor is it a rehabilitation centre for those who lack the courage to make it out there. Formation can only engage an individual at the point he/she has reached developmentally. He/she may require some healing along with facilitation of personal growth. But we must also realize that there is a limit to the amount of healing a formation programme can provide. We must remember that obvious cases that need constant professional attention should not be admitted for vows or ordination. We must have the courage and tenderness, says Pope Francis, to accompany such individuals out of the formation house in order to begin a new life elsewhere.²⁴¹ To act this way is in fact to act mercifully towards the candidate, the religious institute, and the people of God.

If, as has been explained, the primary goal of both priestly and religious formation is to enable the candidate to internalize the values of Jesus Christ to the extent that the person puts on Christ and acts from this centre, then a practical question arises: what needs to take place during the years of formation in order to attain this goal? What type of formation would lead to internalization of Gospel values? Since internalization involves attitudinal change, it is important to address this question by referring to Herbert Kelman's seminal study of attitudinal change.²⁴²

Kelman describes three processes – compliance, identification and internalization – which help explain why people adopt attitudes and ways of acting. The first process, *compliance*, occurs when a person's ideas, attitudes and actions are influenced principally by the desire to gain a reward or to avoid punishment. In a house of formation this could be in the form of external conformity to rules with no deep personal conviction about what these rules stand for. Compliance does not mean commitment. Candidates who operate at this level may keep all the rules of the house in order to avoid being asked to withdraw and/or to achieve the reward of priestly ordination or profession. From real life experience, candidates who only comply seem to have some hidden agenda which exhibits itself after profession or ordination, for example, through attitudes of passivity or resentment. The second process, *identification*, occurs when attitudes and actions are adopted because of the desire to be part of a group and to maintain a relationship with an important, admired, or loved person. Even if the attitude is believed, perseverance in it is subject to the existence of the relationship itself – if relationship ends, one abandons what has been learnt. The process of identification is a necessary stage in the acquisition of values. Identification is a source of growth in the measure in which it makes us learn attitudes that increase values. 'But if the person remains at the level of identification, then the process has not reached its full term'.²⁴³ The third process, *internalization*, occurs when attitudes, opinions and ways of acting are adopted and maintained because the person understands that this is the right thing to do. The internalized behaviour becomes an integral part of the person, a manifestation of what one is at a given time and what one wants to become.

²⁴¹ Pope Francis, Roma, April 2015.

²⁴² Kelman, H. C. Compliance, Identification and Internalization: Three Processes of Attitude Change, In *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 2, no. 1(1958), pp.51-60

²⁴³ Costello T, Goal and Purpose of Priestly Formation, In Vincent S. and Constello T (ed.), *Formation and Transformation*, Asian Trading Corporation: Bangalore, 2010, p. 8

The processes of compliance, identification and internalization offer a framework for understanding the formative dynamics by which the essential goal of formation can be pursued, always in cooperation with the freely-given gift of grace which is poured into the candidate's heart through the power of the Holy Spirit. Motivation is what activates or directs one's being and acting. If one's motivation is by choice Christ – putting on Christ at the beginning and at the end of everything – then a fertile ground is available for formation to take place. Therefore, the question of internalization of priestly or religious values should be one of the very central concerns for any programme of formation. But it is important to differentiate between real internalization, compliance, or identification. For it is difficult to act always and exclusively out of the love for God or love of neighbour.

It is possible to observe the efforts made by a candidate to live out the values proclaimed by Christ. It is also possible to recognize the interference of personal interest, of identification and compliance. It is the responsibility of the formator to evaluate which of these processes is prevalent in the life of the candidate, to facilitate a gradual internalization of Gospel values, and to enable the candidate to recognize and understand his or her own motivations, goals and needs.

There are candidates who think they can consecrate themselves without the need for changing much in their lives. But the internalization of evangelical values, which formation is, demands death to the old self so that a new self-in-Christ may be born. This new person is neither a sample of human maturity nor a hero of perfection. According to Cencini, he/she is one 'who has felt won over by the look of Christ and conquered by his love'.²⁴⁴ Such is the transformation that conversion is. It is, as St Paul reminds us, the work of the Holy Spirit who transforms the believer into the image of the Father (2 Cor. 3: 17-18).

The action of divine grace is gratuitous and comes about through God's initiative. The candidate, moved by grace, makes himself/herself available to God's work of transformation. This disposition on the part of the candidate is the fundamental attitude required for formation. The process of formation leading to transformation demands that first, the candidates must have relatively sufficient understanding of the ideals and values of priestly and religious life they wish to embrace. Secondly, he/she must sufficiently understand the demands these core values make of his/her life and way of being and acting. These demand personal involvement as well as making use of personal prayer, spiritual direction and accompaniment. Thirdly, he/she must personalize these ideals and values that they become so deeply part of his/her life.²⁴⁵ According to Cencini, there is formation only where values and content are experienced and savoured by the candidate to the point of their constituting for him/her a new way of looking at things, a new way of life. It is a question of forming candidates in the perspective of Jesus' self-emptying whereby the community or the formation house becomes the place where he/she experiences and expresses a love that becomes service and mercy.²⁴⁶ In order to be

²⁴⁴ Cencini A, *Spiritual and Emotional Maturity*, Nairobi, Pauline Publications, 2006, p.162

²⁴⁵ Cf. Costello T, Goal and Purpose of Priestly Formation, In Vincent S. and Constello T (ed.), *Formation and Transformation*, Asian Trading Corporation: Bangalore, 2010, p. 14

²⁴⁶ Cf. Cencini A, *Spiritual and Emotional Maturity*, Nairobi, Pauline Publications, 2006, p. 28

capable of mercy, formators as well as candidates must be disposed to listen to the Word of God so as to contemplate God's mercy and adopt it in their lifestyle. This experience is then carried on to mission so that in our parishes and communities, 'wherever there are Christians, everyone should find an oasis of mercy'.²⁴⁷

The process of formation that leads to the internalization of the values of Christ comes about through hard work not only of the candidate but of the formator and the formation process. For effective formation the formator must do his/her own serious work toward human and spiritual integration so as not to be a blind guide who increases the candidate's confusion rather than giving help. If the candidate is to internalize Gospel values, today's formator must be someone who has internalized the values of the Gospel and who has the skills to communicate these values to candidates, attentive to God's grace at work and courageous enough to point out obstacles where they are present and be well versed in showing the beauty of a life that follows intimately in the footsteps of Christ. He or she must have a good knowledge of the candidates as individuals, as members of a generation, and as members of a class.

FACTORS THAT MIGHT INFLUENCE FORMATION AND DISCERNMENT

First to be identified is the emotional baggage which the candidate brings into the formation process. Some of the contents of this baggage may reduce, sometimes severely, the candidate's capacity to be formed. These may include lack of clear personal identity, low self-esteem, histories of trauma/loss, fear of insecurity, a tendency towards conformity and harm avoidance, issues of mistrust etc. It is difficult for candidates with such baggage to be fully present to formation. Even if they complete initial formation, they may end up inadequately prepared to face the challenges of the life and ministry that await them.

A second factor is the family situation – division in the family, conflict among members, violence etc. The candidates with these backgrounds may find it difficult to adjust to the new life that the priesthood or religious life offers. Hence, before admitting an individual and initiating the work of formation, we need to evaluate his/her capacity to learn and to change. A bad family adaptation renders it difficult for the candidates during formation to accept correction, spiritual direction or accompaniment and co-existence with his/her companions.

A third factor is the influence of the realities of the world of our time. The world from which candidates come into religious life/priesthood today is a world in the firm grips of information and communication technology which can be put to good and bad uses. It is a society undergoing disintegration of family life, depreciating quality of education especially in public schools, substance abuse, violence, poverty, to mention but these. Prudence obliges that these be taken into consideration when one explores both the motivations and obstacles which are part of the choice for life in the priesthood or religious life today.

²⁴⁷ cf. *Misericordiae Vultus* n.12

A fourth factor that could impede a thorough discernment process is pressure from the diocese/community, as well as the interior un-freedom of formators. It seems that the declining shortage of candidates in some Congregations or the great need for staffing our parishes and apostolates can create a situation in which vocation discernment is not engaged in with seriousness and detachment.

A fifth factor is the role of authorities of religious and or diocesan authorities, that is, major superiors and bishops, in the formation of candidates. This role may be positive or negative. It is positive if the authority of the formator is respected, negative if that authority is undermined by malignant interference. The same is true of the role of other members of the religious community.

MERCY IN THE DYNAMICS OF FORMATION

Pope John Paul II, in *Dives in Misericordia*, laments the apparent lack of mercy in the technological countries of the 'first world'. According to the Pope, present-day mentality, unlike in the past, seems opposed to a God of mercy, and in fact tends to exclude from life and to remove from the human heart the very idea of mercy. Thirty-five years later, Pope Francis declared an extraordinary year of mercy. The two Popes challenge us to understand and appreciate what mercy is.

Scripture scholars agree that there is no adequate understanding of God's mercy that does not deal also with the Hebrew concept of God's covenant love expressed in Hebrew by the word *hesed*. In order to understand more fully the richness of God's mercy towards us, it would be helpful to reflect on the importance of covenant in Jewish history. A brief exploration of what we can learn of mercy from the Bible is useful. To ignore the Bible is to ignore the word of God, and to ignore the word of God is to ignore what God has to teach us about mercy. The *Dictionary of Biblical Theology* assists us in this brief exploration.

The *Dictionary* brings it to our attention that the Hebrew word *rahamin*, translated as 'compassion', is an 'instinctive attachment of one being for another'. It is a feeling which has 'its seat in the maternal bosom (*raham*)'. Usually used with the word *hesed*, which signifies 'fidelity', it is ordinarily translated into Greek as (*eleos*). According to the *Dictionary*, 'English translations of these Hebrew and Greek words oscillate between *mercy* and *love*, passing through a spectrum of meanings; tenderness, pity, compassion, clemency, goodness, and even grace (hb. *hen*) which, however, has a much broader sense. Despite this variety, it is not impossible to discern the biblical meaning of mercy. From beginning to end the manifestation of God's tenderness is occasioned by misery; and man, in his turn, ought therefore to show mercy to his neighbor in imitation of his Creator'.²⁴⁸

From what has been said, it is clear that mercy, in the Bible, is spoken of by using the language of human emotion. But this is precisely where one has to be careful so as not to miss the real meaning of mercy. As Anthony Akinwale points out in his reflection entitled 'Mercy and Justice are Identical Twins'.

Whereas the Bible uses words that describe human emotions, we need to rise above the limitations of their mode of signification to grasp what they really

²⁴⁸ *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 351-354 [351]

signify... Unless we undertake this task of interpretation, we can neither transmit nor proclaim the rich message of divine mercy in and to our time. St. Thomas Aquinas explains that justice and mercy are in God, in the divine harmony of God's being. When justice and mercy are rightly understood, it becomes evident that any discussion of mercy is inseparable from discussion of justice in God,²⁴⁹ that justice without mercy is not justice but vengeance, and that mercy without justice is permissiveness...²⁵⁰

Pope Francis says that *mercy* and *justice* are not two contradictory realities, but two dimensions of a single reality that unfolds progressively until it culminates in the fullness of love. Justice is a fundamental concept for civil society, which is meant to be governed by the rule of law. Justice is also understood as that which is rightly due to each individual.²⁵¹

Akinwale further explains that in his work of creation, God bestowed goodness on us by giving to our human nature what is due to us, that is, what is necessary to sustain us. After creation came sin. The justice of divine goodness was diminished by sin. God's mercy is God's bestowal of goodness to us his creatures, that is, the goodness that is necessary to preserve his creatures, which was diminished by sin. What is thus common to justice and mercy is the bestowal of goodness on creatures by God. This understanding of justice takes us away from separating justice and mercy. God's love is mercy in so far as it is not preceded by our conversion. His forgiveness is without conditions. He does not wait to see if we are going to deserve his forgiveness. God loves us when we are not right to put us right, and that is justice and mercy. Therefore, 'mercy is not opposed to justice but rather expresses God's way of reaching out to the sinner offering him a new chance to look at himself, convert and believe'.²⁵²

This understanding of mercy points out two possible areas, in my opinion, that we could reflect on during this year of mercy. First is our capacity to experience the love of God so as to freely and truly immerse ourselves into the formation process. The second is our capacity to help candidates develop the heart of the Good Shepherd who reaches out in search of the lost sheep. Our capacity to help the candidates to be compassionate and not become judges, leading candidate to become agents, 'missionaries of mercy'.

From this explanation of justice and mercy, we would proceed to the place of mercy in formation. Formation is itself an act of justice and mercy because the whole process of formation is about bestowal of goodness on the candidate, on the people of God whom the candidate is to serve in the religious community and or diocese. Pope Francis reminds us that 'we need to recall that in Sacred Scripture, justice is conceived essentially as the faithful abandonment of oneself to God's will'.²⁵³ Formation then implies the discernment of the will of God for this candidate. It is about ensuring that the candidate in question is formed and discerned to be suitable

²⁴⁹ Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 21 art 1.

²⁵⁰ Anthony Akinwale, *Catholic Independent Newspaper*, Ibadan; 04/09/2016

²⁵¹ *Misericordiae Vultus*, n.20

²⁵² *Ibid.*, n.21

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, n.20

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for religious life or priestly life. It would be unjust and merciless to the candidate and to the people of God to promote a candidate who has been judged as lacking requisite suitability.

Mercy is not about bringing back people who have been discerned to be unsuitable for the priesthood or religious life; not about lowering the standards nor is it about sending people who are suitable away. Mercy is not about admitting a candidate because he/she is the first from his/her tribe – this is an injustice to the individual and to the Church. Mercy is not about exempting a candidate for the priesthood or the religious life from evaluation using the certain criteria and objective standards proposed by the Church. Mercy is not about saving a candidate from the right of knowing the essentials about our way of life or about how he/she comes across in living out proposed values. In the name of mercy, we should not shy away from making a decision when we observe that a candidate is not suitable. St. John Paul II states that ‘in no passage of the Gospel message does forgiveness, or mercy as its source, mean indulgence towards evil, towards scandals, towards injury or insult’.²⁵⁴ Mercy is the discernment of the suitability of the candidate. We must recall that after freeing the man possessed by demons, Jesus entrusted him with this mission: ‘Go to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you ... how he showed mercy on you’ (Mk. 5:19). From the word go, formators should explain to candidates that formation is about discernment. If it becomes necessary to ask a candidate to withdraw, this should be done in mercy and assistance should be given. The appeal to faithful observance of the law of most of our institutions ‘must not prevent attention from being given to matters that touch upon the dignity of the person’.²⁵⁵ It is crucial that a judgment of readiness not be misunderstood as a judgment of personal worth.

It is essential to understand that the question being asked is not what kind of person this is but whether he/she has achieved a sufficient sense of personal worth, awareness and identity to be in a formation process in which he/she must adopt the different values presented. The question, therefore, is not: what will make this candidate feel good? The question is: what is good for this candidate? It is quite possible to make a candidate feel good without necessarily doing what is good to the candidate. In the same vein, it is quite possible to do good to the candidate while what has been done makes the candidate feel sorrowful. The good of the candidate at this point is the formation of the candidate and the discernment of his/her suitability or otherwise for religious and or priestly life. If a candidate judged unsuitable is admitted, such admission does not and cannot qualify to be called mercy. This could be called ‘false mercy’ which is not concerned with the truth and therefore cannot serve charity. For it is not in the interest of a candidate to be accepted to vows or ordination when it has been discerned that the candidate is not suitable. Mercy in this case is charitably discerning that the vocation of this candidate is to be found elsewhere, not where neither the candidate, nor the Church, nor the religious community will be served.

²⁵⁴ *Dives in Misericordia*, n. 14

²⁵⁵ *Misericordiae Vultus*, n. 20

What does mercy demand of us in moments of doubts? When, in seeking answers to questions pertinent to discernment doubts arise, it is important to bear in mind that the decision to be made must be in favour of the Church. It is clear that not everybody is capable of living the religious/priestly life and this does not mean such people are not capable of any other commitment. There is a compassionate, sympathetic understanding way of working with people. If certain people cannot be accepted, a refusal has to be voiced within the movement of God's love. Formation programmes are essentially intended to strengthen the candidate's commitment to the Christian way of life; develop his/her understanding of this vocation; to support and enhance the candidates' growth as a human being and to encourage, support and challenge individuals to realistically assess the quality and depth of their experience so as to discern their vocation. Formators are to facilitate the way for someone who wants to follow Christ in an exclusive way by discerning the signs of this call. The formator is there to prepare the candidate, to help him/her to see more clearly into him/herself: what he/she likes, what he/she can achieve by his/her own means, discovering within him/herself what he/she could do with his/her life.

CONCLUSION

God's coming into our lives creates the transforming tension between his grace and its demand for an ever greater selflessness which brings about a lasting communion with God and neighbour. Undeniably, formation, as has just been described, involves healthy tension. In Physics, magnetic tension comes from the fact that a metallic object is placed between two opposite poles of the magnetic field. In the same way, in human existence, tension comes when we have to navigate between two or more sets of competing and conflicting demands. At the core of our vocation and consecration there exists a tension between two poles. For there is what the society offers the candidate, and there is what the Gospel demands of him/her. The society has her standard, and the Church has her standard, which must be the standard of the Gospel. There will be need to differentiate between aspirations that are incompatible and those that are compatible with the Gospel way of life, and the candidate must choose between these two. To choose between these options raises a lot of tension. How does one evaluate these choices? The crises – which can occur not only during initial formation but also during ongoing formation, in fact throughout priestly or religious life – are valuable for both the content and their process. The issue of crisis points out the need to have qualified personnel involved in formation. They must be able to help individuals face the crises that will surface during initial formation and after. The ability to do so assumes that formators have learned to deal with their own crisis issues in an open and healthy way and thus can help others to acquire the same skills.

Issues bringing tension could be summed up into three: there is tension that comes from having to change from the way of life before entering into formation and the way of life that formation entails; there could be tension in the relationship between the candidate and the formator or the other members of the community; and there could be tension between the candidate and other candidates in formation. In a nutshell, tension results from the conflict between expectation and experience on the

part of the candidate, the formator/community, and other candidates. The general challenge has to do with forming for conversion - with the ability to step back and observe oneself, one's own choices. When what we expect is not what we experience, there will be tension. So the real tension is the tension between expectation and experience, between the ideal and the actual.

We must be careful not to present formation as a 'weeding out' period. Vocation discernment requires an openness and attention to the one's (candidate) interior movements, especially in prayer and an honest disclosure and discussion of these spirits in spiritual direction or accompaniment. These attitudes of openness and honesty cannot exist in the kind of fear and threat viewing formation as a 'weeding out' process inevitably produces. Such an approach focuses too much attention on external requirements that need to be met in order to 'survive'. Good discernment relies heavily on a person's ability to hear the voice of the Lord speaking deeply in the solitude of one's heart and in the concrete circumstances of one's life.

Let us quickly add that the time and process of discernment, a time when a candidate may be asked to continue or discontinue, is a season of tension. Accepting or not accepting a candidate for vows or ordination raises a lot of anxiety. But the ensuing tension can be managed by way of prevention, which is said to be better than cure. In concrete terms, we must make it known to candidates at the point of entry, and constantly during formation, without sounding threatening, that whereas they have no right to remain in the community or seminary, they have the right to choose to leave at any time. Moreover, the community or seminary or diocese is not under any obligation to keep them. They too have the right to ask the candidate to discontinue.

The period of formation is a period of trial, a period of courtship that precedes a marriage. The marriage may or may not take place. What is important is that the parties involved take a decision based on charity. If the candidate cannot find happiness in living the life, it would be wicked to encourage the candidate to continue, the same way it would be wicked to insist that a person bear a burden which, evidently, he or she cannot lift.

Tension is not always negative. Where persons live for the sake of something or where they dwell closely together, there one will always find fields of tension. Each one has to navigate these fields, and we, formators, must realistically take these into account. For the candidates, these fields of tension are, as it were a school of life, a battlefield in which they can become purified. Following this understanding, it would seem that tensions that occur during formation can, in some instances, serve as normal, important and useful moments in the candidate's personal development as well as in his/her incorporation into the life of a religious community or diocese. In many ways, my experience in formation ministry confirms that formation is about tension - healthy tension - that is inherent in the

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process itself. The formator, aware of these, must be companion to the candidates across these fields – a fulfilling but often exhausting task.

There is never a failure in formation. The aim of discernment in initial formation is either the candidate integrates the life or is helped to search elsewhere. Suitability in one charism is not necessarily suitability for another. Like the prophet Eli in the call of Samuel, the formator must help the candidate to discern his/her vocation. If found suitable, ok. If not, ok still. In both cases, initial formation has achieved its aim. When formation has been transparent, accompaniment sincere, the non-integration of a candidate, although painful and regrettable, is more of liberation for the candidate and for the Institute or diocese. The candidate who either decides or is advised not to continue leaves with some feeling of gratitude. Some even come back later to express their gratitude, having settled in a new way of responding to God's call either in another institute or in married life.

But there is also unhealthy tension. This is tension that crushes or dehumanizes. Tension ought to re-humanize. Candidates should not be put into intolerable situations of conflict and they should not be subjected to a yoke that Christ himself did not want to force upon us. When what is expected of a candidate is unrealistic and unnecessary for formation, tension so created cannot be said to be healthy. When the candidate's expectations and conduct are incompatible with religious or priestly vocation, the tension that results is neither in the interest of the candidate nor in the interest of the Church. Adaptation to religious life and priestly life must be done with method and discipline. A choice has been made. From now on the candidate must enter into a pattern of life in which he/she will be the principal agent of his/her own formation. Hence the need for regular accompaniment of the candidate by the formator to reflect on the candidate's experience not only to support them in moments of crisis but also to help them develop skills necessary for effective living and ministry in the Church. Charity demands good management of tension in formation. Such good management demands prayers, skills and reflection so as to learn from experience on the part of the formator and the candidates. It is what they owe each other in justice and in mercy.

Being a formator is a gift and a privilege. Be a gift to those you are assisting in their formation, and let their encounter with you be a privilege for you and for them. As formators, our model, says Cencini, is by no means the Greek god, Atlas, who carries the whole world on his shoulders. Our model is John the Baptist, the one who points to and announces Another, not attracting others to himself.²⁵⁶ Like John was

²⁵⁶ Cf. Cencini A, *Spiritual and Emotional Maturity*, Nairobi, Pauline Publications, 2006 p. 36

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the voice who prepared the people to hear and make sense of the Word, do your best to diminish yourself because it is the One who comes, Christ himself, that must grow in the heart of the candidates. Let not your voice be heard in place of the Word of God. Rather, as formators, let the Word of God be heard through your voice. Let us be careful not to project our convictions as formators onto our candidates. It is not we who are entering, we are already here. Let us allow the Holy Spirit to do his work. As for us, let us be content to collaborate with the Spirit.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP WORK

1. What factors affect the internalization of values in the formation house?
2. How do we show mercy to a candidate who is found unsuitable and who is asked to leave? How do we show mercy in communicating the message? How do we show mercy after giving the news?
3. How can Formators make our formation process a sanctuary of mercy? Give four concrete points.

**WITNESSING THE IDENTITY AND MISSION OF AN INSTITUTE OF
CONSECRATED LIFE IN THE FACE OF CRISIS AND VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA**

Olisaemeka Rosemary Okwara, DDL²⁵⁷

ABSTRACT

People in the consecrated life live out their vocation and unique charisms in the human society, and thus, are equally challenged by the violent situations around them. On a face value, one is short of words over what consecrated persons can do in the context of violence. Can a consecrated individual or group offer any help in ameliorating violence? The paper is a modest discussion of some ways people in the consecrated life can witness in the situation of violence. It is subdivided into three sections: section one will describe the notion of violence and some of its forms and causes as it exists in the Nigerian context. Section two will throw light on the identity, vocation and life of people in the consecrated life. Furthermore, the section will highlight some of the impacts of violence on the consecrated life in the Nigerian context. Finally, in section three, we shall examine some patterns of witnessing in the context of violence for a consecrated person. Our argument is that, while crisis and violence challenge their total submission and faith in God, at the same time, the violence around people in the consecrated life challenges them to a more prophetic witnessing in the world.

INTRODUCTION

Violence is one of the thorny issues in the Nigerian society. The constant occurrence of violent clashes with religious, economic, political and social undertones speak eloquently of a nation that is constantly menaced by all shades of violence. In the Nigerian case, religious difference, political manoeuvres, socio-economic destabilization and jungle justice characterise the reasons for justifying violence in most of its shades – religious and social. More so, the situation of violence is worsened by the often irrational attempts of those in power to control and repress critical voices and defenders of human rights.

People in the consecrated life live out their vocation and charism in the human society, and thus, are equally challenged by the violent situations around them. On a face value, one is short of words over what consecrated persons can do in the context of violence. Can a consecrated individual or group offer any help in ameliorating violence? In the face of violence, some consecrated people will quickly resign to pacifism and say: How far can she or he go apart from committing such situations to prayer? Some others are inclined to suggest, as a possible solution, the turning of the right cheek to the molester as Jesus commands. A more objective approach would focus on the question: Can a consecrated person offer a significant help in a context of crisis and violence? How significant can such a contribution be? These and many other questions arise in the context of discussing the consecrated

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life and the response to violence. Moreover, a reflection on the character of the religious life in relation to violence presents us with a paradox. A paradox of surrender of power vis-à-vis the manifestation of unrestrained use of power at the detriment of the helpless. Such a reality presents us with the necessity and urgency for considering the witness of the consecrated life in the context of crisis and violence.

The paper is a modest discussion of some ways people in the consecrated life can witness in the situation of violence. It is subdivided into three sections: section one will describe the notion of violence and some of its forms and causes as it exists in the Nigerian context. Section two will throw light on the identity, vocation and life of people in the consecrated life. Furthermore, the section will highlight some impact of violence on the consecrated life in the Nigerian context. Finally, in section three, we shall examine some patterns of witnessing in the context of violence for a consecrated person.

1. FORMS OF VIOLENCE

In recent times, the scope of violence threatens to widen beyond the reach of definition. One feels the sense of violence through the spectres of genocide, racism, injustice, victimization, oppression, terrorism, poverty, rape, sexual trafficking, forced labour and war. These spectres of violence range between global injustices, domestic violence and more sophisticated forms of violence. Hence, the commonplace assumption that sees physical harm to be the most obvious form of violence may be questioned. Along the view that restricts violence to physical harm, anthropologist David Riches defines violence as “an act of physical hurt deemed legitimate by the performer and illegitimate by (some) witnesses”²⁵⁸ The presence of the term “physical” in Riches’ definition is problematic because it excludes all nonphysical kinds of hurt. It ignores the notion of violation, demeaned selfhood, and undermines the assertion of power as aspects of violence. Thus, Michael Levi, Fiona Brookman and Mike Maguire are right in their statement that violence is “a slippery term which covers a huge and frequently changing range of heterogeneous physical and emotional behaviours, situations and victim-offender relationships”²⁵⁹ Hence, against a restricted view of violence, it is now popularly accepted that violence is certainly not limited to acts of physical harm, nor is physical violence limited to the physicality of the violent act itself. Since we cannot discuss every kind of violence, we shall streamline our discussion into three major forms of violence that characterise the Nigerian context, namely, everyday violence, victimization and religiously aligned violence. Our decision to discuss the three, among others, issues from the fact that they are more rampant and very close in the experience of people in the consecrated life.

1.1. THE VIOLENCES OF EVERYDAY LIFE

²⁵⁸ David Riches, ed. *Anthropology of Violence* (Oxford: Basil-Blackwell, 1986), 8.

²⁵⁹ Michael Levi et al, "Violent Crime," in *The Oxford Handbook of Criminology*, ed. Mike Maguire et al (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 796.

Social violence, namely, the violence that oppressive structures and unjust social orders bring to bear on human experience is the commonest and most neglected aspect of violence. This includes the devastating conditions provoked by suffering such as unemployment, homelessness, lack of education, powerlessness, misery hunger, pain, disease and death.²⁶⁰ The violences of everyday life have aggressive effects on the body and the moral order. These effects consequently impact on how people understand themselves and their ability to engage in everyday life. Thus, in the description of her book, *Death Without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil*, Nancy Scheper-Hughes, asks: "When lives are dominated by hunger, what becomes of love? When assaulted by daily acts of violence and untimely death, what happens to trust?"²⁶¹ Scheper-Hughes' dramatic description of the meaning imposed on people by oppressive structures offers a vivid illustration of what we mean by the violence of everyday life. We experience the violence of everyday life when a human person suffers great deprivation of sources for meaningful existence. Such condition exist when one does not enjoy authentic human dignity and wellbeing as a result of poverty, denial of freedom or basic human rights. These experiences can shape people's perception of the self, others, and the world as a lived sense of violence.

Among the many causes of everyday violence, poverty exists as a major source of violence militating against full human flourishing in the Nigerian context. We witness outrageous instances of starvation and demeaned human situation because people do not have the wherewithal to meet the most basic human needs such as food, clothing and shelter. We understand poverty as part of the whole system of violence based on the fact that it arises often out of neglect and the injustice of one onto another. It is a result of the collective failure of human person, government, groups, and even the Church who violate the right of the other to the common good. Hunger which is an offshoot of poverty is a deprivation of a basic human need. In the context of deprivation of food and drink, the human dignity is violated and the body experiences an intense pain and violence. Poverty is not only a form of violence but it also mediates other forms of violence, such as armed robbery and kidnap as prevalent in the Nigerian context today.

In the face of the violence of everyday life the moral order experiences daunting challenges. People's capacity to respond to life challenges are greatly threatened by the demeaned human condition. Thus, they are victims of many incidences of sexual abuse, child labour, human trafficking, poor health, high mortality and so on. In many cases, the youth becomes susceptible to moral lethargy. Furthermore, when the moral order is grossly shaken, the society breeds other forms of vice such as intolerance, lack of respect, shallow personality development, greed, spiritual and physical sloth etc. Thus, the violence of everyday life remains the most challenging for people in the consecrated life due to its peculiarity and intrinsic connections with personal, spiritual, moral and social evils.

²⁶⁰ Arthur Kleinman, "The Violences of Everyday Life: The Multiple Forms and Dynamics of Social Violence," in *Violence and Subjectivity*, ed. Veena Das et al (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 227.

²⁶¹ Excerpt from the online University of California press website book description <http://www.ucpress.edu/book.php?isbn=9780520075375>

1.2. RELIGIOUSLY ALIGNED VIOLENCE

Among the many forms of violence witnessed in Nigeria, religious conflicts and religious terrorism ranks the top. According to Statista's *Global Terrorism Index*, Nigeria ranks the third country with 9.31 points among the top 50 countries ranked by the global terrorism index for 2016.²⁶² The key underlying factor to the frequent violent conflicts in Nigeria has been the issue of religious dominance. As Toyin Falola puts forward, "proponents of Christianity or Islam seek to unseat the rival religion, to impose their own values, and to control the state. This has become a major problem, and the struggle for political power has come to entail the manipulation of the symbols and beliefs of Islam and Christianity."²⁶³ Falola is right in his view that intolerance and appeal to domination and power struggle especially between religiously aligned ethnic groups fund what is understood as religious conflicts in Nigeria. In this Nigerian context, ignorant masses are bought by religious sentiments, used by the power-hungry politicians and religious leaders as a stepping-stone to power.

The three dominant religions in Nigeria, namely Christianity, Islam and African Indigenous Religions (AIR), exist all over the country either as the majority or the minority religion in any given part of the country. For instance, in the Southern part of Nigeria, Christianity is the dominant religion while Islam and AIR are minority. Conversely, in the Northern Nigeria, Islam is dominant while Christianity is the minority. AIR is spread all over Nigeria but is always in the minority. The dominant Christian culture of the South has strong influence on the people from the region, while the dominant Muslim tradition of the North (with the practice of *sharia* law in some cases) also significantly influences people from that region. Since Christians and Muslims are allowed by Nigerian constitution to live together, people with differing cultural and religious backgrounds often meet in the same state, and in most cases sharing things in common. The violent outcome of this diversity in Nigeria is highlighted by the unhealthy rivalry between the various religions in Nigeria. The escalating unhealthy rivalry between Christianity and Islam in Nigeria makes it even more challenging for them to live together in one country. Often, one camp rejects the religious others and implants or advocates one particular religious belief or ideology.

It is clear that religious conflicts diminish the development of human potential in Nigeria. For instance, the situation of near perpetual conflict in the country induces anxiety which cripples individual initiative and ultimately leads to apathy and a 'laissez-faire' attitude. This chaotic situation reduces production and increases corruption and idleness among the youths in Nigeria. Thus, Christian Ezeibe observes that religious conflict "claims the lives of able-bodied men and women who would have engaged in productive ventures and contributed to the

²⁶²Statista, "Global Terrorism Index 2016 , Top 50 Countries," accessed February 16, 2017. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/271514/global-terrorism-index/>.

²⁶³ Toyin Falola, *Violence in Nigeria: The Crisis of Religious Politics and Secular Ideologies* (New York: University of Rochester, 1998), 2.

economic development of Nigeria.”²⁶⁴ It is perhaps correct to assume that such destabilized state of affairs and inter-religious antagonism could have possible impact on the life and witness of consecrated persons in Nigeria.

1.3. THE VIOLENCE OF VICTIMIZATION

Victimization points to the fact that the evils threatening the human person – poverty, violence, ecological crisis - are the result of human decisions and that these evils need not be if human beings lived in consideration of the other. Victimization has a connection with social suffering which we discussed in point 1.1. above. Victimization is the violence of human wickedness to another and the suffering that arises from the knowledge that one is suffering as a result of the unjust decisions of people who have power over them, while social suffering is the result of victimization. Human and Ecological suffering occur because some who have the power to influence human well-being, rather use their power toward personal and self-serving projects. In such projects, human beings are co-opted as part of the mechanism for realizing personal interest or gain. As Paul Knitter points out, “human poverty and ecological destruction result, if not intentionally, then necessarily, from gain or profit motivated decisions, especially as such decisions are enacted and translated into economic policies, legal systems, and international arrangements.”²⁶⁵ Knitter’s view is on point that victimization means that most of the evils – poverty, ecological crisis, violence, are not natural events and must not be. The truth is that, most evils of human existence can be fought, prevented and corrected if people are willing to let go of their personal gain and interest for the common good of all.

The decision of the few who pride themselves above the common good of all to inflict suffering on others and the earth is the vilest kind of suffering. It is a terrible situation when people see that their suffering is as a result of the selfish decision of the few who have the power and authority to influence people’s life for either good or bad. As Knitter says, “such decisions, made by the few but affecting the life and life-giving capacity of peoples and planet, embody the *victimization* of some people by others.”²⁶⁶ Furthermore, Knitter analyses the gravity of such kind of suffering putting forward that,

To be a victim is to be an instrument, nothing but an instrument used by another. To be a victim is not to count, to be there purely to be used and then discarded. To be a victim is the horrible, strangling feeling that one cannot dispose of one’s own life; the victim is powerless in the face of greater, consuming power.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁴ Christian Ezeibe, "Inter-Religious Conflicts and Crisis of Development in Nigeria: Who Benefits?," accessed December 10 2012. http://www.academicexcellencesociety.com/inter_religious_conflicts.htmlInter-Religious.

²⁶⁵ Paul Knitter, *One Earth Many Religions. Multifaith Dialogue & Global Responsibility* (MaryKnoll: Orbis, 1995), 63.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 63.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 63.

The foregoing analysis of victimization evinces that victimization connects with a particular kind of evil, namely, injustice.

As Knitter points out, we think of injustice when “our minds and hearts respond to a situation of suffering which we know immediately and certainly, need not be and should not be.”²⁶⁸ Injustice occurs with the unjust distribution of the goods of the earth. The criteria that places some at the top and others at the lower rung in accessing and enjoying the earth’s riches is not justified. There is something unjust when within a country like Nigeria, a handful few possess and control over 80 percent of the nation’s wealth. It is equally unjust when the increase in total salaries of the common people remains at the barest minimum while the salaries of the few at the helm of affairs continue to increase. The poor get poorer each day not because they are not hardworking, but because the decision of the few has failed to give just reward for their hard work. Conversely, the rich get richer and richer, not because of their hard work, but because they, at a point in their life, were able to connect with those few who decide the fate of others or because they keep usurping the share of the poor out of self-interest and personal gains.

The different forms of violence we have mentioned are not far away from the homes of the consecrated people. At one time or the other, consecrated people have been victims of violence, or its accomplice through their lack of engagement for the eradication of violence, or by making decisions that victimize others including those working among them. In what follows, we shall discuss how violence affects the life of people in the consecrated life in the Nigerian context. But we shall first describe the people in the consecrated life.

2. THE CONSECRATED LIFE IN THE FACE OF VIOLENCE

People in the consecrated life are grouped under three categories, namely, the religious institutes, the secular institutes and the societies of apostolic life. The new Code of Canon Law groups the religious institutes and the secular institutes under institutes of consecrated life since “both are committed to the practice of the evangelical counsels.”²⁶⁹ The difference with the two lies in a common life of the people in the religious institutes.²⁷⁰ The Code treats the societies of apostolic life in the third part of Book II, considering them to be similar to the institutes of consecrated life. People in the society of apostolic life may or may not make explicit commitment to the evangelical counsels. Moreover, they pursue, “each in its own particular way, a specific apostolic or missionary end” while living a common life.²⁷¹ The consecrated life, each in accordance with its specific nature, strive to live a life dedicated to the perfection of charity through the practice of the evangelical counsels

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 63.

²⁶⁹ See the 1983 Code of Canon Law, § 731. See Manuel Ruiz Jurado, “Consecrated Life and the Charisms of the Founders,” in *Vatican II Assessment and Perspectives: Twenty-Five Years after (1962-1987)*, ed. René Latourelle (New York: Paulist, 1989), 4.

²⁷⁰ John Paul II, *The Consecrated Life (Vita Consecrata): Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1996), 9&10.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 11.

of poverty, chastity, and obedience, lived within a community and remains integral to Christian witness in the world. Therefore, people in the consecrated life are members of the Church and share in the mission of the Church. I will apply the expression “consecrated life” to designate all three forms of life: the religious institutes, the secular institutes and the societies of apostolic life. Moreover, I will discuss their witnessing in the context of crisis and violence in line with the broad understanding of the life and vocation of people in the consecrated life.

2.1. THE UNIQUE VOCATION OF THE CONSECRATED LIFE

According to the teachings found in Church documents, we can distinguish the character of the consecrated people with two broad categories, namely, its internal and its external character. The former applies to formal content of the life—its intrinsic character and essence as a practice of the evangelical counsels in the example of Jesus Christ. The external content of the consecrated life applies to its visible contribution in the life of the Church. We must note, however, that due to its nature, the consecrated life is most outstanding in its internal character - the practice of chastity, poverty and obedience, is its significant contribution in the life of the Church. Most people in the consecrated life, live in a community – sharing what they have in common, in solidarity with one another.

Sylvia Nwachukwu argues that with Vatican II’s teaching on the universal call to holiness of the people of God, we must pay attention to the opinions that the idea of consecration is not the special reserve of any particular group since all members of the Church are called to holiness of life.²⁷² Nevertheless, she asserts that, regardless of the hesitancy to apply the term consecrated exclusively to any particular group, the scripture and Vatican II point to the uniqueness of the consecrated life particularly, as “a heightened and intensified form of Christian discipleship.”²⁷³ As such, the consecrated life follows more closely and shows forth the life of Christ who’s life in the world was to do the will of the father and which he proposed to the disciples who followed him (the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* §44).²⁷⁴

In a more general sense, the consecrated life is a life dedicated to the service of God through the Church. The people in the consecrated life do not live for themselves alone, but rather, their life is in union with the life of the universal Church. They share in the life of the many brethren who strive to accomplish the will of God. Thus, *Lumen Gentium* points out that the consecrated life belongs to the life and holiness of the church (44). Consecrated persons contribute to the mission of the Church by bearing witness with their lives. The Decree on the Sensitive Renewal of Religious Life, *Perfectae Caritatis*, refers to the merging of the consecrated life with the life of the Church when it declares that people in the consecrated life “must

²⁷² Mary-Sylvia Nwachukwu, *Consecrated: A Vision of Religious Life from the Viepoint of ‘the Sacred’* (Lagos: CHANGE Publications, 2010), 40-41.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 36.

²⁷⁴ All reference to the Documents of the Second Vatican Council is from: Norman Tanner and Giuseppe Alberigo, eds., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils: Trent to Vatican II*, vol. 2 (London: Sheed & Ward, 1990).

recognise their God-given vocation as primarily a call to practise the gospel counsels," and adds that since it is the Church that accepts their offering, they are to see themselves as bound to the service of the Church, the service of God (5).

In line with their unique vocation, people in the consecrated life strive to root out violence in their everyday-life through total submission to the will of God and good exercise of freedom and authority. The vow of obedience and a life of community as they stand, are powerful solvent for the ego, forcing one to place the needs of others before one's own. Thus, by pro-active engagement with the violence in their own life they transform the violence around them through respect and recognition of the other, tolerance, patience, understanding and love.

In view of their unique vocation, it is understandable that crisis and violence challenge the quality of their witness in the world. Therefore, before thinking of how consecrated persons witness to the gospel in the face of crisis and violence, we have to consider how the consecrated life is implicated in the face of violence. In what follows, we shall highlight how violence and crisis could affect the values of the consecrated life.

2.2. THE EXPERIENCE OF CONSECRATED LIFE IN THE FACE OF CRISIS AND VIOLENCE

The environment is one of the essential determinants of a person's behaviour. It is normal that, as social human beings, what is happening around us impacts our vision, attitude, perception, choices and responses to life. Thus, it is arguable that the violence that occurs in and around Nigeria impacts on the identity, choices and general life of people in the consecrated life in Nigeria. Some of them may have been at one point or another victims of violence such as victimization and kidnap. Directly or indirectly they experience violence when their relations and friends become victims of violence.

Conflict and violence as it is aligned with brazen display of power, intolerance, victimization, neglect of the poor and unforgiveness impinge on the core meaning of the self-donation of people in the consecrated life.²⁷⁵ Violence is about the use of power as well as a conscious decision not to act in solidarity. We resort to violence when we are not in solidarity, when we discriminate and see the other as an outsider rather than a part of us, and not worthy of our care and love. As such, violence, especially, those that are religiously aligned, puts the perspectives of the consecrated life under suspicion and doubt. It questions the very essence of the values of the consecrated life. Indeed, violence in all its shades mocks the essence and relevance of the life of virtue. Such that, the memory of violence touches the basic aspects of the gospel counsels of obedience, chastity and poverty to the extent that some begin to see the Christian option to right use of power as a certain form of weakness.

Consecrated persons are directly touched either as victims or oppressors in the case of violence. Strains of legitimization of violent conflicts and victimization can be

²⁷⁵ See the profound description of self-donation in Ukwuije Bede, *The Memory of Self-Donation: Meeting the Challenges of Mission* (Lagos: CHANGE Publications, 2009), 78-79.

discerned even in the religious communities in the day-to-day life of the “weak and helpless” members in the community. Often, even among consecrated persons, violence is incited and justified out of a situation of injustice or victimization in which one side uses or abuses another. Thus, even religious actors and faith based communities legitimize violence by intolerance, unforgiveness and with a ‘test’ of powers. One of the enigmatic issues about these violent acts ‘with religious undertone’ is the practice of legitimising of violence by religion or in God’s name. To critique violence, one must remove it from the cycle of justification. Particularly, the use of authority must go together with service, faith, hope and love so that we do not lay a burden on others by selfish legitimization of violence.

Their unique vocation is such that counteracts the display of violence. In their daily interactions, rather than getting swallowed up by the shades violence around them, people in the consecrated life transform conflicts in and around them through humility, wise use of authority and denunciation of power. Furthermore, they can confront the evils within and around them through their vocation to prayer, taking up the burdens of the helpless, being in solidarity with the poor and victimized of the society. Pope Paul VI makes it clear on that prayer is basic for both internal and external renewal for peace could take place. Thus, he declares: “Venerable Brothers and beloved sons [and daughters], we can possess a singular weapon for Peace, that is, prayer, with all its marvellous energies to raise moral tone and to invoke transcendent divine forces of spiritual and political renewal, and also the opportunity offered to each and every one to question himself interiorly and sincerely concerning the roots of rancour and violence which may lurk deep in his heart.”²⁷⁶ In this 1968 New Year Address the Pope vividly mentions the evil and violence that resides in human heart and the power of prayer for spiritual and political renewal. We cannot speak enough on the fact that spiritual renewal is the first pattern of witness by people in the consecrated life in the face of crisis and violence.

As participants in the mission of the universal Church, their active witnessing in the face of violence bear fruit in two major ways. First is to be a partners in the mission of the Church through dialogue and second is taking up the option for the poor and the victimized in the society.

3. WITNESSING TO CONSECRATED LIFE IN THE CONTEXT OF VIOLENCE

The question of the actual response of a Christian in the midst of violence is often a complicated one. The complication arises on the one hand, from the question of the core Christian tenets of love, peace and forgiveness and on the other hand, the gospel imperative to challenge evil. In the scriptures, we witness three different approaches to evil. The first is the one we find in the Law of Moses, namely, an eye for an eye (Exodus 21:23). The second is the question of pacifism “if they strike you on the right cheek turn the left for them” (Matthew 5:38-39). Under pacifism, reference can be made to Jesus’ command to put no resistance to the evil one. On this

²⁷⁶ Message of His Holiness Pope Paul VI for the Observance of a Day of Peace 1 January 1968.

note, John Paul II gives us a good expression “do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good.” These fundamental Christian expressions point to the fact that we cannot resolve evil with evil and this is evident in the common expression that “two wrongs cannot make a right.” However, in this Christianity’s option for non-violence, we are to guard against mere surrender to evil. Therefore, we present the third gospel attitude to violence, “why do you strike me?” (John 18, 22-23). How does Jesus’s question “why do you strike me” serve as a more productive way of witnessing in the face of crisis and violence, especially those arising from victimization and social violence?

The pacifism which Jesus preached was an active one. Jesus was wise in his approach to evil because we cannot use the same method of the evil-one because if we do so, evil will be multiplied. To this effect, John Paul II declares that “war is a defeat to humanity. Wars are the cause of further wars. They do not resolve the problems for which they are fought.”²⁷⁷ Jesus gave a proactive response to evil by working against the same categories with which evil triumphs. Take for instance, while Jesus did not strike back when he was slapped, he asked a question ‘why did you slap me?’. Uzochukwu Njoku analyzes Jesus’ response as a more proactive way of responding to violence. For him, “‘why do you strike me’ is a challenge to Christians never to be passive in the face of evil, injustice and oppression.”²⁷⁸ The fact is, by this response, Jesus appealed to the conscience of the evil one through the cry of a suffering human body.

Jesus’ unique response to evil also manifested in securing liberation for the oppressed human person. He fought for the liberation of captives, he fed the hungry, he spoke out on behalf of the marginalised, he spoke out for peace and against the use of power, he says “blessed are the meek,” he spoke against exclusion and discrimination, and he always preached the values of hospitality and solidarity. Jesus rebuked injustice, spoke against retaliation and preached forgiveness, etc. Thus, while not marching evil with evil, Jesus was not passive in the face of violence. Jesus’ teaching was neither a mere pacifism nor was it an approval of violent retaliation. Rather, he devised an active engagement in witnessing in the face of crisis and violence. Jesus’ approach is unique for reminding the violent that their activities will cause more harm than good both to their victims and themselves.

Jesus’ own active and dialogic engagement represents the response of a person in the consecrated life in the context of evil. In their witnessing, the people in the consecrated life take into consideration their call to witness the love of God even in the face of evil. In what follows, we shall look at how they bear witness through their practice of the gospel counsels, and active engagement in the mission of the Church.

3.1. PARTICIPATION IN THE CHURCH’S MISSION OF RECONCILIATION AND DIALOGUE

²⁷⁷ John Paul II, Message for the World day of Peace, January 1, 1998, nr.1.

²⁷⁸ See Uzochukwu Njoku, "Clouds of Evil and the Challenges of Contemporary Religious Vocation," *Oche Amamihe Wisdom Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 2 (2011): 47.

People in the consecrated life are called to support the Church's initiatives of dialogue. Against the two extremes of passivity and confrontation, authentic witness to the gospel message of love even in the midst of persecution is a form of active witness in form of dialogue. The recognition and respect, dialogue and solidarity of their life is an example of how the Church's mission of dialogue takes place.

Dialogue is an active engagement with a condition of total difference, unpleasant, differing and sometimes, discomfiting. Dialogue takes different forms. Interreligious dialogue, as it appears is the most significant way the church intervenes in the religiously aligned crisis and violence in our country. To be successful, such dialogue must assume some qualities, especially in line with the socio-economic and political contexts of human existence as well as cultural and religious diversity in Nigeria. It must be a dialogue life whereby they witness to people through practical life issues and human existential contexts. Dialogue with people in their existential situations and in consideration of cultural and religious diversity follows some patterns such as: "Learning to understand what others actually believe and value, and letting them express this in their own terms; Working to prevent disagreement from leading to conflict. Together, listening and responding with openness and respect, [in which] we can move forward to work in ways that acknowledge genuine differences but [sic] build on shared hopes and values."²⁷⁹ In line with the foregoing pattern of active and praxis-oriented dialogue, people in the consecrated life can collaborate with and support the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) in reaching out to dialogue with people and groups divided along religious lines and in mediating exclusive dominating ideologies that play out in governance and policy making in Nigeria.

Furthermore, dialogue extends to conversation with people and power (socio-economic) and those who make decision for the masses. In this case, calling for recognition of the poor and victimized in the forms of social violence is an imperative of the Church. Indeed, that was the mission of Christ and the reason he went to the cross. Such approach offers a more praxis-oriented interreligious dialogue that is capable of addressing the influence of exclusivist religious ideology on the well-being of human beings and global development. Following the pattern of dialogue along socio-economic lines, we underscore that the social violence we discussed under the forms of violence above requires a more proactive witness. We turn to this in what follows.

3.2. PARTICIPATION IN THE CHURCH'S MISSION OF LIBERATION AND EMPOWERMENT

The internal life of the religious exemplified in the evangelical counsels and a life of virtue belongs to the more global mission of the Church, and the mission of God. Hence, the religious life is not merely a passive life, rather, tied to the mission of the Church, it is a participation in the mission of Christ. Thus, *Lumen Gentium*, declares

²⁷⁹ The Inter Faith Network for the UK, "Building Good Relations with People of Different Faiths and Beliefs," accessed April 20 2016. <http://www.interfaith.org.uk/pcode.htm>. See Paul Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions* (London: SCM, 2010), 62.

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that people in the consecrated life are called, “each in their own way, to help the church in its mission of salvation” (§43). The mission of the Church as Vatican II presents it is to be the sacrament of salvation. The Church exists to continue Christ’s work of salvation through religious freedom, option for the poor, liberation, and social Justice. Thus, people in the consecrated life are part of Jesus’ campaign and mission which the church carries on.

The witness of people in the consecrated life is equally aligned with the Church’s option for the poor. The fathers of Vatican II observe that one of the causes of poverty is the result of imbalance between the prosperity of a few and the misery of many. To them, poverty is the result of a “more basic imbalance rooted in the heart of human being” (*Gaudium et Spes* 10). Fernando Sahayadas argues that for the Council fathers, “the fundamental source of the present social problems is to be found in the creaturely limitations in realising boundless desires and the vocation of human beings.”²⁸⁰ Furthermore, *Gaudium et Spes* reiterates that “although the disturbances in the social order result partly from the “natural tensions of economic, political, and social forms,” the deeper causes are found in human persons’ pride and selfishness, which contaminate even the social sphere” (25).²⁸¹ From the conciliar statements, we can deduce that the disparity between the rich and the poor are rooted in the moral depravity of the human heart. In other words, the defects of the socio-economic order have their primary origin as well as its solution in the choices made by human beings.

The witness of people in the consecrated life, therefore, targets to counteract the evils of human pride and selfishness through option for the poor and victimized. Concretely, they bear witness in ministering to the victims of violence, to provide for refugees and the victims of war. They strengthen those that are persecuted for their faith and uphold the imperative of endurance as an aspect of the Christian life. They are also witnessing when they educate people against violent acts and give instructions on the importance of respect for religious freedom and human dignity. They witness when they inculcate human values to the youth in their various apostolates. The option for the poor is the basic imperative of the Church’s mission.

In a more systematized sense, people in the consecrated life witness through speaking out for the marginalised of the society, and in promoting peace and reconciliation. In this regard, they can cooperate with or establish NGOs geared towards mediating peace and reconciliation and offering assistance to the victims of violence, the poor and victimized. As a matter of fact, concern for the marginalized members of the society proves to be a prophetic element. This is especially the case because many who marginalize others are those in positions of power or who, at least, have to exercise some form of dominance over others; and it would take a prophetic voice to confront the injustice. Their prophetic witnessing in seeing, namely, being alert to the violences around them, acting and speaking on behalf of victims and dialogue with offenders could be a contribution from people in the consecrated life and one which deepens their charisms and vocation.

²⁸⁰ Fernando Sahayadas, *The Church in the World: The Reception of Gaudium et Spes in the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Bengaluru: Theological Publications, 2015), 325.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 326.

CONCLUSION

In this paper we have discussed patterns in which people in the consecrated life witness authentically in the face of crisis and violence. We have pointed out that violence touches core aspects of their life and mission. Furthermore, we realised how consecrated persons, partaking in the one mission of the universal Church are charged with Jesus' own establishment of the rule of God through a life of virtue and active engagement against social violence. In discussing the imperative of a middle position between passivism and violent confrontation, we argued that people in the consecrated life must not be agents of victimization, so too must they be upfront in criticising agents of victimization. In their collaboration in the mission of the Church through dialogue, and option for the poor and the victimized, they bear witness to Christ's own death for the liberation of those under the violence of social suffering and victimhood.

COMMUNITY LIFE IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF ST. AUGUSTINE

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ABSTRACT

Community life or communion of life is essential to most religious institutes. For the Augustinians, community life is understood as the axis around which their life revolves. Therefore, this essay explores St. Augustine of Hippo's perspective on and understanding of community life. The major focus of the essay is St. Augustine's special preference of communion of life and sharing of things in common as the best way to seek God and to seek and arrive at knowledge and truth. The essay concentrates therefore, on the phenomena and events that influenced Augustine's understanding and approach to community life, his concrete experience of community life and his theological, sociological and evangelical teaching on community life. The essay concludes with the assertion that Augustine's perspective on community life is as relevant today as it was in his days.

INTRODUCTION

One thing Saint Augustine of Hippo is known for is his versatility in intellectual and spiritual enquiries. His writings and teachings touch several aspects of philosophy, theology and spirituality. Augustine was not only a theorist, in the sense that he bases his writings on speculative and theoretical matters only. Rather, he was also pragmatic and realistic. His pragmatic approach to issues and intellectual questions are usually fuelled by his personal life experiences. This is especially the case in his teachings on spirituality and faith in general.

One of such practical experiences that influenced Augustine's teaching and approach is community life or life of communion. The theme of community life is present in numerous works of Augustine and he lays down very clearly, both traditional and innovative teachings on the topic. For Augustine, Community life is pivotal to human search for knowledge and for God. Secular wisdom, intellectual knowledge and spiritual growth all progress better when sought within a community, in a life of communion. For Augustine, there is a strong tie between sharing and learning: the more we share, the more we learn; the more we learn, the more we are required to share.

In this article, we wish to explore Community Life in the perspective of Saint Augustine of Hippo. The emphasis therefore, is on Augustine's own understanding, teaching and practice of community life. I will begin the inquest by calling attention to the centrality of community life in Augustinian spirituality. The article goes on to consider Augustine's preference for community life, the influences of community life on Augustine and his understanding of community life. The scope of this article is limited, majorly, to Augustine's teachings on community life. Nonetheless, a little

attention is given to community life as a pivotal point in the spirituality of the Order of St. Augustine.

THE CENTRALITY OF COMMUNITY LIFE IN AUGUSTINIAN SPIRITUALITY

Community life or communion of life is a very central theme in Augustinian Spirituality. Augustinian Spirituality is derived from the spirituality of St. Augustine of Hippo and from the history and tradition of the Order of St. Augustine. Two basic documents that guide the life of the Augustinians, namely, the Rule of St. Augustine and the constitutions of the Order of St. Augustine, lay emphasis on community life as their pivotal point.

A critical analysis of the Rule of St. Augustine reveals that all the regulations of the life of the Friars are centred on communion, sharing, and common concern for the wellbeing of others and the search for God in common. Right from the very start of the Rule, Augustine states that “The main purpose for you having come together is to live harmoniously in your house, intent upon God in oneness of mind and heart”²⁸². Coming together to live harmoniously in the same house and to seek God in oneness of mind and heart immediately strikes the note of communion of life and sets the pace and foundation for all that is to follow in the rule. The sharing of material things in common, fraternal correction, prayer in common, care of community goods and care of one another, obedience to the superior, etc, are meant to foster this living together harmoniously.

The constitutions of the Order of St. Augustine clearly place community life at the centre of Augustinian life and spirituality: “Community life is the axis around which Augustinian Religious life turns: a community of brothers who live harmoniously in their house, united by a single soul and a single heart, seeking God together and open to the service of the Church”²⁸³. This same point on the centrality of community life is echoed earlier in the same constitutions where community life is described as the “foundation” of Augustinian life²⁸⁴.

The Church has in different times reminded the Augustinian Order of this central point of her spirituality. For instance, when Pope Paul VI was addressing the members of the General Chapter of 1971, he emphasized that for Augustinians, “the common life is not just one of the many helps they have for conventual life, but rather the goal towards which they strive every day”²⁸⁵. As an ideal, community life occupies, or rather, should occupy the mind of every Augustinian as a goal that has

²⁸² *The Rule of St. Augustine*, I, 3.

²⁸³ *The Constitutions of the Order of St. Augustine*, 26; This fundamental principle of community life was already highlighted in the first constitutions of the Order of St. Augustine which was published in 1290. See Luis Marin de San Martin, OSA. *The Augustinians: Origins and Spirituality*, translated by: P. Brian Lowery, OSA. (Roma: Institutum Historicum Augustinianum, 2013), pp. 211-212.

²⁸⁴ *The Constitutions of the Order of St. Augustine*, 6.

²⁸⁵ Paul VI, “Discourse to the members of the General Chapter”, 20 September 1971: *Acta Ordinis Sancti Augustini 16* (1971) 91-94, as cited in: Luis Marin de San Martin, OSA. *The Augustinians: Origins and Spirituality*, p. 212; See *Living in Freedom under Grace: Augustinian Spirit and Spirituality in the Writings of the Popes and Priors General (1953-1978)*. (Roma: Curia Generalizia Agostiniana, 1979), p. 44.

to be achieved. This preoccupation is shown by constantly practising community life and placing it at the centre of all the pastoral and ethical actions of an Augustinian.

In his opening address at the Intermediate General Chapter of the Order held in Nigeria, in September 2016, the Prior General, Alejandro Moral Anton, says that communion is the nucleus and centre of Augustinian charism. According to him, communion “has been and is the great gift of the Spirit. If we neglect or even, lose this aspect of our religious identity, the existence of the Order of St. Augustine does not have meaning. Our great witness, according to our Holy Father, and upon which the Church is founded is communion”.²⁸⁶

Since community life occupies such an important position in the life of the Augustinians who live the life of Christ under the inspiration of St. Augustine, it is vital to seek to grasp Augustine’s understanding of Community life and how he lived it both as a lay man and as a priest and bishop.

AUGUSTINE ALWAYS CHERISHED COMMUNITY LIFE

Even though Augustine ardently cherished and sought interiority and solitude, he also certainly sought to build and live a life of community.²⁸⁷ For Augustine, contemplative and active lives have to go together.²⁸⁸ He sought therefore, to harmonize his longing for solitude (*holy leisure*) with friendly dialogue and service to the community (*necessary activity*).²⁸⁹ Augustine believed that both interiority/solitude and community are vital hence he sought for a way to bring *holy leisure* and *necessary activity* together. As we are about to see, Augustine always cherished community life while living and appreciating contemplative life.

It is interesting to note that Augustine did not begin to appreciate community life only after his conversion and baptism; community life has always been part of his life from his earliest days.²⁹⁰ Even before his conversion, Augustine had come to cherish community life that he even had a dream, a vision of a well structured community life. According to him this project and vision collapsed because of the consideration of the spouses of the intending members²⁹¹. Augustine lamented the collapse of this community because it would have been a wonderful “philosophical community”, a community where search for wisdom through individual reflection and common sharing would have taken place.²⁹² Even though the project was not realized, community life was already an ideal in the mind of Augustine.

²⁸⁶ *Intermediate General Chapter: Documents and Decisions*, (Abuja, Nigeria, 18-30 September 2016). Roma: Pubblicazioni Augustiniane, p. 16.

²⁸⁷ Saint Augustine, *Letter* 101, 3.

²⁸⁸ Saint Augustine, *City of God*, XIX, 19.

²⁸⁹ Fermin Fernandez Bienzobas, OSA, “Typically Augustinian Values” in *Basic Elements of Augustinian Pedagogy*, Eusebio B. Berdon, OSA (Coordinator). (Roma: Pubblicazioni Augustiniane, 2006), pp. 85-86.

²⁹⁰ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 4, 4, 7.

²⁹¹ Saint Augustine, *Confessions* 6, 14, 24. Augustine had this to say as the reason for the collapse of the plan: “Afterwards the question began to be raised whether the wives, whom some of us already had and we wished to have, would permit this. As a result, the whole project, which we had worked out so well, collapsed in our hands; it was completely broken up and thrown aside. Thereupon we returned to sighs and groans and turned our steps to following the broad and beaten ways of the world”.

²⁹² See Theodore Tack, OSA, *If Augustine Were Alive: Augustine’s Religious Ideal for Today*, (New York: Alba House, 1989), p. 3.

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As at this time, when Augustine conceived this ideal of community life, he had not known of the existence and practice of the monastic tradition in the Church. According to him, it was after the collapse of this “community project” that he and Alypius, and others with him got to learn from Ponticianus about Anthony of Egypt and the monastic tradition which already existed in the Church “unknown to them”.²⁹³

We can also point to Augustine’s Cassiciacum Community experience as a form of community life, even though it involved his family and friends.²⁹⁴ From the description of the structure and activities that took place at Cassiciacum, it can be seen that a kind of community life was lived there. This is what made Theodore Tack to submit that the Cassiciacum community can be described as the very first “Augustinian” community.²⁹⁵

After the death and burial of Monica in Rome, Augustine did not continue his journey back to Africa; rather, he remained in Rome for some time. During the time he spent in Rome, he visited monasteries in and around Rome and learned about their way of life²⁹⁶. His experience in these monastic communities had some influence on his understanding and appreciation of community life.

Possidius, Augustine’s friend and Biographer, tells us that shortly after Augustine eventually got back to Africa, after his conversion, mother’s death and burial, he founded a community at Tagaste, his home town. This community comprised of Augustine’s fellow townsmen and friends who were alike in their desire to serve God. In this community they practiced prayers, fasting, good works and meditation on the word of God²⁹⁷. This community already had the structure of a religious community.

Furthermore, Augustine’s love for community propelled him to continue the practice of community life even after he was ordained a “diocesan priest”. Due to his interest in, and desire to continue the practice of community life, his bishop, Valerian, gave him a garden on which he founded his second community. This community was modelled after the early Christian community in Acts of the Apostles. Possidius recounts that:

Soon after his ordination, he founded a monastery near the church and began to live there with the servants of God, following the way of life and rule that had been established under the holy apostles. The most important provision was that no one in that community was to have any property of his own, but rather, they were to have all things in common, with each being given what

²⁹³ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 8, 6, 14-15.

²⁹⁴ Augustine narrates the community of Cassiciacum in his *Confessions*, 9, 4-6. Those who were at Cassiciacum with Augustine were his mother, Monica, his son Adeodatus, his good friend Alypius, several other relatives, friends and students.

²⁹⁵ Theodore Tack, OSA, *If Augustine Were Alive: Augustine’s Religious Ideal for Today*, p. 4.

²⁹⁶ St. Augustine, *De Moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae*, I, 31-33.

²⁹⁷ Possidius, *The Life of St. Augustine*, John E. Rotelle, OSA (Editor), (Villanova: Augustinian Press, 1988), 3, 1-2.

he needed; this was the course Augustine himself had adopted when he had returned home from overseas²⁹⁸.

This account of Possidius on the structure, composition and nature of Augustine's community, mirrors Luke's description of the early Christian community in the Acts of the Apostles and very much what Augustine later put down in his Rule. It is a community where Augustine was to share everything in common with the other members of the community, while he still served as a priest.

Jordan of Saxony, a very notable and famous Augustinian who lived in the fourteenth century, wrote about Augustinian Life and Spirituality. In his famous work, *The Life of the Brethren*, he wrote very convincingly about Augustine's love and passion for community life. He stated that both as a priest and a bishop, Augustine wanted to live in community:

When our Blessed father Augustine was made a priest and had to attend to the care of the people, he was still unwilling to leave the company of his brothers behind and wanted to maintain the communion of the common life. When Saint Valerius learned that he was resolved not to live without his beloved brothers he gave him a garden near the city where he could build a monastery. Thus he would be able to live there with his brothers as he desired and nonetheless to look after the people. Even when he became a bishop, he made sure to have some of the brothers with him in his residence so that he would not have to live without a community of brothers²⁹⁹.

Jordan of Saxony was convinced that Augustine was such a community person because, in his view, Augustine was a coenobite and not an anchorite.³⁰⁰ Life in common was an indispensable way of life for Augustine and he showed that clearly all through his life. He always believed in the life of sharing both one's life and one's personal material and spiritual possessions with others, with whom one lives in community.

INFLUENCES OF COMMUNITY LIFE ON AUGUSTINE

Apart from the natural African influence on Augustine regarding his love and preference for communion of life, there are some other factors that influenced him. Right from when Augustine was growing up, he learned from the culture of mutual support, friendship and family conviviality which was part of the African way of life. Augustine enjoyed family support and warmth; he had lots of friends and could

²⁹⁸ Possidius, *The Life of St. Augustine*, 5, 1.

²⁹⁹ Jordan of Saxony, *The Life of the Brethren: Liber Vitasfratrum*, John E. Rotelle, OSA, (Editor). (Villanova: Augustinian Press, 1993), p. 90.

³⁰⁰ Jordan of Saxony, *The Life of the Brethren*, p. 75. He contends that if anywhere Augustine is found to describe himself as a Hermit, then it should be as a Cenobitic Hermit, not as an Anchoritic Hermit. He buttresses his conviction by citing Augustine when he praised life of community as the life of perfect men and as an angelic life. See *ibid*, pp. 76-77. It is also interesting to note that in *Sermon 27*, Augustine ranks himself among the Cenobitic Hermits.

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also relate very cordially with the wider extended family system. Our attention is not focused here on this natural influence of a community's cultural system on Augustine. Rather, we wish to consider some other factors that are different from and wider than the immediate or extended family circle. Three main influences are worth considering here: Philosophical school, Early Christian Community and Monastic Experience.

Philosophical School: The influences of community life on Augustine can be traced back to the time he was captivated by Cicero's Hortensius. After reading this work of Cicero, Augustine became interested in philosophical search and he put in a lot of energy into it believing that his search would be fulfilled and his doubts cleared by it. "He was fired up by wisdom" after reading the Hortensius in his nineteenth year.³⁰¹ Elsewhere Augustine states that "there can be no happy life, save in philosophy".³⁰²

From the different schools of philosophy, Augustine got the idea that wisdom cannot be attained in isolation. Carlos Moran Fernandez buttresses this point by pointing to the historical fact that "in antiquity, no philosophy and no philosopher existed outside a group or community, a 'school of philosophy', and this brought with it a certain way of life".³⁰³ We cannot underestimate this influence on Augustine because in Augustine's understanding and principle of community life, not only material things are shared in common, but also intellectual and mystical ideas. In our search for God, those who live in community share with their fellow community members whatever light or spiritual experience they receive after making the interior journey to meet the interior Master. This idea has been at the centre of Augustine's preference for community life, right from the time he founded his first community at Tagaste. Augustine always sought the truth, knowledge and wisdom within an atmosphere and with the support of the community.

This point is brought out clearly in the "philosophical community of his dream" which collapsed before it took off!³⁰⁴ He wanted a community where the members would share everything in common, including spiritual and intellectual illumination. In his Soliloquies, he states that community is meant to help and encourage those who live, seek and discover wisdom and faith together.³⁰⁵ Other than imitating the early Christians in sharing one's material possessions, it was very important to Augustine that spiritual and intellectual wealth were also shared.

The Early Christian Community: The basic and foundational influence on Augustine regarding community life is the description of the way the early Christians lived their Christian lives by Luke, in *Acts of the Apostles* (4:32-37). According to this text, the believers in Christ lived in one mind and one heart; "there was no needy person among them" because they shared what they had in common. We can say that this

³⁰¹ See Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 3, 4, 7; 6, 11, 18; 8, 7, 17. Saint Augustine, *On Holy Life*, 1, 4.

³⁰² Saint Augustine, *Against the Sceptics*, II, 2, 4.

³⁰³ Carlos Moran Fernandez, "The Community in St. Augustine: Philosophical and Theological Aspects", in *Elements of an Augustinian Formation*, (Roma: Pubblicazioni Agostiniane, 2001), p. 289.

³⁰⁴ Cf. Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 4, 14, 24.

³⁰⁵ Saint Augustine, *Soliloquies*, 1, 12, 20.

scriptural text triggered the conviction in Augustine that spiritual growth, wisdom and intellectual knowledge are better enhanced within a community system. Little wonder then that “one mind and one heart” became a motto for Augustine. Common sharing of goods, therefore, shaped Augustine’s understanding of religious life.

The evidence of this is very eloquence in the Rule of St. Augustine. As we noted in an earlier session, the Rule of St. Augustine is permeated by the consideration of the other members of the community and the attitude of sharing everything in common. For Augustine, the main purposes of coming to live in a community is to live in harmony in oneness of mind and heart intent upon God; and to “call nothing your own, but let everything be yours in common...”³⁰⁶ This is clearly inspired by the life of the Early Christians as presented in the *Acts of the Apostle*.

Monastic Experience: After the visit of Ponticianus to Augustine at the Cassiciacum, during which he told Augustine and his companions about the existence of Monasteries in the East and in the West, especially that of Ambrose, Augustine began to develop a desire to learn and know more about their way of life. The narration of Ponticianus triggered and heightened Augustine’s natural desire to live a shared, common life.

This desire was fulfilled during the space of time between the death and burial of Monica and his return to his native land. As we noted earlier, while in Rome within this period, Augustine visited some monasteries within and outside Rome. These visits offered Augustine different perspectives of community life. This experience, no doubt, helped to shape his community project when he eventually returned to Africa. The first fruit of this experience and inspiration was the community of laymen which Augustine founded shortly after he arrived at Tagaste, his home town.

AUGUSTINE’S UNDERSTANDING OF COMMUNITY LIFE

Augustine’s view and understanding of community life is very rich and enriching to Christian spirituality. Even though Augustine’s love for communion of life is inspired by a variety of factors, as we have already seen, he has a personal touch to it. This personal touch to Augustine’s community comes from his theological, philosophical and charismatic approach to life and spirituality. He speaks about community life with authority because he did not only idealize it, he actually lived it practically, before and after he became a priest and even as a bishop.

The Community as a “Theological Place”: In the spirituality and theology of Augustine, the community is a theological place. For him the human person is a theological place, that is, a meeting place with God. This anthropological privilege, in the thought of Augustine is as a result of God’s decision to make man an *Imago Dei* or as he prefers to call it, *Imago Trinitatis*. The human person has something of God (the

³⁰⁶ *The Rule of St. Augustine*, I, 3-4.

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Trinity) in him. The community is therefore, a privileged and primordial space for this meeting (between God and man) to occur"³⁰⁷ The community which is the conglomeration of many such persons (who are places of encounter between God and man) is without doubt, a "theological place". The community is where its members meet God in each other and where those outside the community encounter God as well. St. Augustine says in his Rule: "Let all of you then live together in oneness of mind and heart, mutually honouring God in yourselves, whose temples you have become".³⁰⁸ Each person living in an Augustinian community, according to the Rule, is a place where God dwells (temple) and each person should also recognize the God who dwells in the other persons and members of the community. God is, and should be, present and made visible in each religious community.

In another of his works St. Augustine re-presents the theme of God dwelling in us through Christ, and we dwelling in him. He writes: "We dwell in Him (Jesus Christ) when we are his members, and he dwells in us when we are his temple. Unity joins us so that we may be members, and this unity is achieved through charity. And what is the source of charity? asks the apostle. The charity of God, he says, is spread in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us".³⁰⁹ By the grace of the Holy Spirit each of us dwells in God and God dwells in each of us. The gathering of these persons who dwell in God and God in them is the community and God obviously dwells in the community. This is why the community should be lived and experienced as a *theological place*.

Community Life and Search for God: Being a deeply community person, all important events in the life of Augustine are done with people around him, including the search for God. For Augustine, therefore, community life and search for God (Interiority) cannot be separated. In his journey towards conversion Augustine was surrounded by friends, so we can say that he arrived at his conversion and discovery and knowledge of God through the community. He makes this very prominent in his rule because for him the reason why brothers (or sisters) come together to form a community is to seek God together.

The search for God is done in community and interiority fosters the community. It is not only material things that are to be shared but also the spiritual illuminations and knowledge gained in the interior. When this is done, common life and interiority become mutually inclusive and mutually beneficial.

Friendship and Community: Friendship is at the heart of Augustine's understanding of community life. As a person, Augustine always cherished friendship and he actually had a lot of friends.³¹⁰ While many of his friends helped him positively, he was also

³⁰⁷ See the analysis of this Augustinian theme in Varied Authors, "Communion of Life" in *Our Journey Back to God: Reflections on Augustinian spirituality*, Miguel A. Keller, OSA, (Coordinator). (Roma: Pubblicazioni Agostiniane, 2006), pp. 319-325.

³⁰⁸ *The Rule of St. Augustine*, I, 9.

³⁰⁹ Saint Augustine, *Commentary on the Psalm*, 27, 6.

³¹⁰ There are many instances in the life of Augustine where he showed how much he appreciated friendship. We could recall his friends with whom he disrupted classes and even stole apple! We can recall the sorrow he felt over the death of one of his friends (cf. Confession 4, 4, 7). We can also point to his circle of

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aware of some, who led him astray, especially before his conversion. In one of his sermons he stated categorically that good health and friendship are the two most necessary things in life: "... two are the most necessary things in this world: good health and a friend".³¹¹

Augustine's shimmering description of the characteristics and relationships that exist among friends fits perfectly into his understanding of community life. Friends share things in common, agree in many ways, laugh and be serious together, learn from each other, etc.³¹² Augustine expects those who live in community to be true friends to each other. It is when we live as friends in the community that the difficulties and sacrifices that go with community life can be tolerated and approached with joy. True friends bear the burdens of one another, knowing that each person has his or her own weaknesses.

In Augustine's understanding, a fulfilled life is the life that is supported by others in true friendship and charity. This is why he states in his commentary on the Psalms that "We need our fellow in order to be ourselves" since "life without friends is an exile".³¹³ The basis of a community therefore, is the determination to come out of this "exile" and live with friends with whom one is happy, comfortable and willing to share one's life.

Love at the heart of Community Life: For Augustine, genuine community comes from genuine love which places common things before one's own. A False community results when members place their own things and interests before common ones. In his view, "a crowd", not a community, is created when selfishness and lack of mutual love bring people together.³¹⁴ A true community comes about when the people who make it up are willing to practice charity towards one another and to transit from the "I" to the "We".

At the centre of community, therefore, is selfless love, where one is willing to detach from the self and share in the life of others, in love. "A community is not created by virtue of clustering or subordination or hierarchy among individuals, but by the common good, which prevails over personal interests".³¹⁵ The appreciation of "common good" is therefore paramount in community life. Community survives only when members are ready to bear each other's burden³¹⁶ and are ready to take that which is common to all as paramount. Only genuine love can make this possible.

friends at Cassiciacum; the friends with whom he founded his first community at Tagaste and even those friends with whom he had the idea of forming a philosophical community, and so on.

³¹¹ Saint Augustine, *Sermon*, 299D, 1.

³¹² See Saint Augustine, *Confessions* 4, 8, 13.

³¹³ Saint Augustine, *Commentary on the Psalm*, 125, 13.

³¹⁴ Cf. Saint Augustine, *Sermon* 103, 4.

³¹⁵ Fermin Fernandez Bienzobas, OSA, "Typically Augustinian Values", in *Basic Elements of Augustinian Pedagogy*, p. 86. See Saint Augustine, *Commentary on the Psalm*, 130, 6.

³¹⁶ Saint Augustine, *Divers Questions*, 71, 1. In this work Augustine gave example of how community members should bear each other's burden by pointing to how the deer swim across a river by one placing its head on the one ahead of it and same with the one bearing the weight of the one behind it. It is a graphic example of how each community member should be willing to bear the burden of others because others also, at one time or another, have to bear his burden too.

The Trinity as the source and Model of Community Life: When we dealt with the community as a theological place, we highlighted Augustine's teaching on *Imago Dei* as *Imago Trinitatis*. The human persons who are made in the image and likeness of God (Trinity) make up the community. It is the unity of these persons that creates community. For Augustine, the Trinity is the source, model and inspiration of a religious community. As the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are distinct persons but live in perfect unity so too we should live in unity, despite our distinctiveness and differences.³¹⁷

Unity is pivotal in Augustine's consideration and understanding of community life. In and through Christ, the unity of the Trinity can be achieved in human (religious) communities. This is why he says that for community to be truly possible, the many souls that make it up should become one soul: "Your soul is not yours alone; it belongs to all your brethren, just as their souls are yours. In other words, their souls and yours are not many souls but the single soul of Christ".³¹⁸ A true giving up of self and a convinced willingness to share one's life with others is needed for a true community life. Perfect life in common, harmony or *koinonia* (having one single soul and heart) is for Augustine the foundation and badge of religious life, the fundamental vow or "holy intent" characterising it.³¹⁹

Certain persons live in the community only in the physical sense; they live under one roof but they are very far from each other. Such people need to seek the grace of God therefore, because true unity in community is made possible by the grace of God and not only by human efforts. Commenting on Psalm 132, Augustine says that the dew referred to in the psalm is the grace of God which fosters and guarantees this unity in community.³²⁰ By the grace of God and the convinced determination of members, a community can succeed in true unity, after the model of the Blessed Trinity.

Poverty is a necessary part of Community: In the understanding and teaching of Augustine, poverty is part and parcel of community life. Coming together to form a community, especially a religious community, necessarily demands sharing of spiritual and material things in common; it also requires receiving and serving others. This principle is set down in the Rule which Augustine wrote for those who came to live together in a community: "Call nothing your own, but let everything be yours in common. Food and clothing shall be distributed to each of you by your superior; not equally to all, for all do not enjoy equal health, but rather according to each one's need".³²¹ The good and welfare of the person should be the main consideration in the distribution of things, not uniformity or equal measure.

³¹⁷ Saint Augustine, *Commentary on Psalm*, 103, 4; Saint Augustine, *Letter*, 238, 16.

³¹⁸ Saint Augustine, *Letter* 243, 4.

³¹⁹ Continental Animation Team of the "Hippo Project" (Project for the Revitalization of the Order in Latin America), "Communion of Life" in *Our Journey back to God: Reflections on Augustinian Spirituality*, p. 322.

³²⁰ See Saint Augustine, *Commentary on Psalm*, 132, 11.

³²¹ *The Rule of St. Augustine*, 1, 4.

Evangelical poverty demands submission and sharing. This means, therefore, that poverty calls for dependence and the attitude of disposing one's personal property for others. Those who live in community possess nothing personally but rather are content to have only one possession in common with others, namely, God. Augustine clearly states: "Indeed, God himself, that great and superabundant treasure, will be our common possession".³²² God should become the common possession of all because those who possess God possess everything. This for Augustine is the reason why community persons are people of joy and contentment.

Another important point in Augustine's teaching on the importance of poverty to community life is the positive attitude which should accompany the sharing of goods. Those who submit their properties to the community should do so cheerfully and not begrudgingly. And those who did not bring should not take advantage of the community in enriching themselves or becoming puffed up because of the privilege of enjoying what they would not have been able to enjoy outside the community.³²³ When both the one who submits and the one who shares from what is submitted act in humility and charity,³²⁴ true joy and contentment of community life is experienced.

PRACTICAL COMMUNITY LIVING

Augustine speaks and teaches about community life from his practical experiences of it; he is not idealistic or theoretical about community life. The greatest part of his life was lived in community, at different stages and with different types of people. From his observations and practical personal experiences, therefore, Augustine has so much to say regarding community life.

For Augustine, an ideal community respects needs of members who are quite different from each other. Community life is not established on egalitarianism but on a successful integration of the differences of the community members. This is the first task of a religious community, namely, to transit from the "I" to the "We", and to begin to think of the common good as superior to personal interests. In the Rule, Augustine asks that each person should be given what he needs, and that those who receive gifts should dispose their gifts for common use. It is when members willingly share, that is, give and receive, that we can speak of a community.

Augustine admonishes us to seek and promote harmony and make effort to kill dissensions and anger in the community. He says that as vinegar spoils a container if it is kept in it for too long, so does anger destroy the community.³²⁵ Part of the maturity that is required of the persons who live community life is the ability to control one's anger so that love and charity on which a true community is established is not jettisoned or sacrificed.

Augustine also observes that certain persons enter the community without the willingness and determination to live the life they profess to live. He complains that some profess to be what they are not, because they do not practise charity and

³²² Saint Augustine, *Sermon*, 355, 1, 2.

³²³ See *The Rule of Saint Augustine*, I, 5-8.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*

³²⁵ Saint Augustine, *Letter* 210; cf. *The Rule of St. Augustine*, I, 6.

do not live true community life. He calls these community members “false monks”³²⁶ He recognizes that there are some community members who live hypocritical lives, and for him, it is better for such people to leave the Monastery than to continue to live within it pretentiously.³²⁷

Even though Augustine laments these phenomena, he does not give up on community or on the brothers who do not live up to expectation. Rather, he admonishes those who live in communities to bear the burdens of such “falsity” and “hypocrisy” of these “false monks” because people may have also suffered the inadequacies of the good brothers before they made progress.³²⁸ Those brothers who have made progress in living community life need to tolerate those who have not because we always have something in us that others may have to tolerate in us. Moreover for Augustine, “because you already have no fault in you for another to bear, you should be all the stronger to bear with the faults of others”.

In community life, therefore, peddling rumours about a brother, assassinating the character of a brother, refusing to share your life with the brothers, treating a brother with disrespect or with a prejudiced mind are against Augustine’s principles and understanding of true community life.

All the legitimate members of the community are either the burden or the glory of all. In the Church and in all the professions within the Church, there are the good and the bad; let them coexist till the end of time.³²⁹ Augustine does not condone anti-community behaviours from those who live in community, rather, in his usual way, he applies moderation and objective consideration of the practical realities of community life.

We can demonstrate that Augustine does not tolerate indiscipline in the community by pointing to chapter seven of his Rule which recommends punishment for acts that undermine the rules of the community.³³⁰ In the constitutions of the Order of St. Augustine, following the teachings of the rule of St. Augustine, a section is dedicated to various forms of punishment that should be meted on those who violate the life of the community.³³¹

It is important to emphasize, as Domingo Alvarez did, that the motif for giving punishment should not be inspired by the desire to eliminate opposition: “It is not a question of eliminating opposition, because in that case there would be no interchange of ideas and the saddest thing is for an Order, Province or community to err unanimously, as this closes off the future”.³³² The beauty and richness of the

³²⁶ Saint Augustine, *Commentary on Psalm*, 134, 4.

³²⁷ See Saint Augustine, *Sermons* 355 and 356. Augustine was vehemently against private possessions by those who share common life in the Monastery. See the analysis of Theodore E. Tack, “Augustine’s ‘Holy Commitment’ and Religious Profession” in *Elements of an Augustinian Formation*, pp.186-189.

³²⁸ Saint Augustine, *Commentary on Psalm*, 99, 9.

³²⁹ Saint Augustine, *Commentary on Psalm*, 99, 13.

³³⁰ *The Rule of St. Augustine*, VII, 44-47.

³³¹ *Constitutions of the Order of Saint Augustine*, 513-521.

³³² Domingo Natal Alvarez, “The Augustinian Community in Practice” in *Elements of an Augustinian Formation*, p. 332.

community is in the multifariousness of ideas, talents, cultures and experiences of its members. Differences in opinions and styles do not necessarily represent disobedience, opposition, division or anti-community spirit. Rather, multiplicity in unity should be viewed and understood as a beauty and strength, not a weakness or negativity.

CONCLUSION

This article is not exhaustive on the teachings and understanding of Community life in Augustine. Nonetheless, we have endeavoured to demonstrate that Augustine was grounded in community life as a charism and spirituality. One can say that his teachings on community life are prophetic and seminal in the sense that they are as valuable and useful today as they were in his days. This is why the different religious families who use the rule, and/or follow the spirituality of St. Augustine still find him inspiring and relevant today.

Other than religious families and people who live vowed lives, the concept of community life which was taught and promoted by Augustine is very apt and relevant to modern society. In a world that is grossly divided and driven by the wind of economic and social competition, the kind of community life advocated by Augustine is a panacea. Today's world needs communion, friendship, mutual help and the spirit of sharing and solidarity. All these can be found in the kind of community life dreamt of, taught and lived by Augustine of Hippo.

**THE FOUNDATION OF NEW RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES: A BRIEF
COMMENTARY ON THE GUIDELINES AND DIRECTIVES OF THE
CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF NIGERIA³³³**

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ABSTRACT

There are very many pious associations in Nigeria seeking approval as religious institutes. At the same time, there are lots of serious abuses by founders and foundress owing to their ignorance of what Religious Life entails and/or lack of guidance from competent ecclesiastical authorities. Some young men and women, ignorant of the status of such associations, join them. Finally, some of the associations disband or never get to be approved and their lives are ruined. The Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria produced the *“Guidelines and Directives on Founding Religious Institutes and Lay Associations in Nigeria”* (September, 2014). The *Guidelines* intend to aid bishops and founders through the different stages from foundation to approval as a Religious Institute. The *Guidelines* recognized that charism is a gift of the Holy Spirit given to founders for service in the Church. Such charism addresses the needs of the church. A charism is usually unique and original. The Apostolic See does not allow same charism replicated in the same diocese or episcopal conference. Every charism must have its focus on Christ. Spirituality springs from an institute’s charism. The spirituality the founder gives to the association is to follow the form of Religious Life he intends to found, e.g., Religious or Secular Institute or Society of Apostolic Life. Apostolate and charism mutually enrich each other. Charism is the identity of an Institute. Apostolate is the outward expression of an Institute’s charism. The bishop is the competent authority that discerns and approves these associations as Religious Institutes. He should make sure that founders meticulously follow the laid down rules and conditions before he can give approval after consulting the Apostolic See.

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(Editor's note: The author, one of the collaborators with the CBCN's in the production of document under review, had earlier presented to the CBCN a talk on this theme during the bishops' meeting in Akure, Nigeria, in 2016. He now offers reader an informed commentary on the document, also in the light of the recent documents of the Apostolic See, especially the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's Letter, *Iuvenescit Ecclesia*, to the Bishops of the Catholic Church Regarding the Relationship Between Hierarchical and Charismatic Gifts in the Life and the Mission of the Church" [May 15, 2016]. Thus, the reader will find addition of more conditions or requirements necessary for the bishop to review in the process of accompanying and approving an institute and a lay association. The author emphasizes the grave responsibility of the bishops in this process. The Holy Spirit can use anybody, any Catholic, no matter how weak the person might be or how estranged the situation could be. However, it is incumbent upon the bishops to truly accompany and strictly discern and evaluate the founders and their project, not out of an eagerness to "quench the Spirit" but for the service of truth and common good, "upholding whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy" in the project [1 Thess. 5:19-22; Philippians 4:8]. When they do the thorough job of discernment and consistent application of the Church's own guidelines and directives to stop whatever they judge and are convinced are *not* from the Holy Spirit, this effort of bishops will hopefully facilitate the restrain and management of the phenomenon of the proliferation of religious institutes and lay associations in Nigeria and, positively, it will contribute to the discernment of vocations and to the enhancement and qualitative growth Consecrated life in Nigeria).

INTRODUCTION

Religious life is a gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church. Religious men and women have, to a greater extent, sustained the missionary life and work of the Church. They are practically great evangelizers both in word and action. They, normally, have no frontiers as they are ready to be sent anywhere in the world. By their vow of obedience, they are always ready to say *fiat* to the command of the superior to be sent. They largely express the Church's charismatic nature. Through them, so many and different kinds of charisms have been gifted to the Church. Religious life is also mediated by the Church because it belongs to the life and holiness of the Church. The sacred hierarchy has an oversight function to promote and to regulate it. Speaking about the ecclesial dimension of religious life, *Mutuae relationes* refers to "the unquestionable bond of religious life with the life and holiness of the Church."³³⁴ A founder or foundress who is inspired with a charism that will give birth to a religious institute must submit the whole process from beginning to completion to the competent ecclesiastical authority. It is this authority that discerns its charism, spirituality and apostolate and guides the process until his approval

³³⁴ Sacred Congregation for Bishops and Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes (SCB & SCRIS), Norms *Mutuae Relationis*, (MR), May 14, 1978, no. 8.

gives it the status of a religious institute. This same process of establishment applies to any other form of consecrated life, such as, secular institutes or societies of apostolic life.

1. BACKGROUND TO THE DOCUMENT

The document from the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria, *Guidelines and Directives on Founding Religious Institutes and lay Associations in Nigeria, (Guidelines)* which necessitated this reflection was given from the background of the numerous associations in many Catholic dioceses in Nigeria either pretending to be religious institutes or knocking on the doors of the diocesan bishops requesting to be approved as such. Many of the founders and foundresses are ignorant of the meaning and demands of religious life. Consequently, they get confused with regard to what exactly they want to bring about. Innocent young men and women, who are also ignorant and without proper guidance, join them. Without appropriate formation and stability in such associations, their lives are ruined after being trapped in them for years. It is not uncommon to notice from the initiators some inordinate ambition to answer father-founder and mother-foundress to the detriment of these innocent young people.

1.1. CLUELESSNESS OF FOUNDERS AND FOUNDESSES ABOUT FOUNDING CHARISM

Religious life does not begin without the founder or foundress being inspired by some charism given by the Holy Spirit on behalf of the Church. You ask some of these founders what their charism is, they have no idea what you are talking about. They are totally clueless.

1.2. LACK OF FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Money is necessary for the survival of any organization. Many founders and foundresses of these preparatory associations are totally ill-prepared for the cost of maintaining their members. They often have no apostolates and projects to sustain them. Many begin their association before looking for apostolates to sustain them. They depend on charity which is often meagre.

1.3. ABUSES

The young women and men are asked before admission to the novitiate to pay some huge amount of money. This is part of the prospectus given them. Before first profession, some of these associations would ask novices to pay another huge amount of money. That demands freeing them from the novitiate to go and look for funds. Many get entangled with some men who would give them the money at a cost. Before final profession, the members are asked to pay another huge sum.

Guidelines indicates that these initiatives springing up in our land are so convoluted in their understanding of the three-fold identity of religious institutes, namely:

charism, spirituality and apostolate. "For some of the initiatives, charism and spirituality seem to be subdued by apostolate. Many of the Religious Congregations will be happy to tell their apostolate, either as education, hospital work, taking care of the poor, caring for orphans etc., but are unclear about their charism and spirituality."³³⁵

It is the responsibility of diocesan bishops to regulate these abuses. They are not just the chief shepherds of the faithful but also the custodians of the sacred mysteries. They are the magisterium of their dioceses, the teacher of the faithful. They are the chief liturgists of their dioceses. They have been given care of all the souls of Catholics in their dioceses to shepherd. These young men and women whose lives are ruined are among the people entrusted to their care to teach, to shepherd and to guide on the path to heaven. Apparently the church has not done enough to guide them. It was high time the bishops got involved to stem the tide. This is why the *Guidelines* was produced to help the bishops in the process of accompanying these associations, to discern them, approve those they feel come from the Holy Spirit and disband the others.

2. TYPES OF INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE

Guidelines discusses the different forms of institutes of consecrated life. It refers to *Vita Consecrata* which delineates three types of institutes of consecrated life, viz: Religious Institutes, Secular Institutes and Societies of Apostolic Life.

Religious Institutes are essentially characterized by the public profession of the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience by vows. Religious Institutes can be clerical or lay. Other characteristics of religious institutes are, they live community life in common, render public witness to Christ and the Church, this entails separation from the world, canon 607 §§ 2 and 3.³³⁶

Secular Institutes are characterized by consecration in secularity, an original form of life, and profession of the evangelical counsels. They live the secular life in the world as secular professionals. They are not obliged to live community life, members can live alone, can be lay or clerical or both, in accordance with their constitutions.³³⁷

Societies of Apostolic Life constitute some type of consecrated life different from Religious and Secular Institutes. They take private vows. Members can live in community or alone also in accordance with their constitutions.³³⁸

The document indicates some other forms of consecrated life which are different from Institutes of Consecrated life. These are Hermitism and Anchoritism, Order of

³³⁵ Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria, *Guidelines and Directives on Founding Religious Institutes and Lay Associations in Nigeria*, Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, September 2014, n. 6..

³³⁶ *Guidelines*, n. 11.

³³⁷ *Ibid.* n. 12.

³³⁸ *Ibid.* n. 13.

Virgins, and Order of Widows. These participate in and contribute to the holiness of the Church (cf. *Lumen gentium*, 44).³³⁹

3. CHARISM OF RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES

Guidelines discusses charism under the following sub-titles: meaning of charism, Charisms Given for the Good of the Church, Charisms Address the Needs of the Church and Society, Uniqueness and Originality of Charism, Authenticity of Charism and the Life of the Founder, Centrality of Christ in Each Charism, Every Pious Association is not Destined to be a Religious Institute.

Charism means free gift. It is a special gift of the Holy Spirit, a manifestation of the work of God, a service directed to the Lord in the Church or in the world. Charism addresses the needs of the Church and society. Institutes of consecrated life always come into existence to fulfil a timely need in the Church. The ultimate justification for the approval of a new Institute is whether the charism is motivated by the Holy Spirit in response to the will of God in the service of the Church. It must be committed to address a particular need of the Church. The Holy Spirit inspires certain individuals to band together to meet those specific needs.

The generating power of a new Institute of Consecrated Life is given in its original inspiration – its charism. The newness and originality of a charism do not mean deviating from the nature of Consecrated Life but the newness of the gift, the charism. Each new Institute brings a unique contribution to the work of a particular Church and ultimately to the universal Church.

However, if the uniqueness and originality are lacking, if it is similar to an existing charism, the Apostolic See suggests that the members of the Association join the existing Religious Institute.³⁴⁰ The Apostolic See does not want the same charism replicated in the same Diocese or Conference. Charisms should always be unique and original.

Mutuae relationes details what to look for in the life a founder and his disciples that can show the authenticity of a charism. They include, a continual examination regarding fidelity to the Lord, docility to His Spirit, intelligent attention to circumstances and an outlook cautiously directed to the signs of the times, the will to be part of the Church, the awareness of subordination to the sacred hierarchy, boldness of initiatives, constancy in the giving of self, humility in bearing with adversities.³⁴¹

Pope Leo XIII's Constitution, *Conditae a Christo* of December 8, 1900; and Pope St. Pius X's *Motu proprio, Dei Providentis*, July 16, 1906, make these points in relation to the evaluation of charism and founders by the Bishop:

³³⁹ Ibid. 14.

³⁴⁰ Leo XIII, apostolic constitution *Conditae a Christo*, December 8, 1900, (cf. Papal Pronouncements, A Guide, 1740-1978).

³⁴¹ *Mutuae Relationis*, no. 12.

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- a. Before applying to Rome, the bishop must examine its constitutions as to their orthodoxy and moral character, and satisfy himself that they conform to the sacred canons, the decrees of the Roman Pontiffs, and the scope intended.
- b. If possible, rather than permit the foundation of a new Congregation, the bishop should call in members of a Congregation, already approved, if its purpose and charism are the same.
- c. The purpose or aim of the new Congregation must be well defined and not too diversified, which would be the case if the Congregation should propose to devote itself to all kinds of charitable works.

One of the basic norms determining the genuineness of a charism of a new Institute is its bond or relationship with the Church. Therefore, the founder, in spite of his persistence, must in humility be submissive to the hierarchy.

The document *Mutuae relationes* recognizes that the Holy Spirit can inspire certain individuals of the Church to undertake certain works for the good of the Church. However, any apostolic activity undertaken by founders/foundresses must be in harmony with and subject to the authority and supervisory approval of the bishop.

Mutuae relationes places the burden on the competent authority who is to discern the authenticity of the new charism to make sure they do not approve an institute that is useless. They should be able to also discern from the life of the founder what may be a devotional phenomenon instead of a charism. A devotional phenomenon may look like a charism while it is not. They are to do this humbly and objectively.

In some regions there is noticeable a certain overabundance of initiatives to found new religious institutes. Those who are responsible for discerning the authenticity of each foundation should weigh with humility, of course, but also objectively, constantly, and seeking to foresee clearly the future possibilities -- every indication of a credible presence of the Holy Spirit, both to receive His gifts "with thanksgiving and consolation" (LG 12) and also to avoid that "institutes may be imprudently brought into being which are useless or lacking in sufficient resources" (PC 19). In fact, when judgment regarding the establishment of an institute is formulated only in view of its usefulness and suitability in the field of action, or simply on the basis of the comportment of some person who experiences devotional phenomena, in themselves ambiguous, then indeed it becomes evident that the genuine concept of religious life in the Church is in a certain manner distorted (cf. Part I, ch. III).³⁴²

Mutuae relationes proffers three characteristics needed for the correct assessment of the authenticity of a charism by the competent authority.³⁴³

³⁴² *Mutuae Relationis*, 51

³⁴³ *Ibid*

- a) Its special origin from the Spirit, distinct, even though not separate, from special personal talents, which become apparent in the sphere of activity and organization;
- b) A profound ardor of love to be conformed to Christ in order to give witness to some aspect of His mystery;
- c) A constructive love of the Church, which absolutely shrinks from causing any discord in Her.

The Bishops, as the successors of the apostles, are given power to discern if the charism given to a particular individual is centred on Christ and in service of the mission of the Church. Therefore, for a charism to be centred on Christ it must be a gift of the Holy Spirit; it must be a service to the Church; it must contribute to building up of the Body of Christ; and it must be submissive to the Church.

Canon 299 grants the Christian faithful the right and freedom to form associations. However, every pious association is not destined to be a Religious Institute. While the Church guarantees the right of the faithful to form an association, it does not include the right of every faithful to form an Institute of Consecrated Life, which is a special kind of association. It is pertinent that for an association destined to become an Institute of Consecrated Life, it has to go through the stages of formation and development, first as a private association, then a public association, and lastly, approval as a Religious Institute. There are many pious associations in the Church. Bishops should discern that what is presented to them is not just a pious association meant to serve the Church as such. Every pious association must not become an Institute of Consecrated Life.

4.1. CHARISM AND SPIRITUALITY

Guidelines notes that Spirituality and charism mutually enrich each other. It is a Christo-centric spirituality perfected by charism. "The Church is given the mandate to accomplish the mission of Christ. Consequently, the Holy Spirit is given to the Church to teach and empower her to accomplish that mission. The Holy Spirit inspires certain individuals and entrusts them some charisms to serve the needs of the Church in the fulfillment of her mission. Charism leads both the receiver and members of the Church to union with the Giver, that is, with God. Therefore, the spirituality that arises from such charism leads to holiness."³⁴⁴

To respond to this spirituality, the founder and his members, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, embrace Christ's ongoing invitation to 'repent and believe the Gospel.' They strive for a personal conversion that is hinged on an ever-deepening communion of faith, hope and love with other Christians in their religious community and in the apostolate to be ever more faithful witnesses to Christ, the values of His Gospel and the teaching of His Church in their daily life as religious.

4.2. SPIRITUALITY OF A PREPARATORY ASSOCIATION

³⁴⁴ *Guidelines*, n. 32.

The type of spirituality expected of a preparatory association should reflect the form of the Institute of Consecrated Life or Society of Apostolic Life that the founder intends for his members. The founder must have the clarity of mind that he is establishing a Religious Institute or a Secular Institute, or a Society of Apostolic Life. This distinction is not clear in the minds of many founders and foundresses in Nigeria. They only understand religious life but not the others. This clarity informs the type of spirituality based on the characteristics of the Institute or Society he chooses. To clarify this point further, it is pertinent to examine how the characteristics of a Religious Institute can influence the spirituality of a preparatory association.

4.3. SPIRITUALITY OF A RELIGIOUS INSTITUTE

The spirituality of a preparatory association that intends to become a Religious Institute has to be anchored on the values that are characteristics of Religious Institute. Canon 607, §§2 and 3 give the four characteristics as follows:

- a) members must profess public vows of chastity, poverty and obedience;
- b) members must live community life in common;
- c) members must give public witness to Christ and to the Church;
- d) Religious life entails separation from the world.

The spirituality of such an association should focus on these four characteristics of religious life. The evangelical counsels, so important for religious life, lived in imitation of Christ, can become the summit and centre of their spirituality. In *Vita Consecrata*, St. John Paul II indicates the necessity of members to conform to Christ; he exhorts religious to return to the Rule and Constitutions which provide a map for the whole journey of discipleship.³⁴⁵ This enables them to grow in holiness through obedience to their constitutions, then to their superiors, and to the Church. Community life must be centred on fraternal love strengthened by communal prayer. Besides personal prayer life, praying of the Liturgy of the Hours as a community and other prayers prescribed in their statutes and constitutions are very important in nurturing their spirituality. The public witness to Christ and to the Church which is expressed through the fraternal life of the religious and their involvement in the apostolate gives them an apostolic spirituality. As religious life entails separation from the world, their spirituality will demand detachment from material things.

4.4. CHARISM AND SPIRITUALITY TO REFLECT THE TYPE OF INSTITUTE OR SOCIETY INTENDED BY THE FOUNDER

Guidelines underscores the importance of a founder of an association to determine from the outset whether he is founding a Religious Institute or Secular Institute or Society of Apostolic Life. This will reflect on the type of charism and spirituality he gives his association. Often, founders and foundresses think every Institute of Consecrated Life or Society of Apostolic Life is a Religious Institute. They are unable to differentiate one from the other. But with clarity about the form of life he wants,

³⁴⁵ John Paul II, post synodal apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, (VC) March 25, 1996, nos. 36 and 37.

he sets out from the start with the right charism and the right spirituality for his association.

If he intends to found a Religious Institute, canons 573 – 704 will be a good guide. He should not gloss over the fact that religious profess public vows of chastity, poverty and obedience; live community life in common, give witness to Christ and the Church; and are separated from the world, (cf. canon 607).

If Secular Institute is the founder's choice, canons 573 – 704, including specifically, 710-730 will be a good help. He should pay attention to its constitutions, particularly, charism and spirituality, (including formation, apostolate and government). He is to recognize the fact that Secular Institutes were approved to live in the world and operate from the world (cf. canons 710; 712; 713; and 714). These relevant canons should guide the founder in determining their spirituality and apostolate. He has to decide whether they should live in community or not. He should determine the type of vows they profess and the obligation from them. According to the canons, these will be determined by the founder in the constitutions.

Where the founder desires to establish a Society of Apostolic Life, he should consult canons 573 -704, and also specifically, 731-746. Their statutes and spirituality should take cognizance of the fact that they do not profess public vows, (canon 713 §1). They are consecrated in some way but are not stringently considered as consecrated persons. Strictly, consecrated persons are members of the Institutes of Consecrated Life.

5.1. ESSENCE OF APOSTOLATE FOR CONSECRATED RELIGIOUS

In *Guidelines*, the bishops affirm the significance of the apostolic dimension of religious consecration which necessitates the engagement of religious persons with apostolic works in the realization of their charisms. The term 'apostolate' underscores the role and function of "an apostle" in its meaning and content. Related to an Institute, apostolate expresses the concrete activity which speaks to its charism. Apostolate is not about doing everything or any activity, but the very activity embarked upon must flow from the charism of the Institute.

Church documents and the canons of the Code on Religious Institutes admonish Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life to live their charisms in the apostolates they are engaged in. *Perfectae caritatis*, nn. 8 and 10 states, "their whole life is imbued with apostolic spirit and the whole of their apostolic action is animated by a religious spirit. For their apostolate is an essential part of the pastoral life of the Church."

The apostolate of religious expresses the concrete activity which speaks to its charism. Apostolate is not about doing everything or any activity, but the very activity embarked upon must be attuned to the charism of the Institute. For consecrated persons, the very life they live is already an apostolate. The external work done consolidates their primary mode of evangelization through witnessing

with their lives as lived in fidelity to their charism. Religious Institutes should live their charisms in the apostolate they undertake. Superiors and members are to hold fast to the works and mission proper to their Institutes, cf. canon 611.

5.2. RELATIONSHIP OF APOSTOLATE TO CHARISM OF INSTITUTES

The bishops underscore the symbiotic relationship between apostolate and charism. They mutually enrich each other. "Charism is the very identity of an Institute. It is what generates the apostolate of the Institute. Apostolate on the other hand, is the outward expression of an Institute's charism. The apostolate that members of Religious Institutes are engaged in are necessarily the offshoot of the charisms which have been recognized and approved for the Institutes by ecclesiastical authorities during the course of the approval process. The apostolate of an Institute remains a factor that renders concrete, practical and beneficial for humanity the charism it professes."³⁴⁶

The approval by an ecclesiastical authority is an indication that the apostolate bears the authority and support of the competent authority. *Perfectae Caritatis 2* admonishes Religious Institutes to go back to the details of their original charism, implores them to re-discover and revert to the original apostolic activity they were made to undertake.

Religious Institutes are called to be open to new pastoral needs of the mission. In carrying out their apostolate, Religious Institutes are to be aware of the challenges of their time, understand the profound theological meaning of these challenges through discernment and guidance of the Spirit. Guided by the Holy Spirit, they are to present new answers to the new problems of the contemporary world. In his 2014 Apostolic Letter to All Consecrated People, Pope Francis said that he counts on religious "to wake up the world".³⁴⁷ For this reason, constitutions, directories, books of customs, of prayers, of ceremonies and such like should be properly revised, obsolete prescriptions suppressed and brought into line with conciliar and papal documents.

6.1. STABLE PATRIMONY NEEDED FOR APPROVAL

Guidelines proffers four aspects of the patrimony of a preparatory association seeking canonical erection as an Institute that the competent authority should closely examine before formal approval by decree. The patrimony may be considered from two perspectives,

- i. the spiritual cum juridical patrimony as given in the Code of Canon Law, which takes years (even up to 20 years) to be fully defined

³⁴⁶ *Guidelines*, p. 39.

³⁴⁷ Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter, *To All Consecrated People: On the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life*, II, n. 2.

- ii. the physical and fiscal patrimony required towards the sustainability and viability of the new foundation. This is required to safeguard the members from frugal living and alms begging.

For the canonical erection of a new foundation as an Institute of Consecrated Life, it is recommended that the new foundation has:

- a stable Generalate (seat of administration) built on its own property
- at least two personal houses that qualify for the title of a religious house according to can. 608
- spread into a minimum of three dioceses
- Assets or economic base up to 20 million naira cumulative
- A stable demography of growth in membership (admissions and departure) since its inception

The approving authority should use experts to ascertain and establish these facts before approval.

7. KINDS OF FOUNDERS

Any Catholic (cf. C. 205), (including lay persons) who having received the gift of the Holy Spirit, can be the founder of a new way of following Jesus Christ more closely through the profession of the evangelical counsels by vows or other sacred bonds. Such a person must have the intention of founding an institute with notable characteristics distinguishing it from already existing ones. There have been some Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life founded by lay people, for example, Dominican Sisters of the Holy Rosary was founded by a lay person, Blessed Bartolo Longo in Pompei.

Guidelines gives five possible types of founders:³⁴⁸

- i. The Model type of founder: Some hero of the faith after whom persons chose to model themselves or their way of life. This is a founder by attribution or a patriarchal founder
- ii. The Charismatic founder: The person who receives the gift or charism to directly start an Institute of Consecrated Life
- iii. The Reform or Secondary founder: A member of an already existing Institute who calls for a return to the original inspiration of the founder. This person retains the constitutions of the parent Institute but takes on a new title and refers still to the original founder
- iv. The Hierarchical founder: Where an authority figure starts an Institute in which he is not a member or recommends it to others

³⁴⁸ Guidelines, n. 46.

- v. The Co-founder: Where more than one person is involved or someone assists a hierarchical founder to realise his *propositum* (intention) and may even be a founding member of the same Institute

8. BISHOP'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE PROCESS OF APPROVAL OF AN INSTITUTE

Recognizing the authenticity of a charism is not always an easy task, it is, nonetheless, a dutiful service that Pastors are requested to fulfill. When the Pastors of churches do not make pronouncements about these charisms, young people are misled into joining associations that do not have and may not have the stability of a Religious Institute. St. John Paul II insists that, "The faithful have the right to be informed by their pastors about the authenticity of charisms and the trustworthiness of those who present themselves as recipients thereof."³⁴⁹

The bishop should see his role as an attitude of service to the Holy Spirit and toward the Church whenever founders and foundresses present an association to him that seem to be a gift of the Holy Spirit. As a teacher and guide, the bishop has the responsibility of carefully discerning and assisting so that the plan, if it is in line with the norms set down by the Church, is realized in the best possible manner (cf. c. 605). In the recent document, *The Church Rejuvenates*, from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Apostolic See underscores the meticulous and slow nature of this discernment process. "This process is time consuming. It requires an adequate period to pass in order to authenticate the charisms, which must be submitted to serious discernment until they are recognized as genuine."³⁵⁰ It enunciates further, "the reality of the group that arises from the charism must have the proper time to grow and mature. This would extend beyond the period of initial enthusiasm until a stable configuration arises."³⁵¹

No canonical law obliges the bishop to comply with the request of promoters of a new foundation. It does, however, fall within his responsibility not to extinguish or to alter a gift of the spirit which is truly such. At the very beginning, the bishop is called upon to deal with a reality which is not of his own making, a reality whose implementation requires his approval (c. 575).

The process of discernment and supervision of charismatic gifts can be difficult for the competent authority journeying with an association towards its approval. The following canons will assist the bishop in his judgment, cc. 575, 576, 578, 586, 587, and 605.

³⁴⁹ John Paul II, *Catechesis* (9 march, 1994), 6: *Insegnamenti* 17/1 (1994), 641.

³⁵⁰ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *The Church Rejuvenates, Iuvenescit Ecclesia*, Letter to the Bishops regarding the relationship between Hierarchical and Charismatic Gifts in the Church, no. 17.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*

Guidelines expresses a two-fold responsibility of the bishop in the accompaniment of these associations. These are the juridical and paternal dimensions. The diocesan bishop (as well as the Episcopal Conference and the Supreme Pontiff) gives approbation to a Religious Institute in the Church which is the juridical dimension to his responsibility. Even more important than this juridical dimension, the bishop in a certain sense is the “founding father” of the Institute. This relationship of “fatherhood” is operative in an especially intense degree during the preparatory phase of the establishment of the religious institute. Consequently, in accomplishing this dimension of paternal care the bishop should always acknowledge with due respect both the autonomy proper to the association and the charism of the association. The bishop is “father” not “lord and master”.³⁵²

“Therefore, it is the duty of the bishop to weave together various elements. The bishop is to encourage the founding members and help them to discern, to understand and to be faithful to the charism gifted to them by the Holy Spirit. At the same time, it is his responsibility to verify that charism. Again, the bishop is not to suffocate the inspiration of the Holy Spirit nor the creativity and initiative of the founding members. It is not always easy to determine when the juridical and paternal roles of the bishop overlap and interfere with the charism of the Holy Spirit and with the autonomy and initiative proper to the association.”³⁵³

9. CRITERIA FOR DISCERNING THE CHARISMATIC GIFTS

The Apostolic See gives the criteria as set out by the Magisterium of the Church in recent years, for discerning the charismatic gifts with reference to ecclesial groups, for example, associations that desire to be approved as Religious Institutes should exhibit the following:

- a) The Primacy of the vocation of every Christian to holiness
- b) Commitment to spreading the Gospel
- c) Profession of the Catholic Faith
- d) Witness to a real communion with the whole Church
- e) Recognition of and esteem for the reciprocal complementarity of other charismatic elements in the Church
- f) Acceptance of moments of trial in the discernment of charisms
- g) Presence of spiritual fruits
- h) The social dimension of evangelization

10. FOUR-STEP PROCESS OF FOUNDING A RELIGIOUS INSTITUTE

Guidelines gives a four-step process for the establishment of a Religious Institute from a preparatory association to approval. It is a gradual process that should not be rushed. To move from one step to another requires the approval of the proper competent authority.

³⁵² *Guidelines*, n. 48

³⁵³ *Ibid.*

It begins by someone inspired to undertake some work of mercy which attracts some people, particularly, the young, to join him. This, normally, is within the territory of a parish. The priest is pleased with the work they are doing. The bishop comes to know about it. Happy that they are serving the diocese in a noble way, he writes them a letter of commendation.

The group continues its eminent work as new members continue to join as its popularity grows. About five years after the letter of commendation, the bishop writes them a letter of recognition. This letter recognizes the immense service they are giving to the diocese. By this time, the founder begins to write rules for them, gives them a habit, looks for some formator who is a religious to give them an integral formation. They are permitted to make professions even though their professions are not valid because they are not yet a Religious Institute. These acts of living like religious are necessary and encouraged so that by the time they are ready for approval, they would have become structured like a religious institute.

Between three and five years after the letter of recognition, the bishop can erect them a public association of Christ's faithful by a decree. This decree makes them juridical persons in the Church with rights and duties. It authorizes them, in their apostolate, to act in the name of the Church.

Between five and seven years after erecting them a public association, the bishop can approve them as a religious institute. Before approval, he would need to evaluate their rules and statutes to make sure there is nothing in them contrary to canon law. He would also need to consult with the Apostolic See. This four-step process is not rushed. The Apostolic See wants the process, from beginning to the time of approbation, to take at least twenty years. It is necessary to give the new religious institute a solid foundation. A Religious Institute that would last thousands of years should not be rushed or allowed to have a weak foundation. Bishops should take time to journey with the founders and foundresses. To accompany them, bishops should have as his advisers, a canonist, a theologian and a psychologist, one of whom should be a religious.

11. CONSULTATION WITH THE APOSTOLIC SEE

The following are the checklist that should be in place before the diocesan bishop approaches the Apostolic See for consultation:

- a) They have stayed at least twenty years in the process of becoming a religious institute
- b) They have capacity for continuous existence (they have vocations)
- c) They have at least forty members, with some members in perpetual profession and others in temporary profession. They should include pictures of members in their habits

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- d) They should have some governance structures, for example, they should have conducted general chapter(s) that elected superior general and council. (Members obtain these offices through election).
- e) They must present evidence of financial viability and sustainability

In conclusion, religious life is a gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church. It is an expression of the charismatic life of the Church. Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life are like a mosaic of great beauty on the landscape of the Church. The Holy Spirit continues to give charisms to individuals to accomplish the needs of the Church. The competent authorities, particularly, the diocesan bishops are constantly to discern new associations that want to become Institutes of Consecrated Life. They are to accompany them, and give approbation to those they judge to have fulfilled the necessary conditions for approval. They are to duly follow the process and not allow founders and foundresses to pressure them into giving a hasty approval. The competent ecclesiastical authorities are to be vigilant in their dioceses to make sure young people who have genuine vocations but are ignorant of the status of these associations are not deceived. Associations that are abusive and deceitful should be proscribed immediately. Those asking candidates or members to bring huge amounts of money before admission or profession have no business in the Church. Bishops need to be vigilant and to act with dispatch.