

Part 1: FOCUS

***Africae Munus* and Consecrated Persons**

Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, OSA*

Introduction

The period before the convocation of the 1994 African Synod, was a time when Africa was described in the image of the biblical icon: the man who was on his way from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers, who robbed him, brutalized him and abandoned him half-dead (Lk 10: 30-37). It is therefore not surprising that the challenges of Africa became the dominant points in the *Lineamenta* and *Instrumentum laboris* of the 1994 African Synod: instability and political violence, armed conflicts, poor democratic representation, poor management of public affairs, weight of external debt, corruption, ethnocentrism, arms trade, the collapse of health services and public education, exponential spread of HIV/AIDS, but also the aggressive growth of religious sects and certain Christian or non-Christian fundamentalist circles against the Catholic Church. The Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, saw Consecrated persons as agents of evangelization who could contribute to the liberation of Africa from the forces that cripple her progress. The Roman Pontiff wrote,

In the Church understood as the Family of God, *consecrated life* has the particular function not only of indicating to all the call to holiness but also of witnessing to fraternal life in community. Therefore, all who live the consecrated life are called to respond to their vocation in a spirit of communion and cooperation with the respective Bishops, clergy and laity".

Focusing on local ordinaries and Consecrated persons, he wrote further,

...the leaders of the local Churches and of the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life to foster dialogue among themselves, in order to create, in the spirit of the Church as Family, mixed groups for consultation which would serve as a witness to fraternity and as a sign of unity in the service of a common mission.

Sixteen years after the 1994 Synod, Pope Benedict XVI issued the document *Africae Munus* to continue the work already begun by *Ecclesia in Africa*. He wrote, "It was my wish that the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops, held from 4 to 25 October 2009, should continue the work of the 1994 Assembly, "which was

intended to be an occasion of hope and resurrection, at the very moment when human events seemed to be tempting Africa to discouragement and despair." It was an Apostolic Exhortation that was aimed at rekindling the fire kindled by his predecessor, Pope John Paul II. He wrote, "The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa* of my predecessor, Blessed John Paul II, brought together the pastoral insights and proposals of the Synod Fathers for a new evangelization of the African continent. It was appropriate, ten years into this third millennium, to rekindle our faith and hope, so as to help build a reconciled Africa by pursuing the paths of truth and justice, love and peace (cf. *Ps 85:11*)." In this new vision of Africa's commitment to the Lord Jesus, what is the place of consecrated persons? What is their fundamental contribution towards the realization of this new vision for Africa? These and more are the burdens of this article.

The Theology of Consecrated Persons

By consecrated persons, I mean the members of the Religious Institutes and Societies of Apostolic Life. They are lay persons or clerics who assume the evangelical counsels by means of a sacred bond, and become members of an institute of consecrated life according to the law of the church. They totally dedicate themselves to God with the goal of pursuing perfection in charity by faithfully embracing the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. In this sense, consecrated persons respond freely to the invitation of the Holy Spirit to follow Christ the poor, the celibate, the obedient son, more closely, thus becoming in this life a sign of the life to come. "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". These counsels are referred to as evangelical because the religious vows are central to the life and message of Jesus and also because religious consecration is founded on baptismal consecration. The consecrated life is also traceable to the post-apostolic church, especially to those early Christians who dedicated themselves to a gospel-oriented life-style, to a radical following of Jesus Christ. The first person in this line was Anthony of Egypt. He was followed by a line of disciples, until it became an institution in the Church.

Very significant is the idea of consecration. It is derived from the word 'holy' or 'holiness'. In Hebrew it is *qadash* and in Greek *Hagios*; these are translated to mean 'to consecrate' (Lev 15:31; Ezek 14:7). In Numbers 6:5-7, 12, the Nazirites were referred to as consecrated because of their vows to God. This makes the person holy, a consecration that separates the person from others. Thus the word consecration implies a setting apart or a separation. This separation does not in any way imply superiority, or complete severance from those the consecrated are called to serve. 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." 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”. 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 sin (cf. Rm 6:11) 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”.

Benedict XVI’s Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: *Africae Munus*

Africae Munus was published after the First Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops and gave great impetus to the growth of the Church in Africa developing, among other things, the idea of the Church as Family of God which has been beneficial to the universal Church. It aims at reinforcing this ecclesial dynamism and outlining a programme for pastoral activity for the coming decades of evangelization in Africa, underlining the need for reconciliation, justice and peace.

The document has two parts. Part one discerns the fundamental structures of the ecclesial mission on the continent, a mission which aspires to reconciliation, justice and peace, and has its origin in the person of Jesus Christ. He invites Christians to be reconciled with God, and to become just in order to build a social order where justice reigns and in keeping with the logic of the Beatitudes. Attention then turns to the paths towards reconciliation, justice and peace. These include authentic conversion, the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance, the spirituality of communion, the inculturation of the Gospel, the protection of life, migrants, displaced persons, refugees, the good governance of States, and ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue especially with traditional religions and Islam.

In part two, all members of the Church are invited to contribute to communion and peace in the Church and in society. It also identifies areas for the apostolate: the Church as the presence of Christ, the world of education, healthcare and the communications media. The Exhortation opens a horizon of hope to Africa which, by welcoming Jesus Christ, must free itself from the forces which paralyze it. According to Nicola Eterovic, as a document, it offers the Church in Africa practical guidance and suggestions for pastoral activity over coming decades. These practical guidance and suggestions, he lists as follows,

The Catholic Voyage: African Journal of Consecrated Life

Vol. 11, 2015. ISSN: 2659-0301 (Online) 1597 6610 (Print)

4

1. Evangelization *ad gentes*, the announcement of the Gospel to those who still do not know Jesus Christ, is still of vital importance in Africa. It is a pastoral priority which involves all African Christians.
2. Ordinary evangelization must be increasingly promoted in the various particular Churches, through commitment to fostering reconciliation, justice and peace.
3. There is also an urgent need to work for the new evangelization in Africa, especially among people who have distanced themselves from the Church or who do not behave in a Christian fashion. African Christians, and in particular the clergy and consecrated persons, are likewise called to support new evangelization in secularized nations. This is an exchange of gifts, because African missionaries are already at work in countries which once produced missionaries who went forth to announce the Good News in Africa.
4. Saints, people reconciled with God and neighbor, are exemplary heralds of justice and apostles of peace. The Church – all of whose members are called to sanctity – must discover fresh ardour, the ardour of the many saints and martyrs, confessors and virgins of the African continent, devotion to whom should be renewed and promoted (cf. AM 113).
5. In order to find further examples of sanctity, also obtaining new intercessors in heaven, pastors of the particular Churches are encouraged ‘to recognize among servants of the Gospel in Africa those who could be canonized according to the norms of the Church’ (AM 114).
6. The bonds of communion between the Holy Father and the bishops of Africa must be strengthened, as must the bonds among Africa bishops themselves, at the national, regional and continental level.
7. It is considered important ‘for the bishops to help support, effectively and affectively, the Symposium of Bishops’ Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) as a continental structure of solidarity and ecclesial communion’ (AM 107).
8. For a deeper appreciation of the mystery of the Eucharist and to increase Eucharistic devotion, emphasis is given to the Synod Fathers’ proposal to celebrate a continental Eucharistic Congress (cf. AM 153).
9. African countries are encouraged to ‘celebrate yearly ‘a day or week of reconciliation, particularly during Advent or Lent’ (AM 157).
10. In agreement with the Holy See, SECAM may contribute to promoting ‘a continent-wide Year of Reconciliation to beg of God special forgiveness for all the evils and injuries mutually inflicted in Africa, and for the reconciliation of persons and groups who have been hurt in the Church and in the whole of society’ (AM 157).

This notwithstanding, Anthony Akinwale avers that the essence of *munus Africae* for Africans is to allow the grace of God to reconcile us to God and to one another. Empowered by this grace, we are to strive for “that inner purification of man which is

the essential prior condition for building justice and peace.” We assume the task of reconciliation, justice and peace when we cooperate with the grace of God in Christ who re-establishes humanity in the Father through the forgiveness of sins, forming a renewed human community characterized by restoration of relationships, settlement of differences and removal of obstacles to the personal and communal experience of God’s love.

Africae Munus and Consecrated Persons

In part two, chapter one, number one of *Africae Munus*, the Roman Pontiff, Pope Benedict XVI focused on consecrated persons. The concern of the section of this work, which is the heart of it, is to focus on the relevance of *Africae Munus* to consecrated persons. Here, a couple of points would be raised in this regard: Consecrated persons as prophetic witnesses, faithful adherence to the charism of founders and foundresses and the National and Continental Conferences.

1. Consecrated Persons as Prophetic Witnesses

By virtue of their calling as Consecrated persons, the religious are prophets in a preeminent manner. The scripture speaks of the prophetic ministry in relation to the word of God and worship. The emphasis on the word of God is because the Word of God is an agent of the revelation of God’s will for mankind. The Second Vatican Council document speaks of the prophetic character of consecrated persons when it says that they belong essentially to the charismatic nature of the Church. An intimate relationship with God opens the prophet to the knowledge and ways of God granted only to a few. With such knowledge, the prophet can interpret the word of God in the daily events of life. The Roman Pontiff establishes a relationship between the evangelical counsels and the prophetic character of Consecrated Persons:

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

From the foregoing, it is obvious that Consecrated Persons are not prophets by virtue of their consecration alone, it is a life that is lived out in concrete historical circumstances. They must be living examples to the world they have been called to change, especially in the area of reconciliation, justice and peace. They should be able to live together in mutual love and fraternal communion as brothers and sisters in a world where sectionalism and tribalism has destroyed the future of many innocent men and women. This must be renewed on the fire of prayer. If this is lacking, consecrated persons would fail in the prophetic character of their calling.

2. Faithful Adherence to the Charism of Founders and Foundresses

By the charism of the Founder or Foundress, it is meant the special communication of grace, granted directly by the Spirit to an individual, in order to empower that person to found a religious institute and to configure its shape and identity. The Second Vatican Council document asserts that the religious life proceeds from a charism given to the Church so that various members of the faithful can live their Christian existence in a state of life that imitates and represents the lifestyle that Jesus chose for Himself and proposed to his followers. Through its charism, the particular congregation expresses and realizes the total and exclusive giving of oneself to God and to God's plan of salvation for humankind. The Religious life therefore, has its origin in a charism, which is a constitutive part of the charismatic dimension of the Church. Another integrating and distinctive part of the charism of Religious Life is the dimension of community. It is an essential element that represents the life of the apostles with Jesus. The charism of religious life, and the vocation that it brings with it, has a missionary, apostolic-prophetic and eschatological dimension: it bears witness to the life of Jesus and to the Gospel and, moreover, manifests the good things of heaven. It proposes a new and eternal life won by the redemption of Christ and it prefigures the future resurrection and the glory of the heavenly kingdom.

“Dear consecrated persons, may you continue to live your charism with truly apostolic zeal in the different fields indicated by your founders or foundresses! Thus you will be all the more vigilant in keeping your lamps alight! Your founders and foundresses wanted to follow Christ truly and respond to his call. The different good works that came about as a result are gems that adorn the Church. You must therefore carry them on by following as faithfully as possible the charism of your founders, their ideas and their vision. Here I would like to emphasize the important role of consecrated persons in the life of the Church and in her missionary endeavour. They are a necessary and precious aid to the Church's pastoral

activity but also a manifestation of the deepest nature of our Christian vocation.”

There are times when circumstances and persons, most times out of ignorance of the Religious Life, may try to redirect consecrated persons in a direction away from their particular charism: the Holy Father appeals that consecrated persons stick to their particular charism. For the charism of a religious institute gives her identity and thus authenticity. Only then can she truly be a germ that adorns the church.

3. National and Continental Conferences

The Holy Father has called for the different Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life to come together in solidarity to deal with common concerns, with proper cooperation with the Bishop’s Conference. He wrote:

“The meetings of the different National Conferences of Major Superiors and those of COMSAM help pool your reflections and resources, not only in order to pursue the goals of the various Institutes, while preserving their autonomy, character and individual spirit, but also to help deal with common concerns in a climate of fraternity and solidarity. It is fitting to foster an ecclesial spirit based on a sound coordination and proper cooperation with the Bishops’ Conferences”.

In this area of concern, the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria has achieved a lot. The Conference has an Annual General Assembly of the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria, during which the two conferences, Male and Female, meet separately and together to discuss issues that affect the conference as a whole and the concerns of her particular members. The members of the Executive Council meet at least twice a year to concretize the solutions proffered to problems and to articulate the position of the Conference. The Conference also meets with the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria once in two years in mutual relations, to discuss issues that border on the relationship of the dioceses and the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. The Conference also has Justice and Peace Initiative (JPI), a body that promotes Justice, Peace and Reconciliation. At the continental level, COMSAM conferences are organized which brings Major Superiors from different countries to share experiences and learn from one another.

Conclusion

When the Holy Father speaks to Consecrated Persons as agents of evangelization, he sees the state of the Consecrated as dynamic rather than passive. *Africae Munus* understands the divine call of the Consecrated as a call to liberation, which is most characteristic of all the divinely chosen. Our 'chosenness' makes us occupy a position of spiritual leadership that must be characterized by Justice, Peace and Reconciliation. This also encompasses other divine virtues like love, compassion, forgiveness, mercy etc. The Roman Pontiff therefore reminds Consecrated persons that they are at the heart of God's life, particularly at the heart of the ministry of Jesus Christ, and this mission is about creating models of reconciled and liberating communities for the world. This witness has become urgent in the face of the religio-cultural and political crises that have besieged Africa for quite some time now. The spiritual leadership of consecrated persons is therefore to shape human history, precisely, the history of Africa. For a liberative spiritual leadership would create a positive history.

**Ikechukwu Kanu, is a member of the Augustinian Order. He Lectures in the Augustinian Institute, Makurdi. He is the Executive Secretary of the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria (Men). Email: ikee_mario@yahoo.com; Phone: +2348036345466.*

**“EUNUCHS FOR THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN”:
CELIBATE CHASTITY AND CHRISTIAN LOVE**

*Obiorah Mary Jerome, IHM**

Abstract

The concepts of counsel and gift in the context of the Evangelical Counsels seem to have nothing in common, because as advisory declaration, a counsel in its face value appears a conflicting notion when compared with the intrinsic features of a gift. On the contrary, in Matthew 19:11-12 Jesus teaches that the Evangelical Counsel of Chastity, though advisory in nature, is a divine gift, for it bears in itself the grace to accept it as a means of attaining greater moral perfection. In reality, greater moral perfection is its principal objective. This explains why Jesus inserts this teaching in a context that some readers would least expect, his teaching on divorce (Matt 19:1-9). Furthermore, he employs the image of a eunuch, which is a natural antithesis in this context, to explain perfect continence. In this paper, the writer studies Matt 19:1-12, with special attention on verses 11-12. The paper focuses on the meaning of “eunuch”, its function in this text of the Scripture, and how Jesus uses it to convey his teaching on the Evangelical Vow of Chastity. Consecrated persons who have accepted and are living the gift of perfect continence are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs “for the sake of the kingdom of heaven”.

Introduction

But he said to them, ‘Not everyone can accept this teaching, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can’ (Matt 19,11-12).¹

No other premise can be more appropriate for this presentation than these words of Jesus. In them we see the nature and the objective of the evangelical vow of Chastity,² which is not a command but a counsel, proposed by Jesus first of all in his lifestyle and then in his words. When Jesus employed the image of a eunuch to propose this counsel, he expanded further the nature of continence, which can be explained as *to practise self-restraint especially sexually*. According to Jesus, those who embrace this counsel are voluntary eunuchs. It is voluntary because continence for God’s Kingdom is not for personal gratification or self-interest but for a higher value, which is at the core of Jesus’ teaching. This higher value is the Kingdom of Heaven.³ The phrase “for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven” embodies the purpose of this counsel.

Matthew 19,11-12 came as an answer to the rejoinder of the disciples to Christ’s teaching about divorce in Matt 19,1-12. Their response was “If such is the case with a

man with his wife, it is better not to marry” (Matt 19,10). This was engendered by Jesus’ insistence on sacredness and indissolubility of marriage, which was sanctified by God when he instituted marriage (Gen 2,24). Jesus saw in this OT text an authoritative basis for his explanation and uncompromising assertion on the indissolubility of marriage. The disciples, however, who wanted to seek refuge in what they believed to be a command from Moses, were confronted by Jesus’ teaching. A certificate of dismissal was allowed in the OT (cf. Deut 24,1-2) because of human hardheartedness (Matt 19,8).

The reaction of the disciples to this fresh and firm interpretation of God’s plan for man necessitated further explanation in which Jesus mentioned three different classes of eunuch. Were the disciples thinking that the condition of eunuchs was preferable to entangling oneself in a union that knows no exit, according to Jesus new teaching? The evangelist does not tell us further reaction of Jesus’ interlocutors; his attention now centers on Jesus’ response, especially on the three ways of becoming a eunuch. This response is of importance in understanding the state of those who profess the evangelical vow of chastity. They can be identified with the third class of eunuchs: “eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven”. Jesus rounded up what he wanted to convey in these words: “Let anyone accept this who can” (Matt 19,12).

From what Jesus said and in relation to the counsel of continence, one can elicit a key phrase or idea. This is voluntariness which is a constitutive quality of this third group of eunuchs: “they made themselves eunuchs”. This sets a sharp contrast between them and the preceding two: those who received their state of eunuch from nature and those who have been made so by fellow human beings. In other words, if they have the opportunity of changing what they are, they could willingly do it. The Scripture does not tell us the reason why some men were rendered impotent by others.

In ancient Near East some men were castrated for certain high positions in a royal court. We know from the Acts of the Apostles 8,27 that “there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury”. Perhaps he was castrated for this high position in the Ethiopian royal court. Another example is in Esther 2,14 where a eunuch was in-charge of the king’s concubines. This further differentiates them from the third group because it is only these voluntary eunuchs, according to Jesus, who have reason for being eunuchs. They are eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. Therefore, this third group of eunuchs can be identified with voluntary or perfect continence. The preceding two classes could remain eunuchs without exercising self-restraint especially sexually (description of eunuch). Thus the inherent self-restraint of eunuchs is imposed on them either by nature or by human beings.

This paper attempts to explain the nature of the evangelical vow of chastity from the perspective of voluntary eunuchs and the relationship between this and Christian

love. I shall be working on a triadic outline: the liberating power of the vow of chastity, Christian love and the link between this vow and Christian love.

1. Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven

Jesus' invitation to his disciples to embrace perfect continence is taken as the matrix of this reflection on the life of celibacy and Christian love especially in the NT. In this first section the constituent parts of the words of Jesus in Matt 19,1-12, particularly verses 11-12 are analyzed.

1.1 Understanding the Term 'Eunuch'

While the disciples of Jesus were thinking about the expediency of marriage, Jesus continued the same topic but shifted the conversation from the level of getting married to remaining celibate and eunuch. The Hebrew of the OT uses the term *sārîs* for a eunuch. This is the common word for an emasculated man.⁴ Although in Deut 23,1 the term *sārîs* does not occur,⁵ the passage contains a description of the literal meaning of *sārîs*. According to this text, a eunuch was not allowed to participate in the divine worship because he was not complete as a human person. In other words, his blemished body is not 'cultically' pure. The Book of Leviticus forbids the offering of castrated animal (cf. Lev 21,20 and 22,24). Another reason was that as one rendered impotent, a eunuch was incapable of fulfilling the divine command in Gen 1,28: "Be fruitful and multiply".

This physical feature of *sārîs* as one without issues is seen in Isa 56,3-4. Self-depiction of *sārîs* in this text is "I am just a dry tree". This "was apparently a deprecating remark about their inability to father children".⁶ They were refused admission into the assembly of the Lord (Lev 22,24 and Deut 23,2), because it seemed improper for a person, deprived of the power of transmitting life, to associate with the God of life. Isaiah 56 urges their full readmission among God's people and Wis 3,14 has a blessing reserved for them and confirms their participation in the temple service. In Isaiah the Lord commiserates with the eunuchs on their condition and even encourages them by promising them that thing which either nature or fate denies them.

Besides this literal meaning, the Hebrew term *sārîs* also acquired another connotation. It is predicated of officer and chamberlain.⁷ An example of this is seen in Gen 37,36 and 39,1. Pharaoh's official, Potiphar, who bought Joseph from the Midianites is called *sārîs* in Hebrew. Our English translations, especially the *New Revised Standard Version* and the *New Jerusalem Bible*, seem to be aware of the fact that *sārîs* in this context does not mean eunuch in the literal sense, hence the rendition, "official", in both passages. In the story of Joseph, we are informed that Potiphar was married and probably he had issues. Furthermore, in 1 Chr 28,1 *sārîs* stands for distinguished officials at the royal court.

Jesus, surely, was referring to the literal sense of *sārîs* in his conversation with the disciples. However, was he referring to real mutilation of oneself when he mentioned the third category of eunuchs? Jews at the time of Jesus held in abhorrence castration with which eunuchs were associated, because marriage was considered as a divine mandate. The Biblical basis for this is from the account of the creation of the primordial parents of mankind who were given the injunction on procreation (Gen 1,28). The command, "Be fruitful and multiply" was upheld as a divine mandate that should be observed to the letter. The Rabbis taught that every Israelite should adhere to this order. In the Rabbinic teaching, "to allow one's twentieth birthday to pass without one's having married, is to break a command and draw down on oneself the anger of God". Another famous saying of the Rabbis in this regard is "one who does not marry is like a person who sheds blood - he refuses to transmit the life within him".⁸ In fact, animals should not be subjected to castration because they are also involved in procreation. According to the Rabbis, marriage was a duty every human person has to fulfill.

In the history of the Rabbinic Judaism, there was once a Rabbi, Ben Azzai, who remained celibate. When other Rabbis criticized him, he responded in a manner many consecrated celibates of our time would answer: "My soul cleaves to the Torah; there is no time for marriage; may the world be maintained by others".⁹ However, Rabbi Ben Azzai did not reject marriage for he was in line with the common teaching of others. He is cited to have said: "He who does not see to the continuation and propagation of the race, may he be accounted by Scripture as if he diminished the (divine) image".¹⁰ Therefore, theoretically, Ben Azzai agreed with his colleagues, but in practice he considered perfect continence paramount to his total dedication to the study of the Torah. His action seems to be akin to what Jesus was proposing to his disciples. Ben Azzai could not have castrated himself and still remained a renowned Rabbi. He was not a eunuch in the literal sense of the term. Therefore, he can conveniently fall into the third category of eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of God. He made himself eunuch for the sake of the Torah to which his heart cleaved. Jesus must be referring to this kind of voluntary renunciation of sexual life and marriage of which he was a living exemplar.

1.1.1 Newness in Jesus' Invitation to Perfect Continence

Jesus invited his hearers to the life he was living, perfect continence, for the Kingdom of God in these words: "Let anyone accept this who can". This invitation to perfect continence transcends in the first place the divine command on procreation given in Gen 1,28. However, it does not devalue marriage. Perfect continence means a conscious and voluntary renouncement of that union and all that is connected to it in the full meaning of life and human society.¹¹ Christ did not conceal from his disciples

the fact that the choice of continence for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven, viewed in the light of temporal categories, is a renunciation.¹²

While the contemporaries of Jesus were teaching the obligation of adhering to the command in Gen 1,28, and of having family of one's own, he invited his disciples to renounce marriage for a higher value. He did not abolish marriage; rather he affirmed it more than Moses had done. Moses granted some concession but Jesus reminded his disciples of how the Creator intended marriage from the beginning of creation. Therefore, his injunction goes beyond the Mosaic permission of dissolving marriage; this must have made his disciples wonder at his teaching. Already in the earlier part of the Gospel according Matthew, specifically on the Sermon on the Mount, he proclaims that he has come to perfect the Law and not to abolish it. Matthew 19,1-12, therefore, continues this trend of perfecting the Law.

Jesus' invitation also transcends a certain conception of voluntary eunuchs, which might not be strange to his contemporaries. In Asia Minor, there was a group of voluntary eunuchs called "priest eunuchs" who were practicing self-emasculation for their self-interests. Their major intention was to be like god physically and spiritually. They wanted to transform themselves into the mode of being of the deity. It was cultic self-castration that aimed at mystical union with a certain god. Those who subjected themselves to this mutilation claimed to have attained a new transformation in their lives. Thus they were given some functions to perform in the cultic festivals and they enjoyed public honour and recognition.¹³ These are voluntary eunuchs; however, they had a motive that was inferior to what Jesus had in mind. Jesus proposed "eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven".

1.2 Kingdom of Heaven

The phrase "Kingdom of Heaven/God" is a major theme in the Bible; it is frequent especially in the Synoptic Gospels. The reason why Jesus called his disciples is "to welcome the Kingdom of God into their lives ... and to put their lives at its service".¹⁴ When he debated with the Pharisees and his disciples on the expedience of marriage, he proposed continence for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt 19,1-12). In the Synoptic Gospels Jesus is presented as the preacher *par excellence* of the Kingdom of God/Heaven. The Apostolic Letter (*Rosarium Virginis Mariae*)¹⁵ of John Paul II includes the "Proclamation of the Kingdom and Call to Repentance" among the Mysteries of the Rosary. Therefore, the importance of understanding the meaning of the phrase, "the Kingdom of God" is still felt even in our own time.

1.2.1 A Linguistic Consideration

The phrase "Kingdom of God" (*hē basileia tou theou*) is found especially in Mark, Luke and in Acts of the Apostles. Matthew instead prefers a circumlocution, a roundabout expression, "the Kingdom of Heaven" (*hē basileia tōn ouranōn*). Circumlocution is a

figure of speech seen often in the Bible.¹⁶ It is “so called because more words than are necessary are used to describe anything”.¹⁷ In Matthew, “the Kingdom of Heaven” is an expression which avoids uttering or writing the Divine Name (YHWH). Hence “the Kingdom of Heaven” in this Gospel is the same as “the Kingdom of God” in the rest of the Synoptic Gospels. The term “Kingdom” as we know is a concrete now; some scholars prefer the abstract noun “reign”; hence one finds in some books, the “Reign of God”. In my opinion, multiplicity of terms depends so much on the interpretation given to the original Greek expression *hē basileia tou theou*, “the Kingdom of God”. Whether one says the “Kingdom of God” or the “Reign of God”, we are still in the same semantic field. Both point to an expression in the Gospels, an expression that is not defined either by Jesus or the Evangelists. It is an expression whose meaning has generated many theological speculations.

1.2.2 A Recapitulation of the NT Message on the “Kingdom of God / Heaven”

The meaning of “the Kingdom of God” is central to discipleship.¹⁸ In the NT, the following points relate to this important theological theme”:

Kingdom of God / Heaven is a dominant motif in Jesus’ preaching (Matt 4, 17 and Mark 1,14-15). It is a major turning point in salvation history, inaugurated by the arrest of John the Baptist and by the public ministry of Jesus (Mark 1,14-15a; Luke 16,16; cf. Matt 11,12-13). It is close at hand (Matt 3,2; 4,17; 10,7; Mark 1,15; Luke 10, 9.10). It is truly present in germ and now at work (Matt 12,28). Jesus’ wonder-working activity is a sign and an anticipation of the full realization of the Kingdom of God (Matt 11,2-6 and Luke 7, 18-23). It is like a seed, enjoying irresistible power (Matt 18,8. 31-32; Mark 4,8.26-29.30-32 and Luke 13, 18-19). It is like the leaven, unpretentious in its beginnings but destined for enormous growth (Matt 13,33 and Luke 13, 20-21). Repentance and faith are the appropriate human response to the coming of the kingdom (Matt 3,2; 4,17 and Mark 1,15). It is to be approached as a child (Matt 18,1-4; 19,13-14; Mark 10,13-15 and Luke 18,15-17). It is to be sought (Matt 6,33 and Luke 12,31). The Eucharistic meal is an anticipation of the kingdom (Matt 26,29; Mark 14,25 and Luke 22,18). There is a prayer for the coming of the kingdom in its fullness (Matt 6,10 and Luke 11,2). The gospel of the kingdom is to be proclaimed to the whole world (Matt 24, 14; cf. 4,23; 9,35 and 28,19). Jesus’ message is the word of the kingdom (Matt 13,19). There are things that are to be done for the sake of the Kingdom of God (Matt 19,12 and Luke 18,29). The heirs of the kingdom are the poor (Matt 5,3; and Luke 6,20); those who are hungry now (Luke 6, 21), those who are weeping now (Luke 6,21); and the persecuted in the cause of righteous

(Matt 5,10). The Kingdom of God is justice, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom 14,17). It is the reign of the Messiah (Luke 1,33; cf. Rev 20,4).¹⁹

The theme of the “Kingdom of God / Heaven” is indeed vast in the NT especially in the Synoptic Gospels and it covers all parts of these three Gospels. Its use in Pauline writings is rare but very essential. A resemblance of what can be considered a definition²⁰ of *hē basileia tou theou*, exists in the NT, in a place that is least expected, in a Pauline letter, because its use in his writings is not as profuse as in the Synoptic Gospels. In Romans 14,17, Paul explains: “For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit”. I focus on the second part of this brief definition of an all-encompassing phrase: “the Kingdom of God is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit”. Three things are involved: righteousness, peace and joy. This is reminiscent of the programmatic passage in Luke 4,16-30 which is a quotation from the OT: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor” (Luke 4,18-19).

This OT text is from Isaiah 61,1-2 and 58,6 and Jesus uses it to inaugurate the messianic era that has its inception in him. Another passage is: “He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1,33). Is “the Kingdom of God” that is so central to the preaching of Jesus separable from the person of Jesus and the Good News he proclaims? Jesus is the king and his coming inaugurates his reign on earth, his kingdom of “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit”. The words of St. Paul are echoes of Jesus’ description of his mission in Luke 1,18-19; his Kingdom is the reign of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

There is a pre-requisite for being a participant in this Kingdom; it is *metanoia* with all its connotation of “repentance, change of heart, and turning from one’s sins and change of way”. This is the content of Jesus’ first proclamation of God’s Kingdom (cf. Matt 3,2; 4,17; Mark 1,15). The message of the Kingdom of God is central to Jesus’ mission and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of God. What then is the nature of this perfect continence for the Kingdom according to Jesus’ teaching?

1.3 The Nature of Perfect Continence

Jesus’ contribution to the debate on divorce recorded in Matt 19 confirms the significance of marriage and at the same time he counsels perpetual continence. He confirms marriage when he emphasized its indissolubility (cf. Matt 19,4-6) as well highlighting its theological character. It is God who joins a man and a woman and

makes them one body, “therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate” (Matt 19,6). The “writ of dismissal” which Moses allowed was necessitated by hardheartedness of his contemporaries and so is not in the original divine plan when God created our primordial parents. In the creation of man and woman, unity is a central feature. In fact, Jesus cited Gen 2,24 to support his own side of argument: “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife and they become one flesh”.

Besides the confirmation of what the Pharisees and the disciples of Jesus (cf. Matt 19,3) knew, especially from their assiduous study of the Law, Jesus advocated something new. Perhaps, he might have taken them aback for they did not expect the argument to reach this extent. Jesus spoke of making oneself eunuch for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. It is impressive to note the introductory statement before he enunciated the three categories of eunuchs. The preamble reads: “Not everyone can accept this teaching but only those to whom it is given” (v.11). This definitely goes with the three classes of eunuchs according to their sequence. It goes with them as well as forming an inclusion with the last statement of this pericope in v.12: “Let everyone accept this who can”. However, when we come to the level of meaning, it points particularly to the third class of eunuchs because the first two categories of eunuchs were well known to his interlocutors. Secondly, the injunction or rather the invitation at the end: “Let anyone accept this who can” (v.12), can only point to the third class. This is because it is only this class of eunuchs that does not encroach on the person’s will. The first two are imposed on a person by nature and by other human beings, while the third comes out of a person’s will or personal freedom. Therefore, the first two cannot be object of counsel. While the preparatory statement, “Not everyone can accept this teaching, but only those to whom it is given”, indicates the vocational feature of perfect continence. The concluding invitation, “Let anyone accept this who can”, points at the voluntariness on the part of those called to embrace it. It clearly indicates the importance of personal choice and also the importance of the particular grace, that is, of the gift which human receives to make such a choice.²¹

From Jesus’ words, three outstanding features of perfect continence can be elicited. The first is that it is a divine gift: “Not everyone can accept this teaching, but only those to whom it is given” (v.11). The subject of the passive voice, “it is given”, is not mentioned. It can be taken as an instance of the *theological passive* which is not infrequent in the Bible. *Theological passive* is that passive sentence whereby God is the subject or agent although he is not explicitly mentioned. It is a name given to the passive used in order to avoid directly naming God as agent.²² Thus one can complete Jesus’ words in this way: “Not everyone can accept this teaching, but only those to whom it is given by God”. The gift of perfect continence is a free gift from God. It is given to some, and it is an exceptional gift of grace.²³ This is implied in the phrase, “Not everyone can accept this teaching”.

The second feature of perfect continence is from the description of the third category of eunuchs. In Jesus' words, "There are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven". While the first two classes are eunuchs out of some constraints, the eunuchs in the third category "have made themselves so". Here lies the crucial point and characteristic of this third category. They voluntarily respond to the divine gift of perfect continence. Nothing impelled them to subject themselves to this state of life.

The third feature of perfect continence, according to Jesus, is derived from the concluding statement in v.12: "Let anyone accept this who can". This is not an imperative mood. Jesus is not giving a command because he knows it is not meant for all but only to those to whom God has given this free gift. Hence the three vows of chastity, poverty and obedience are often called "Evangelical Counsel". They are counsels that have their root in Jesus' teachings and lifestyle recorded in the Gospel and in the relationship and experience that his followers had of him. They are counsels because all are not called to take them as vows. "The evangelical basis of consecrated life is to be sought in 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 lives, but also to put their lives at its service, leaving everything behind and closely imitating his own *way of life*".²⁴ In these words one notes the echo of the debate in Matt 19 particularly from the side of Jesus. To be a eunuch for the sake of the Kingdom of God is for some persons. Again, *raison d'être* of this life is the Kingdom of God. Furthermore, it is a life in imitation of Jesus. Hence, at the time of this debate with the Pharisees, the living example of a eunuch for the Kingdom of God was Jesus himself and the invitation addressed to his disciples was to imitate his way of life.

To these three features of celibacy, we can add the constancy of this state of life. Perfect continence by its name is not a short-term affair. Once self-mutilation is made, a person should remain so for life. One does not think of reversal. Jesus had this in mind when he employed the image of eunuchs to convey his teaching on a state of life that sounded alien to the society that believed that marriage was a divine command. Eunuchs from birth or by human beings remain eunuchs for the rest of their lives. In the same way, eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of God should remain eunuchs forever. This is implicit in the mere fact of using the image of a eunuch to present this teaching. If not so, Jesus could have resorted to another image.

Faithfulness to this self-mutilation is a great challenge to those who respond to Jesus' invitation, for Jesus was not referring to a physical self-mutilation but a spiritual one. It is the most effective means of dedicating oneself wholeheartedly to the divine service and the works of the apostolate. Since it is not on the mutilation of the physical body, the greatest temptation is to seek for reversal, which is not inherent in the invitation. Therefore, those called should be at pains to be faithful to what they have professed, believing Jesus' words and relying on God's help. They should not rely on

their own strength.²⁵ Speaking of those who have consciously chosen celibacy or virginity for the sake of heaven, Christ pointed out – at least in an indirect way – that this choice during the earthly life is joined to renunciation and also to a determined spiritual effort.²⁶

The permanence of the state of perfect continence helps to underscore Jesus' teaching on the indissolubility of marriage. He did not negate that marriage was a divine command. Rather, he went further to enlighten his interlocutors on what they thought they knew. Just as no one can separate what God has joined, in the same way, it will be absurd for one who has undergone the kind of self-mutilation Jesus was proposing to look for a return to wholeness. This state should remain perpetual. The sole aim of perfect continence, according to Jesus, is for the sake of the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of God is central to Jesus' mission. What has this do with that love of which Jesus is an epitome?

2. Christian Love

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life” (John 3,16). The term “love” in the NT is one of the central concepts, which express the whole content of the Christian faith. The key to the understanding of the Christian faith is God's love for us when he sent his Son to the world. Our response to this divine love is also called love in the NT: “So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them” (1 John 4,16).

2.1 Getting to the Root

In Greek the most common verb for ‘to love’ is *phileō* which indicates a general attraction towards a person or thing. It basically stands for love for one's relatives and friends. A typical expression is *philadelphia* that means “love for a brother”, “mutual love” (cf. 2 Pet 1,7). In the ancient Greek language, *phileō* means, to show affection, love, and hospitality, to be accustomed to, to be in the habit of, to do something gladly, customarily, or generally. Matthew 6,5; 23,6 and Luke 20,46 contain this meaning of *phileō*. Matthew 6,5 for instance states: “And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they *love* to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward”. “Love” in this verse is from *phileō*. Another example of *phileō* as a love for one's relative is found in Matt 10,37: “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me”. Greek also has another verb, *eraō* from which we have *eros* and the common adjective, *erotic*. It points to love that desires to have or take possession. It fittingly describes love that seeks to get something from the other. The third verb is *agapaō* which in classical Greek

means “to welcome, to honour”. As a verb for “to love”, it is not clearly defined as the preceding two verbs.

The NT has two outstanding words that express love. These are *phileō* and *agapaō*. These are verbs from which other words, particularly compound words are derived. Thus in the NT one can speak of the *agapaō* group and the *phileō* group. It is observed that *phileō* is employed mainly for love of people who are closely related either by blood or by faith. Father-child relationship in John 15,19; 11,36 and 16,27 is expressed with *phileō*. Sometimes it is synonymously used with *agapaō* especially in John 3,35, 5,20 and 21,15. *Agapaō* group is more frequent and it is essential in our understanding of the early Christian communities. It is accorded a particular significance in the NT because it is used to express the love of God, the way of life based on this divine love, and the way of life that flowed from it.

2.2 Synoptic Gospels

In the Synoptic Gospels, God’s relationship with human beings is expressed as *agape*. His Son who came to redeem us is *ho agapētos* “the beloved”. The same term is predicated of those loved by God. We are the “beloved”. We shall see this mainly in the Pauline Writings. According to the voice of the Father at Jesus’ baptism (Mark 1,11; Matt 3,17; Luke 3,22) and at the Transfiguration (Mark 9,7; Matt 17,15 and Luke 9,35), to listen to Jesus is to be saved. God’s love for us of which Jesus is the personification was revealed in Jesus’ ministry.

Our response to God’s love is based on the two commandments enunciated by Jesus in Matt 22,34-40; Mark 12,28-34 and Luke 10,25-28. It is summarized as love of God and love of neighbour. In loving God and our neighbour we share in the earthly ministry of Jesus.²⁷ This ministry made him to suffer and it did cost him his mortal life. His followers are enjoined to follow his footsteps by also bearing hardship that love entails. They can succeed only by the way of suffering (cf. Matt 10,37-39 and Luke 6,22-26). *Agape*, according to the Synoptic Gospels, is God’s relational attitude to humans and their twofold response to this by loving God and fellow human beings. God’s love for us and our love for him and others demand suffering. God-made-man was the first to give a lead to this and we have to follow in his footsteps. Both on the part of Jesus and on our part, suffering is an important feature of *agape* according to the NT; it is selfless love.

In the Synoptic Gospels, *agape* knows no bounds because our love is not only for those who love us. It is not just that meaning of *phileō* in Classical Greek. Love is *agape* in its new meaning among the followers of Jesus. Jesus’ command is “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be children of your father in heaven” (Matt 5,44-45; cf. Luke 6,27-36). It is a great challenge to love enemies, but *agape*, according to Jesus’ teaching, is pruned in one’s love for those who in human

reckoning do not deserve love. Jesus demonstrated love for his enemies especially those who crucified him (Luke 23,34; cf. Acts 7,60). The distinguishing mark of Jesus' followers is to love without measure and to love without expecting any reward.²⁸

2.3 Letters of Saint Paul

Paul believes that his life is determined by God's love for him (cf. Gal 2,20). In the letters of Paul we find the great hymn of agape in 1 Cor 13 where love is exalted over and above all other virtues. This hymn teaches that other virtues are varied expressions of agape. Actually, the hymn in 1 Cor 13 echoes the concept found in the Synoptic Gospels: the whole Law is summed up in love of God and love of neighbour.²⁹

It is impressive to note that the triadic part of 1 Cor 13 is centred solely on fraternal love besides the allusion to love for God in v.13.³⁰ The hymn in 1 Cor 13 commences with the supremacy of love in vv.1-3. The works of love in vv.4-7 and finally the never-ending duration of love in vv.8-13 follows this. Love is the only eternal virtue. In the list of the fruits of the Spirit the all-encompassing attribute of love makes it stand in the forefront: "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (cf. Gal 5,22-23; Eph 4,2; 4,32-5,2; Col 3,12; 2 Cor 6,6). Agape in Paul's words has no possessiveness and is not a desire for satisfaction. Its desire is to satisfy and edify the other.

Paul, being an expert of the Law and of the entire OT teaching, links his concept of agape to the election of Israel, whence the common expression *agapētos* "the beloved one" in his writings (cf. Rom 1,7; 9,25; 11,28; 12,19; 1 Cor 4,14,17; 15,58; 2 Cor 7,1; 12,19; Eph 1,6; 5,1; Phil 1,12; 2,12; 3,13 etc.). God's love, according to Paul, is the motive for the election of Israel and of the Christians. One who believes in Jesus is a sinner who is loved by God. God's love in a sinner makes him enter into God's sphere and makes him a loving person capable of loving God and of loving fellow humans. This divine love for us is so strong that nothing can separate us from it (Rom 8,39). The basis of our love for God and for our neighbour is God's love for us. It is God's love that moves us to love (cf. Rom 5,5 and 15,30). The Christian knows, through faith, that God loves him. For this faith to be active one has to love: "The only thing that counts is faith working through love" (Gal 5,6; cf. 1 Thess 3,6). For Paul, love is the force that holds a Christian community together and builds it up. One can speak of fellowship only where there is love: "Pursue love and strive for the spiritual gifts, and especially that you may prophesy" (1 Cor 14,1; see also 1 Cor 16,14 and Eph 1,15-16).

2.4 Johannine Writings

According to John, God's nature and activity are clearly illustrated by the use of the term "love". God is essentially love (1 John 4,8). Our love for God and for one another is based on God's love for his Son. God's love for us is made visible when he sent his

Son into the world (cf. 1 John 3,1) and we have to be like his Son (1 John 3,16). Love is God's primary purpose for the world. God's love is manifested in his glory and its triumph is seen in Jesus' death on the cross. Jesus' death was the greatest manifestation of his love for us (John 15,13).

The response of human beings to God's love is also our love for God and for our neighbour. Our mutual love is grounded in the love of God (John 13,34 and 1 John 4,21). In the letters of John there is a constant exhortation to love one another (cf. 1 John 3,11.23; 4,7.11.12; 2 John 5). Being children of God is the criterion for loving the brother (cf. 1 John 2,10; 3,10.14; 4,20.21 and 5,2). To love is the same as to observe the Law (John 14,23).

2.5 Dialectic on Christian Love

It is clear from the above investigation in the NT that love among Christians is intrinsically marked by disinterestedness. It is rooted in God because God himself is love. It starts first and foremost with a good disposition towards another and manifests itself in practical things. Jesus in his ministry gave us the example to follow.

When at the time of creation God made us, he desired to make us part of himself. Hence, he created us in his image and likeness. He remains faithful to his love in spite of our unfaithfulness. The climax of his love is the coming of his Son in our human nature who came to show us how to love and to establish his Kingdom of love (John 15,13-14). What Jesus commands us to do is to love. When we love we identify ourselves with him.

No one was exempted from Jesus' love for he came to save all. He is generous with his love like the Father who "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous" (Matt 5,45). God was the first to love us and show us what agape is. Among the contemporaries of Jesus, women and children were not rated equally as men. The evangelists excluded them from the number of those whom Jesus fed (cf. Matt 14,13-21; Mark 6,32-44; Luke 9,11-17 and John 6,1-15). However, Jesus in his ministry had remarkable openness to them. He was also the friend of sinner and he even called one of them, Levi, to be among his close companions (cf. Matt 9,9; Mark 2,13-14 and Luke 5,27-28). He ate with sinners (Matt 9,10-13; Mark 2,15-17; Luke 5,29-32; 15,1-2; 19,1-10) and loved the Samaritans (cf. Luke 10,25-37). He was indignant to those who were obstructing children from going to him (Mark 10,14). Children's attitude to life is recommended to those who want to enter into the Kingdom of God (Mark 10,15; cf. Matt 18,1-4; Mark 10,13-16 and Luke 18,15-17).

An exceptional novelty in the call to discipleship in the NT, especially in Jesus' earnest attempt to break the social barriers at this time is the conspicuous presence of women among those who followed him. The Evangelist Luke is particularly interested in this newness because he highlights the presence and specific functions of women who were in Jesus' entourage (Mark 15,40-41; Luke 8,1-3; John 4,27). When Jesus went

about “proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God” (Luke 8,1), gender barrier is breached. He gave value to the worthless. He fulfilled the content of the programmatic passage in Luke 4,18: he let the oppressed go free. Unlike the Rabbis of his time, Jesus admitted women to discipleship.

If God’s Kingdom is at the center of Jesus’ preaching and love is the visible manifestation of this preaching, the two are inseparable. What Jesus preached was what he did. When he invited his followers to renounce marriage for the sake of the Kingdom of God, he was inviting them to a complete self-identification with God who is love. The ultimate aim and goal of all persons is this union with God. Every human being on the face of the earth has an existential thirst for God. Perfect continence or celibacy can be seen as the ultimate expression of this desire to love God now, and to the full capacity of the human heart.³¹ Therefore, selfless love and the innate urge for unreserved union with God are at the basis of the state of eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

3. Celibacy and Christian Love

A Eunuch literally means one who is impotent either from birth or emasculated by fellow human being for a purpose. Such a person need not go into marriage because the essence of marriage, according to the contemporaries of Jesus, will not be attained. From our discussion above we have seen that those who are castrated by human beings are made so for some specific reasons. One of such reasons was to acquire a high post in the royal court. We can ask ourselves: why is it necessary that a healthy human being be made eunuch in order to occupy a prestigious post in an earthly and transient kingdom? Why can’t a married man be given such a work? Similar question can be asked about eunuchs who were given charge of the king’s concubines. No married person can claim to have unhindered devotion to duty. Rabbi Azzai mentioned above knew that family ties would be a hindrance to his love and study of the Torah, thus he opted for perfect continence in order to be free to render wholehearted service to the Lord.

In all these, we note that perfect continence is preferred because one considers it a value higher than marital status. What gives it this preferential value is the course of the Kingdom of God. The principal reason is to be free to embrace the dictates of perfect continence, which is undivided love for God. Human heart is made to be filled with something, with love. It is designed for love. If the path of celibacy should be trodden successfully, the human heart has to be filled with active love for God and neighbour. Celibacy makes us free to be full. Those who have embraced this state of life should not be free to be empty. When they are empty, they become like emasculated men who grope about wishing to return to wholeness. Celibacy uniquely frees the heart of those who are called to it, so that they become more fervent in love for God and for neighbour.³² The introduction on celibacy in the Rule of Taizé describes it thus:

“While celibacy brings greater opportunities to concern oneself with the things of the Lord, it is acceptable only in order to give oneself more fully to one’s neighbour with the love of Christ”.³³

Besides Matt 19,1-12, another clear reflection on the life and the purpose of celibate life is found in Paul’s Letter to the Corinthians 7,32-34. According to Paul, the purpose of celibacy is to dedicate oneself to the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord. A close look at this text shows a twofold division. The first is on a celibate man and a married man and the second is about unmarried woman or virgin and married woman. It is interesting to note the phrase “and his interests are divided” (v.34). This implies that all should care for the affairs of the Lord, whether married or single. The degree of our caring depends on the state of life of each person. The interests of a married man are divided; they are not fully focused like that of a celibate.

The affairs of the Lord are about the reign of God in the world and this reign, God’s Kingdom, is characterized by the Christian love. It is the definitive fulfillment of the aspirations of all human beings, to whom Christ addressed his message. God’s Kingdom is the fullness of the good that the human heart desires beyond the limits of all that can be his lot in this earthly life. It is the maximum fullness of God’s bounty.³⁴ Hence celibacy makes one not to have undivided interests. The sole interest is about the affairs of the Lord. It makes one free to be dedicated to the Lord and to the course of the Lord.

Jesus, who invited his disciples to this kind of life, exemplified it in his earthly ministry. He taught us how to be celibate. It is like a coin with two sides and each of these sides is indispensable. The first is union with his Father. He taught us how to commune with the Father especially in prayer and in activities. His occasional withdrawal to a lonely place invigorated him for more active ministry. The other side of it was his unconditional love for all. His celibate life made him love all. It did not keep him aloof from people but made him love people with all the warmth of human love.³⁵

Celibacy is an inner energy from which the apostolate is generated. It is a source of power because it makes those who embrace it Christ-like. This entails union with the Father who is love and who loves and wants us to love others as he loves us. A consecrated person who neglects this inner aspect of celibacy will certainly experience interior vacuum within him/her. When there is this emptiness, the next step is a mechanical way of living and unfaithfulness to one’s commitment.

It is a contradiction for consecrated persons who have vowed to be celibate not to love. When such persons cannot love, it is because they are not full inside. By the term ‘full’ we mean that their interior life is filled with love of God and neighbour. One can purport to be celibate and has filled his/her heart with worldly things and attachment. One has wrong energy inside him/her and when this energy is invoked it generates wrong actions.

Conclusion

“A life transformed by the evangelical counsels becomes a prophetic and silent witness and at the same time an eloquent protest against an inhuman world. It calls for the promotion of the individual and for a new *creativity of charity*”.³⁶ “Eunuchs for the Kingdom of God” should not be understood in a literal sense. The first two categories of eunuchs in Matt 19 are literal but the third is indeed metaphorical. Just as the condition of eunuchs affects the social relation of the person by rendering them impotent for life, in the same way being “eunuchs for the Kingdom of God” touches the core of a person’s being. This self-mutilation occurs on the spiritual level of the individual. Those who embrace this kind of self-castration are no longer of this world. They should be totally transformed into the image of Christ who has taken the lead and has invited his followers to go after him.

Therefore, consecrated men and women, who freely respond to Jesus’ invitation to perfect continence, engage in their varied works of apostolate with their transformed beings. The works of their apostolate are seen as avenues of furthering the Kingdom of God in the present world. God’s tender love, which they bear, radiates in all sectors of their work.

No apostolate undertaken by any consecrated person should be underestimated. None is more important than the other or superior to the other. Since Jesus has called them out of this world and they are no longer of this world (John 15,19), the way they value what they do should be different from that of the world. They do not need to have a high post in the world in order to manifest God’s love, neither do they have to strive to be important persons before they put into action what they have professed. History of consecrated persons has taught us that those who are vividly remembered today are not the most educated but those who considered themselves insignificant in the sight of the world and according to the reckoning of the world. They are those who were constantly aware of the image of God in their lives and made every effort to live up to it. Their work has an underlying guiding principle, which is God’s tender love. Consecrated men and women respond to this invitation to love in and with their lives. Every work of theirs becomes concrete realization of the Christian love and an opportunity of spreading the Kingdom of God. Any deliberate action against Christian love in our work becomes then a form of return to the world from which Jesus has chosen us.

* *Obiorah Mary Jerome (IHM) is a Sister of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Mother of Christ. She is a lecturer at Blessed Iwene Tansi Major Seminary, Onitsha and University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Her field of specialization is Sacred Scripture.*

ENDNOTES

1 The citations from the English version of the Bible in this paper are from *The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, Catholic Edition*, unless otherwise indicated.

2 In this paper, there are three terms that are used interchangeably; these are “the vow of chastity”, “perfect continence” and “celibacy”. They all refer to the third category of eunuchs mentioned by Jesus in Matt 19,11-12.

3 The phrase “the Kingdom of Heaven” found conspicuously in the Gospel according to Matthew is the same as “the Kingdom of God” occurring in the other Synoptic Gospels of Mark and Luke. Matthew prefers to use “the Kingdom of Heaven” because of his tendency to use circumlocution. It is used, among others, when a person or thing is spoken of by some attributes, instead of by its proper simple name (cf. E. W. BULLINGER, *Figures of Speech used in the Bible* [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 2003] 419). Matthew meticulously adheres to the Jewish usage of not mentioning the Divine name. Word like “heaven” is used instead. Surely this was not strange to Matthew’s addressees or “real readers”.

B. KEDAR-KOPFSTEIN, “*sārîs*”, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* vol. X (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1990) 344-350.

Note that the Latin version of the Bible, the Vulgate, adds “eunuch” to the text of Deut 23,1: *non intrabit eunuchus, atritis vel amputatis testiculis et absciso veretro, ecclesiam Domini*.

JOHN D.W. WATTS, *Isaiah 34-36* (Word Biblical Commentary 25; Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1987) 249

EDITORIAL STAFF, “Eunuch”, *Encyclopaedia Judaica* vol. 6 (Jerusalem: Ketter Publishing House 1996) 959.

J. SCHNEIDER, “Eunuch”, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament II* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1995) 765-766.

“Ben Azzai”, www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/2859-ben-azzai; accessed on 9 July 2014.

SCHNEIDER, “Eunuch”, 767.

Cf. POPE JOHN PAUL II, “The ‘Superiority’ of Continence does not devalue Marriage”, General Audience of April 7, 1982, *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1997) 274

Cf. POPE JOHN PAUL II, “The Value of Continence is found in Love”, General Audience of April 21, 1982, *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1997) 281.

Cf. SCHNEIDER, “Eunuch”, 765.

POPE JOHN PAUL II, *Vita Consecrata: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996) 14

JOHN PAUL II, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*. Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2002.

BULLINGER, *Figures of Speech*, 419-422, has some examples of this figure of speech.

BULLINGER, *Figures of Speech*, 419.

JOHN PAUL II, *Vita Consecrata: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996) 14.

Cf. “Pastoral Guide for the Use of the Bible in Preaching”, *The International Bible Commentary: A Catholic and Ecumenical Commentary for the Twenty-First Century* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1998) 1894-1895.

Cf. J. FUELLENBACH, *The Kingdom of God: The Central Message of Jesus’ Teachings in the Light of the Modern World* (Manila: Logos Publications, 1993) 168-188. The author fully analyzes Paul’s definition of the Kingdom of God in Rom 14,17 in the light of the modern world

Cf. POPE JOHN PAUL II, “Virginity or Celibacy for the Sake of the Kingdom”, General Audience of March 10, 1982, *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1997) 263.

The Catholic Voyage: African Journal of Consecrated Life

Vol. 11, 2015. ISSN: 2659-0301 (Online) 1597 6610 (Print)

26

See further examples in Matt 5,4: “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted”. Matt 5,6: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled”. More examples can be found in Matt 3,10; 5,5-9; 5,25.29; 6,7.9.10.33; 7,1.2.19; 10,19.30 etc. We find in all these instances another attempt in Matthew to avoid mentioning the divine name. It reminds one of the expression “Kingdom of Heaven” in Matthew, instead of the “Kingdom of God” seen in other Synoptic Gospels.

VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decree on the Up-to Date Renewal of Religious Life, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 12.

JOHN PAUL II, *Vita Consecrata*, 14.

VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decree on the Up-to Date Renewal of Religious Life, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 12.

Cf. POPE JOHN PAUL II, “The Vocation to Continence in this Earthly Life”, General Audience of March 17,1982, *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1997) 266-267.

M. J. OBIORAH, “Who may abide in your house? (Psalm 15,1): the vertical and horizontal dimensions of worship in Psalm 15”, *Bigard Theological Studies – A Journal of Bigard Memorial Seminary Enugu* vol. 29 no. 2 (2009) 7-25 Enugu: Bigard Memorial Seminary (ISBN: 978-2396-00-1).

V. M. OKEKE, *The Measure of Love: Lenten Pastoral*. Enugu: SNAAP, 2005.

OBIORAH, “Who may abide in your house?”

G. D. FEE, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1987) 625-652.

Cf. J. FUELLENBACH, *Proclaiming his Kingdom* (Manila: Divine Word Publications, 1992) 168.

VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decree on the Up-to Date Renewal of Religious Life, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 12.

BROTHER ROGER, *The Rule of Taizé, “Celibacy”*, London: Society for promoting Christian Knowledge, 2012 (books.google.com.ng/books?isbn=0281068283).

Cf. POPE JOHN PAUL II, “The Value of Continence is found in Love”, General Audience of April 21,1982, *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1997) 280.

FUELLENBACH, *Proclaiming his Kingdom*, 172.

CONGREGATION FOR THE INSTITUTE OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE: *Starting Afresh from Christ: A Renewal Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium: Instruction* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2002) 33.

**PART 2: PERSPECTIVES: THEOLOGICAL, PASTORAL AND
ECCLESIAL ISSUES**

THE FAMILY INTERPELLATES THE CONSECRATE LIFE:

The Role and Mission of Consecrated Persons in the Evangelization of the Family

Oseni J. O. Ogunu, OMV*

Abstract

Inspired by the historic events of the Year of Consecrated life and the two Synods on Family, the author intends to explore some aspects of the mission and contributions of consecrated life in one of the most vital, necessary and urgent field of evangelization today: the family. It shows the importance of the relation between marriage and virginity, between family and consecrated life and how these can mutually influence each other. It indicates how the practice of evangelical counsels, celibacy, and virginity contribute to the family. As its title indicates, the article intends to highlight the functions of and in what ways the consecrated life - experienced as a consecration to mission and lived as a witness to love of God and of neighbour - can contribute to and further advance the family and both can further contribute to the development of each other.

“The Holy Spirit will guide us in finding the road to truth and mercy for all.”³⁷

INTRODUCTION

The vocation and mission of the Consecrated Life in the Church and Nigeria is for all a reason for joy and gratitude, a motive for a new commitment with passion, and a source of renewed hope in their respective Christian calling. After the conclusion of the III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, celebrated in 2014 to treat the topic, *The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization*, the Catholic Church in Nigeria again joins the rest of the world, this time in preparing for the XIV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on “*The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and Contemporary World*” (October 2015), which providentially holds during the Year of Consecrated life. These major historic events in the life of the Church – the Year of Consecrated Life and the two Synods of Bishops on the Family – inspired the choice of the topic for the following reflections. Consecrated persons “contribute greatly to the apostolate of the church in all domains, inasmuch as they find ‘in their consecrated life a privileged means of efficacious evangelization’ (Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n.69).”³⁸ One of these domains is that of marriage and family life. The social-cultural and ecclesial contexts in which family live and in which candidates for consecrated life and priesthood receive formation, and later on, as professed members, consecrated persons exercise ministry shares many striking similarities across Nigeria (which is our main context), and indeed sub-Sahara Africa, though there are also

differences and peculiarities in specific contexts and regions; many Catholic Episcopates and recent studies recognise both facts, and I too do so.

These reflections dwell on some dimensions of the mission and possible contributions of Consecrated Life in one of the most vital, necessary and urgent fields of evangelization: the Family. Rather than giving a point-by-point response to the so many important questions asked by marriage and family, or even evaluating the work that was done – and that is impossible here – the effort will instead be to propose a general consideration on selected aspects and what is being done or can be done to further contribute to advance the family. After an initial consideration of the significance and value of the family and Consecrated Life, this reflection will dwell on the question of vocations and formation, and on the attitude of people towards Consecrated Life. Then attention will turn to African vision of life and the relevance and mission of consecrated life in the light of Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortations, *Ecclesia in Africa* and *Africae Munus*. Since religious men and women are consecrated for mission, the article proceeds to explore the evangelical counsels as well as celibacy and virginity insofar as they relate to our mission towards the Christian family. After acknowledging that consecrated persons contribute to the evangelizing mission of the Church in all domains, the focus of this study will then shift to the role and possible contributions of Consecrated Life in the Pastoral Care of the Family: here, it will be helpful to consider the teachings of the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* and the pastoral orientations of some Catholic Episcopates in Africa. Finally, I shall briefly comment on the preparatory phase of the forthcoming Ordinary Synod of Bishops to be celebrated on October 2015 which began with the celebration of the 3rd Extraordinary Synod (October 2014); some concluding remarks follow it.

The consecrated persons pastorally engage themselves, with courage and humility, in the proclamation of the Gospel of family and life. Many families, in Nigeria as elsewhere today, expect from consecrated life a greater commitment and clearer responses to the emergent, sometimes agonizing questions of our time. The Church calls on consecrated men and women as well to offer this service to the family in truth and mercy, justice and hope. The response to the interpellation from the families are presented in diverse ways and to varying degrees by the Magisterium of the Church, the local Episcopates, the consecrated persons, by lay faithful, according to the capacity and competence of each. This reflection, far from being conclusive, encourages further discussions as we prepare for the Synod of Bishops 2015.

PART I: CONSECRATED LIFE: FORMATION, PEOPLES' ATTITUDE AND THE AFRICAN SYNODS' ORIENTATIONS

1. THE SIGNIFICANCE AND VALUE OF THE FAMILY AND OF THE CONSECRATED LIFE

1.1 *The Family*

The family, founded on the marriage of a man and a woman, has an immeasurable value and its mission is ever more necessary and urgent for the health and true development of society and church. The two African Synods (in 1994; 2009) reaffirm the importance and mission or function of the family. Each African Christian family is "a privileged place for evangelical witness,"³⁹ a true "domestic church"⁴⁰, a community which believes and evangelizes,⁴¹ a community in dialogue with God⁴² and generously open to the service of humanity.⁴³ In fact, "it is in the heart of the family that parents are by word and example ... the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children".⁴⁴ "It is here that the father of the family, the mother, children, and all members of the family exercise the priesthood of the baptized in a privileged way 'by the reception of the sacraments, prayer and thanksgiving, the witness of a holy life and self-denial and active charity'. Thus the home is the first school of Christian life and 'a school for human enrichment.'⁴⁵ It is in the family that the features of a people take shape; it is here that its members acquire basic teachings. The family is also the best setting for learning and applying the culture of forgiveness, peace and reconciliation.⁴⁶

The family is the "sanctuary of life" and a vital cell of society and of the Church. There, children learn to love, learn respect for others, and they learn to know the face of God. Whenever these fundamental experiences are lacking, society as a whole suffers violence and becomes in turn the progenitor of more violence.⁴⁷ In addition, the family is the first cradle of vocations. It is in his or her family the child first come into contact with the Word of God, makes experiences of faith of the adults and learn to identify the persons consecrated to God and the ministries of the Church.⁴⁸

Due to its central importance and the various threats looming over it - e.g., distortion of the very notion of marriage and family, devaluation of maternity and trivialization of abortion, easy divorce and the relativism of a "new ethics" - the family needs to be protected and defended, so that it may offer to society the service expected of it, that of providing men and women capable of building a social fabric of peace and harmony.⁴⁹ Its protection and defense can be ensured in various ways: the family must draw inspiration and strength from the sacrament of the Eucharist;⁵⁰ it must be committed to constant (individual and communal) prayer and, therefore, an assiduous listening and attentive reading of Bible within families is necessary;⁵¹ finally, the Christian family should carry out its educational mission as a true ministry.⁵² Therefore, parents should ensure the integral Christian education of their children.

1.2. *The Consecrated Life*

Consecrated life is a gift given by Christ who chooses a person individually to respond to His great love in a special relationship. Called by the Holy Spirit to seek God alone, the consecrated persons give themselves totally to the Father and follow Jesus Christ under the guidance of the Blessed Virgin Mary and/or another saint. Jesus asks that person

to leave some aspects of the world (such as marriage and following secular goals) to put themselves at the service of their brothers and sisters. The consecrated life is constituted by the profession of the evangelical counsels. It is not part of the Church's hierarchy, but this way of life belongs to the Church's life and holiness. In the consecrated life, the perfection of charity involves the obligations of chastity in celibacy, of poverty and of obedience in a permanent state of life recognized by the Church.⁵³

Consecrated life is a vocation just as marriage and diocesan priesthood are. Both men and women can choose to consecrate their lives to Christ as a way to seek an intimate relationship with Him. These men and women give witness that Christ is ultimately who we are called to be united to. They live the truth that only Christ can satisfy the deepest longings in a person's heart, and witness that this union provides a deeper joy than the secular world can give. In effect they are previewing the way we will relate to Christ in heaven.

Those in consecrated life generally join a religious order or congregations. There are various forms of consecrated life, various religious families. Their members live in either solitude or fraternal life in community. They have spiritual resources for their members and for the Church. They are dedicated to the service of the Kingdom of God by carrying out the spirit and charism of their Founder or Foundress. There are many of religious orders and congregations, some founded centuries ago while others are of more or less recent foundation. Consecrated life is most often shared in a community which is united to live out their common mission together.

Some religious orders are considered "contemplative," which means that prayer is central to their day, though there are variations. Others are described "Apostolic" orders inasmuch as these are more active in society and the world; their focus may be teaching, ministering to the sick, or missionary work in Nigeria, in Africa, or abroad.⁵⁴

1.3. The vocations to marriage and to Consecrated Life are complementary

God is love because He loves. He calls to love: love of himself and love of neighbour (I Jn. 4:8, 11). St. John speaks of this love in the Christian sense of charity. The human heart is not in peace unless it opens itself to God and to one's neighbour. The love of our neighbour does not go in search of something for itself. It is other-directed and outgoing, not possessive. It implies caring for the other. This call to love, which is indistinctly addressed to every person, is a call to mission. It is essentially a call to holiness of life, ultimately a call to eternal happiness.

So, in human life, there are two forms of great calls from one voice of God; vocations to love: the vocation to Marriage and the vocation to Virginity consecrated to God. Both are different ways of loving, the persons in both groups are called to the maturity of love. Marriage and Virginity are two complementary states of life, two different ways of living one's own particular being as man or woman; they are two

ways of attaining the same aim, namely, the completion of one's personality. Every man and woman has the freedom of choosing to get married or choose avowed life. However, he or she has the freedom and possibility, when he or she has the vocation, of renouncing marriage in order to consecrate himself or herself to God in the Church for the whole of his or her life through virginity or celibacy in order to dedicate himself or herself to the service of God and humanity or vice-versa for married life. That is why it is a call but also a free choice entrusted to individuals by the free will of Almighty God. Hence, it solely depends on individuals to make the choice.

2. VOCATIONS TO CONSECRATED LIFE AND THE FORMATION

The family and society have influence on the initial formation of candidate to consecrated life and the priesthood. Most African Catholic Episcopates acknowledge that the family has role and influence - described as "real", "decisive", "indispensable", etc. - on the candidates for consecrated Life and priesthood, and on the Formators and the centres for Formation. Human and Christian formation begins above all within the extended family and the basic ecclesial community or the parish. The influences come from other sources too: the Christian community, liturgy, ecclesial associations or spiritual and apostolic movements, the schools, etc.⁵⁵ The family generally is the the most fundamental and decisive of these sources of influence.

As the Episcopal Conference of Tanzania notes, "the Christian family is the cradle of genuine vocations for priests, religious and the laity. Good families in a parish offer valuable encouragement and consolation to the priests."⁵⁶ The Tanzanian Episcopate in the statement of the Rwandan Bishops, when these describe the Christian family as "bedrock of priestly vocations through education, prayer, gift of self, the love for Christ and the Marian devotion."⁵⁷

The nature and the degree of this educative influence received from families by candidates vary from country to country; and the evaluation of the influence is often considered serious enough to be taken into account in the vocation's discernment and formation of candidates and consecrated persons.⁵⁸ Many of the influences of the families are common to many African regions, while others vary. Whether the influences are judged positive or negative depends on some conditions and on the situation in the region. In Ghana, for example, "generally, candidates from good Christian communities become very good priests but this is by no means always the case. In fact, we have some of our outstanding priests coming from families of traditional, Islamic and religious (backgrounds)."⁵⁹ In Angola and Sao Tome, the influence has been positive as long as the candidates meet a welcome and a response from the families.⁶⁰ In any case, as the Episcopal Conference of Benin notes, "Altogether, there is no opposition between their (i.e., the family and ecclesial movements') influences and the ideal of vocations, it is rather the contrary. Whether it is in the milieu of Christian or of pagan families, the influences can be positive or negative, and help in the awakening and in the pursuit of vocations"; but, the same Episcopate of Benin

also warns that, such influences can sometimes be exaggerated to point as if it is the parents or the milieu that owns the vocation for the young person⁶¹.

Obviously, problem may sometimes arise concerning the real impact that the influence of the family may have on the candidate as well as regarding the motivations it generates. On this issue, the Seminary and the Formation Team may be aware of this problem. In this regard, there are various suggestions as to the means used or to be adopted in order to become more aware of and address this problem; these include:

- Contact of the rector with the candidates, the Spiritual Director, the Conference-debate, sharing of the word, and so on;
- The attention given to the spiritual and moral conduct of the candidates;
- And pastoral work.

There are specific positive influences of the family and society on the formation to priesthood and candidates for Consecrated Life.⁶² For example, the family environment, when it prays for vocations, permits that a priest should be well-perceived.⁶³ The witness of life by some consecrated persons and some priests: joy and apostolic enthusiasm, detached from the world, the significant setting of oneself apart (religious habit). However, the negative influences⁶⁴ on the candidates cannot be overlooked. For instance, society's attitude on married life exercises its impact on them: The candidate for consecrated life and priesthood is thought of as someone who is going to lose his or her roots. Celibacy contradicts the society's expectation on every man and woman to marry and to procreate. If overemphasised, this attitude makes the candidate to doubt himself or herself and may lead him or her to misjudge his/her true vocation. Besides, as regard assumption of responsibility, society expects every capable man to be a responsible person for his parents and relatives. This may make the candidate think that he is more needed for material help than spiritual and religious assistance.

The influences of the family and society are, in many cases, not restricted to individual candidate in formation (be it temporary or permanent). The influence extends to the Formators and their educational environment. The influence of the family - as well as the Christian communities and school - where it exists, is undeniable, be these influences positive or negative.

There are several difficulties that constitute obstacles to the emergence and development of vocations and Christian family life. We see the socio-political crisis, inter-ethnic wars in many countries, the insurgence of conflicts and widespread insecurity in regions of Nigeria. These have impacted on the life of families and of religious communities. The materialist spirit has infiltrated into families. Among the poor, the vocation is embraced or refused due to the danger of a secret desire to aim at a socio-economic promotion in the consecrated life and priesthood and which can induce to a non-credible witness.⁶⁵

To overcome the obstacles to the development of vocations to Consecrated Life and Priesthood and to healthy Christian Family Life, some initiatives present themselves. The Formation Team and the Seminary must try to understand the background of a

candidate before they can effectively handle him.⁶⁶ Effort should be made to know and evaluate the nature and degree of the influence of the family. Visit of the Formators and persons-in-charge of the parish to families will help to achieve the goals of vocational discernment and development of vocations.

3. ATTITUDE TOWARDS CONSECRATED LIFE

Generally, Consecrated life is greatly appreciated by people of many African societies. In Burundi, for example, "the presence of religious men and women is highly evident in all the social and pastoral services."⁶⁷ In some milieu and where there is a long-standing Christian and monastic tradition, "candidates and priests have little difficulty to understand and live out the requirement of evangelical radicalism that go with ministerial priesthood: obedience, celibacy, chastity and poverty."⁶⁸

Special attention is given to the condition of African women, particularly the African female religious, in the context of the priority given to evangelisation in Africa. According to Bishop Anselme Sanon, the "specific presence of African woman and of the African religious woman in the Church, in the best of situations, is a real, active, dynamic, responsible presence, though often discreet."⁶⁹ Their presence and role are all the more noteworthy and appreciable since the spiritual and religious values of our cultures, their moral energies are due, most of the time, to the family, and the family owes it, to a great extent, to the woman, wife and mother who gives and conserves life. Of course, evolutions of society and cultures are in course and we must accelerate it in favour of a new promotion of African woman. Consequently, evangelization must have an echo in the heart of the Christian women in Africa: they will discover and deepen a sense of their dignity as sister, wife, and a companion of man. The celibate woman, the consecrated African woman is recognised in a new esteem rooted in the light of the Gospel. Therefore, the African religious woman is called upon to take her place and fulfil her role in the Church-Family, accomplishing of her donation as wife and mother, educator and apostle of the Good News, consecrated religious woman, a gift of the Lord to the Church in Africa.⁷⁰

Still, in view of a witness that is even more eloquent it is in some regions required of consecrated persons - men and women - to participate more actively in the direct animation of the people of God. Many of them already do so, as the Burundian Bishops rightly noted, but the danger of the consecrated persons to remain within their own structures is perceived as real. They can instead increasingly maintain constant and direct contact with the basic ecclesial organisations: work in the parish, participation in the meetings and activities of Basic Ecclesial Community, make pastoral visit to the sick. It is also expected of them to contribute to overcome all kinds of division, and to attend to social promotion in the regions around them.

For these reasons and in order to be always a sign of the Kingdom of God, they are requested to live more visibly their religious vows.⁷¹ Let us now consider what the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortations, *Ecclesia in Africa* and the *Africae Munus* say about consecrated life.

4. *ECCLESIA IN AFRICA AND CONSECRATED LIFE*

The First and second African Synods of Bishops offer some insights into the significance, the role and mission of consecrated life. The *Message* of the first African Synod (1994) to the Religious men and women⁷² teaches that:

- The consecrated life is gift of oneself to God and neighbour in order to reveal to all the beauty and grandeur of the life and purpose of the Church;
- The Consecrated life manifests the holiness of the Church;
- Inculturation of consecrated Life is necessary and urgent; it implies a cultural hospitality to Christ who is chaste, poor and obedient;
- Fidelity to religious Consecration and charism of Institute is a necessary and vital condition for the correct exercise of apostolate.

The role of Religious life is multiple and rooted in its vocation and mission. In his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*, n. 94, Pope John Paul II addresses three main set of issues in the context of its reflections on consecrated persons as agents of evangelization, that is: the basic functions of the Religious Life; the vocations to Religious life; and the need for dialogue between religious institutes and local Ordinary of a diocese.

Concerning the functions, in part reiterating the Message of the same Synod, the *Ecclesia in Africa* speaks of three tasks of Consecrated life, and these are its responsibility to:

1. Indicate to everyone the call to holiness;
2. Witness to fraternal life in community.
3. And, consequently, promote communion and cooperation with respect to Bishops, clergy and laity.⁷³

In treating these points the Pope reiterates some of the proposals and ideas earlier presented by African Bishops in their *Message* and *Propositions* of that Synod.

As regards vocations, the *Ecclesia in Africa*, presenting it with more details, gives some guidelines. Firstly, it is necessary to foster religious vocations to consecrated life. This requires above all choosing vocations with "great discernment" and then ensuring that they receive an integral human formation as well as a formation which is solid in its spiritual and doctrinal, apostolic and missionary, biblical and theological dimension. This formation is to be faithfully and regularly updated. The African Synod Fathers express some caution on the matter of the foundation of new Religious Institutes. Here,

the African Bishops ask for “great prudence and enlightened discernment,” requesting that the criteria laid down by the Second Vatican Council and the canonical norms now in force must be followed. On the other hand, once established, these Institutes are to be helped in acquiring juridical status and becoming autonomous in the management both of their own works and of their respective sources of income. This is important if the institute is to be able to sustain its members and apostolate.

Finally, there is the delicate question of dialogue, particularly needed in the area of vocations. It is necessary in order to enhance mutual relation between the partners involved - the Institutes of consecrated life and the local Churches - and advance the apostolate. The hope is that the expected dialogue and the structure suggested for its realization (i.e., the creation of a mixed group for consultation) will serve as a witness to fraternity and as a sign of unity in the service of a common mission.⁷⁴

The *Ecclesia in Africa* does not claim to exhaustively delineate the role of religious life in the Church. Already as at 1994, the first African Synod Fathers were aware of this fact and therefore made a request, calling for a revision of the document *Mutuae Relationes*,⁷⁵ “in order to define better the role of religious life in the local Church.”⁷⁶ In the meantime, however, the basic orientations of the first African Synod Fathers served adequately to address some of the urgent issues the Church in Africa faces.

5. THE AFRICAN VISION OF LIFE, THE CONSECRATED LIFE AND *AFRICAE MUNUS*

5.1. African Vision of Life and the *Africae Munus*

One of the fundamental values of African worldview is life. The concept of life pervades African social, religious, moral and cultural traditions. It is, of course, evident particularly in African understanding of marriage and family. It underlies the emphasis the community places on inter-personal relationship and on the fundamentally community-oriented vision of society. How does the African understand of the decisive and all inclusive concept of life?

The *Africae Munus*, echoing the African Bishops’ reflections, aptly albeit succinctly describes it as follows:

“In the African worldview, life is perceived as something that embraces and includes ancestors, the living and those yet to be born, the whole of creation and all beings: those that speak and those that are mute, those that think and those lacking thought. The visible and invisible universe is regarded as a living-space for human beings, but also as

a space of communion where past generations invisibly flank present generations; themselves the mothers of future generations."⁷⁷

This great openness of heart and spirit in the African tradition, as Benedict XVI noted, predisposes the African to hear and to receive Christ's message and appreciate the mystery of the Church and, therefore, to value human life to the full, along with the conditions in which it is lived.

Such perception of life, with the basic disposition to value human life, has its dimensions and responsibilities for all citizens and institutions, not excluding consecrated life. Around the theme of human life as understood in African worldview, the *Africae Munus* discusses five major aspects of the consequent responsibilities in the face of present-day challenges, namely: the protection and defense of human life; respect for creation and the ecosystem; the good governance of states; the care for migrants, displaced persons and refugees; and Globalization and international aid. These are areas in which, for the good of the family and society, the consecrated persons carry out their service of charity. They can consistently speak out with a prophetic voice, and they can offer valuable practical contributions, according to the charisms and capabilities of each institute and in harmony with the Church-Family of God. However, for sake of brevity, the focus here is on the protection and defense of human life, which has an ever greater need everywhere today especially in Africa.

The protection and defense of human life has been and continues to be carried out in Africa, particularly in Nigeria, through various initiatives. International institutions have adopted initiatives aimed at protecting human life on the African continent through efforts extended to promote certain aspects of development. Nonetheless, the *Africae Munus* reproaches their lack of ethical clarity at international meetings, particularly the systematic use of ambiguous or confusing language conveying values at odds with Catholic moral teaching. The child in his or her mother's womb is a human life which must be protected, and thus the Church decries anti-life practices, such as abortion.

Together with the Church-Family in Africa, consecrated persons must without fear or favor be committed to promoting and defending life and, thus, also to offering help and support to women and couples tempted to seek an abortion while remaining close to those who have had this tragic experience and helping them to grow in respect for life.⁷⁸

Human life in Africa faces serious threats today. For example, there are the ravages of drug and alcohol abuse⁷⁹; malaria,⁸⁰ tuberculosis and AIDS decimating the African peoples and gravely compromising their socio-economic life.⁸¹

In the name of life the institutes of consecrated persons and the entire Church-Family should:

- Offer encouragement and give support to all the Church institutions and movements at the diocesan and national levels that are working in the field of healthcare. Some institutes of consecrated life are already much committed in this area of apostolate according to their specific character and acting in a spirit of collaboration;
- Encourage those institutes and programmes of therapeutic and pharmaceutical research which seek to eradicate pandemics. High quality medical treatment should be made available at minimum cost to all concerned.⁸²
- Promote and support pro-life initiatives in the dioceses and in the civil society in the spirit of their Institute.

Another form of the defense of life, carried out also by many institute of consecrated life, includes the elimination of ignorance through literacy programmes and quality education that embraces the whole person.⁸³ Illiteracy represents one of the principal obstacles to development; it is “a scourge on a par with that of the pandemics”, because while it does not kill directly, it however contributes actively to the marginalization of the person – which is a form of social death – and it blocks access to knowledge. Teaching people to read and write has important advantages. It makes them full members of the *res publica* and enables them to play their part in building up the nation; for Christians it provides access to the inestimable treasure of the sacred Scriptures that nourish their life of faith.⁸⁴

The Church calls on the Institutes of Consecrated Life and all the faithful to respond generously to this great challenge – promotion of quality Education and literacy programmes; the protection and defense of human life - described as a real testing ground for civilization. In order to meet this challenge, the institutes of Consecrated life and other Catholic Institutions, are required to fulfill two important and necessary conditions to be “preserved and safeguarded”, namely, they must maintain their ecclesial identity, and remain faithful to the Gospel message and the charism of their founder.⁸⁵ In addition, it is necessary to raise the awareness of governments, so that they will increase their support for schooling, and moreover, recognise and respect the legitimate right of the Church to offer her particular contribution to education.⁸⁶

5.2. Consecrated persons according to *Africae Munus*

The *Africae Munus* (AM) recognises the great importance and role that consecrated life has in Africa. On many occasions this document explicitly speaks on “consecrated

life", and the "consecrated persons". Pope Benedict XVI describes Consecrated Life as one of the major life choices, as a vocation, that one can make, that is, as one way of a total consecration to Christ (AM, nn. 1, 167); indeed, consecrated life is a missionary vocation (AM, 167). Besides, the Consecrated life has an ecumenical mission. Since "the path to reconciliation must first pass through the communion of Christ's disciples" and a divided Christianity remains a scandal, the institutes of consecrated life - and other members and ecclesial associations of the Church - are to pursue with greater determination the part of Ecumenical dialogue that directs our common journey towards Christian unity; and to listen assiduously to the word of God, faithful to fraternal communion, the breaking of bread and the prayers (cf. Acts 2:42), (AM, 89).

The Africae Munus turns attention concretely to consecrated persons. To them, for instance, the Church entrusts the "precious treasure" which is "Africa's commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ" (AM 1). He exhorts the consecrated persons to enable children receive schooling: "this is a matter of justice for each child and indeed the future of Africa depends on it." (AM, 134). While emphasizing the importance of individual confession, which no other act of reconciliation or any paraliturgy can replace, the *Africae Munus* encourages the consecrated persons - as well as all the other Church faithfuls - to "restore to its true place the sacrament of Reconciliation in its twofold dimension, personal and communitarian" (AM, 156). Still, the position of *Africae Munus* on Consecrated persons appears more fully when it discusses the role of Consecrated persons as members of the Church, the Family of God (AM,110-120. In fact, the *Africae Munus* highlights four aspects of the role of consecrated persons in Africa, namely, Consecrated persons as prophetic witness; fidelity to charism, ideas and vision of the Founders and Foundresses; Christian contemplative life of consecrated persons dedicated to prayer; and collaboration of National and Continental Conferences of Consecrated persons.

5.2.1 *Consecrated persons as prophetic witnesses*

In many ways consecrated persons bear witness to Christ and His Gospel. "Through the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, the life of consecrated persons becomes a prophetic witness. Hence they can be examples in the area of reconciliation, justice and peace, even in circumstances marked by great tension. Community life shows us that it is possible to live as brothers and sisters, and to be united even when coming from different ethnic or racial backgrounds (cf. Ps 133:1). It can and must enable people to see and believe that today in Africa, those men and women who follow Christ Jesus find in him the secret of living happily together: mutual love and fraternal communion, strengthened daily by the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours."⁸⁷ In this way, the witness of the consecrated persons can be a source of encouragement and support to couples, families and young people in their struggles for reconciliation, justice and peace within their own environment.

5.2.2. *Fidelity to charism, ideas and vision of the Founders and Foundresses*

To effectively carry out their important role in the life and evangelizing mission of the Church, the consecrated persons are called upon to remain faithful to the spirit and charism of their Founders and Foundresses, and in communion with the Church. The fidelity to their origins and the unity with the Church, while attentive or sensitive to the signs of times, will permit them to meaningfully respond to the needs and pastoral challenges of people in the church and society today, especially in matters relating to family life. In this regard, the *Africae Munus* asks the Consecrated persons to be vigilant in keeping their lamps alight:

“Dear consecrated persons, may you continue to live your charism with truly apostolic zeal in the different fields indicated by your founders or Foundresses! Thus you will be all the more vigilant in keeping your lamps alight! Your founders and Foundresses wanted to follow Christ truly and respond to his call. The different good works that came about as a result are gems that adorn the Church. You must therefore carry them on by following as faithfully as possible the charism of your founders, their ideas and their vision. Here I would like to emphasize the important role of consecrated persons in the life of the Church and in her missionary endeavour. They are a necessary and precious aid to the Church’s pastoral activity but also a manifestation of the deepest nature of our Christian vocation. For this reason I invite you, dear consecrated persons, to continue in close communion with the local Church and with its head, the bishop. I also invite you to strengthen your communion with the Bishop of Rome.”⁸⁸

5.2.3. *The Contemplative life: eloquent silent witness, dedicated to prayer*

The Consecrated persons proclaim the Gospel message not only through external apostolate works but also by living a contemplative life. Through a life dedicated to prayer in a silent witness to Christ they follow, contemplative men and women make an eloquent and effective statement emphasizing the power and primacy of the Lord God in our lives and they contribute to sustain families, the Church and the apostolate of all agents of evangelization:

“Africa is the cradle of the Christian contemplative life. Present from earliest times in North Africa, especially in Egypt and Ethiopia, it took root in sub-Saharan Africa during the last century. May the Lord bless the men and women who have decided to follow him unconditionally! Their hidden life is like leaven in the dough. Their constant prayer will sustain the apostolic efforts of the bishops, priests, other consecrated persons, catechists and of the entire Church.”⁸⁹

5.2.4. *National and Continental Conferences*

The evangelizing mission of consecrated persons demands some form of organization and coordination to be effective and successful. Since the consecrated persons have possessed such bodies, these coordinating institutions are expected to gather their resources to fraternally cooperate and address their common concerns in view of the common good:

“The meetings of the different National Conferences of Major Superiors and those of COMSAM help pool your reflections and resources, not only in order to pursue the goals of the various Institutes, while preserving their autonomy, character and individual spirit, but also to help deal with common concerns in a climate of fraternity and solidarity. It is fitting to foster an ecclesial spirit based on a sound coordination and proper cooperation with the Bishops’ Conferences.”⁹⁰

PART 2: WITNESS OF LIFE, IN WORDS AND ACTIONS: THE MISSION AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF CONSECRATED LIFE

6. CONSECRATED FOR MISSION

Consecrated life has a specific contribution to evangelization,⁹¹ which includes the proclamation of the Gospel of the family. The specific contribution of consecrated persons, both men and women, to evangelization is first of all the *witness of a life* given totally to God and to their brothers and sisters, in imitation of the Lord Jesus.

Because the consecrated persons love God and therefore must love their fellow human beings, they particularly feel impelled by love to *proclaim Christ to all nations*, to the many men and women who do not know Him. Consecrated persons have the responsibility of making present to everyone Christ who is chaste, poor, obedient, prayerful and missionary.⁹² Moreover, consecrated persons are *present and work in every part of the world*. They work in order to consolidate and expand the Kingdom of Christ, bringing the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ even to the furthest regions. Today too the duty of proclamation of the Gospel of Christ, by making the greatest possible contribution to this evangelising mission of the Church, continues to present a pressing call to Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

Another aspect worth considering is the *proclamation of Christ and inculturation*. The proclamation of Christ "is the permanent priority of mission" and is directed towards conversion, that is, to full and sincere allegiance to Christ and his Gospel. The challenge of inculturation should be taken up by consecrated persons as a call to fruitful cooperation with God’s grace in facing cultural diversity.

A genuine inculturation requires the Christ-like attitudes of love and meekness. In this sense the consecrated life makes its members particularly well suited to face the complex work of inculturation, because it accustoms them to being detached from things, even from many features of their own culture. Applying themselves with these attitudes to the study and understanding of other cultures, consecrated persons can

better discern the real values in them, and the best way to accept them and perfect them with the help of their own charism.⁹³

7. EVANGELICAL COUNSELS AND THE FAMILY

The evangelical counsels of obedience, poverty and chastity are means of evangelization, which involves in some way the evangelization of the family. The religious vow of obedience is related to African concept of family. Obedience, far from being mere organisational and disciplinary disposition, finds in the African concept of family a “*pierre d’attente*”, as Bishop Somé puts it.⁹⁴ In the organisation of his African family, obedience to authority and dialogue and consultation with individual are promoted.

The question of poverty in consecrated life is often a thorny challenge in African countries. It relates in many ways to important matters of cultural and socio-economic and family values in context of various African milieu. The delicate and complex nature of the question lead some to take the attitude of “let the sleeping dog lie”, in a way that, in some cases, while accepting a theoretical affirmation of the principle or doctrine of the importance of the vow of poverty as stipulated by the Church and respective Institutes, some individuals arrogate to themselves the interpretation and practical application or practice of the vows. Others have not only upheld the doctrine of consecrated poverty but sincerely strive to live up to the stipulated ideal, even with the existing pressures and difficulties. In any case, some authors consider that it is not sufficient to merely present the doctrinal *status quo* but rather calls also for a re-examination of way of conceiving and/or at least the *modus vivendi* of this vow such that it takes into account the new questions or emerging challenges coming from African socio-cultural milieu. The gravity of the questions led some authors and pastors, like Bishop Basile Mvé Engone, to suggest the need to “fundamentally review” the way of living the vow of poverty in the Church in Africa. Such review, he argues, must take into account the relation of the consecrated person with his or her family, with his/her culture, and the relation of the whole consecrated person with his/her context of apostolate.⁹⁵ As regards the relation of the consecrated person with his family two dangers, he adds, must be avoided, namely, the imposition of the family on the consecrated person, and the radical rupture of the consecrated person from his family. To overcome the challenge of poverty, it is necessary, firstly, to have recourse to the Gospel; secondly, the consecrated person, as well as the diocesan priest and the laity, must come together to engage in the battle of the poor people for life. For that to happen, it is necessary to:

- deepen the sense of welcome through the constitution of a more welcoming community;
- develop the sense of solidarity and of sharing in the African context;

- promote action in favour of the poor in order to concretely help them to free themselves from misery.

These efforts imply frank and durable collaboration of the religious institutes, the laity and the local Church.

8. CELIBACY, VIRGINITY AND THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

8.1. *Celibacy and Christian Family*

Celibacy is a challenge, a gift, and also a problem. Celibacy is a challenge to priests and consecrated persons of all cultures and of all times. Celibacy is a gift, a grace and charism, from God. It is given only to those He calls for a special mission. Therefore, a person's response to God must be a free choice made out of love for God and for humanity.

Celibacy has also become a serious challenge in the Church today. And efforts are made to propose solutions to it. The causes and the assessment of the situation vary. It is sometimes claimed that the problem of celibacy indicates a weakness in the life of faith of our Church, and above all in the faith of those who are in the consecrated life. It indicates the fading of moral values in our society. The question, then, is asked: Shall the Catholic Church succumb to this tendency, and shall she conform to the current events or rather revive the faith of her children? Crisis in celibacy indicates, we are today, that those who are called to the celibate state of life no more respond to Christ with full commitment and conviction as it used to be. They now give a half-hearted response, a conditional and a temporary or a part-time response.⁹⁶ In this context, the Tanzania Episcopate proposes that the problem of celibacy will be combated from its roots by imparting true faith and true love for Christ in the candidates for the priesthood and by helping those already ordained to grow in the true faith and love for Christ and the Church.

On its part the convictions and proposal of the Association of Member Episcopal Conference of Eastern Africa (AMECEA), reported by the Tanzania Catholic Episcopate on the occasion of the Synod of Bishops (1990), are enlightening. The AMECEA bishops "are still convinced that:

- (1) Celibacy should continue to be part and condition for the vocation and life of a Catholic Priest". Among the motives is the fact that the lay faithful "uphold celibacy as one of the major characteristics which is an identity of a Catholic priest." For fear of infidelity in the area of celibacy, some parents would not allow their children to enter into Consecrated Life and the Priesthood. "For them (Parents), one has either to be a faithful celibate priest or he should not become one who later dishonours celibacy."⁹⁷

(2) “We should inculcate true faith and true love of God and the Church as well as good moral values and behaviour right from an early age of the candidates to the priesthood”; but there is also a *caveat*, a warning: “However, care should be taken not to separate them (candidates) completely from their family backgrounds.”

(3) “Good Christian families are the key point for a natural and balanced growth of character. The family is the school and arena for psychological, spiritual and human growth. And the bishops conclude: “If we want to solve some of the serious problems on vocation, formation and even of celibacy, let us begin to teach catechesis in our families and make them true Christian families.”⁹⁸

8.2. *Marriage and Virginty*

As earlier mentioned in this article, I briefly addressed the vocation to marriage and vocation to consecrated life lived in virginity as complementary, they are two forms of response to God’s call to holiness and mission, to walk towards enjoying eternal happiness.

One may ask, why vocation to consecrated virginity? One consecrates virginity to God in order to be freer to live for and dedicate himself or herself to God and to the things of God.

The vocation to virginity has great value. Firstly, virginity renders the individual free, making him able to dedicate himself completely to the Lord with undivided heart; it is therefore of great help to holiness of life. Secondly, virginity promotes brotherly love. Thirdly, virgins are symbols of the Church that is always faithful to Christ and loves Him without limit; virgins esteem and try to live as best as they can live here on earth what human marriage symbolizes: the unity between Christ and his Church. Virginity is, thus, very positive for the holiness of the Church and for her credibility. Moreover, virginity is a proof that the new life which Christ gives us is a reality; it is a victory for the kingdom of Christ. Virginity “manifests in a special way the transcendence of God and its requirement over all earthly things and the highest kind of bonds within it.”⁹⁹ Also, virginity tries to anticipate our future life in heaven.

Virginity is a great encouragement to fidelity in the vocation to married life. This is because, without words, virginity shows to spouses that with God’s grace it is possible to control instincts, worldly desires, and sexual inclinations. Virgins announce disinterested love. “Obviously, these values of virginity can be realised only if the state of virginity is chosen, not out of pride, nor out of spite for married life, nor out of love for oneself, nor out of fear of pregnancy, nor because one has to train children, but only ‘for the kingdom of heaven’ (Mt 19:12) in order to have more facility and freedom in dedicating oneself to the things of God and for the zeal of helping others towards the kingdom of heaven.”¹⁰⁰

Virginity confirms marriage. The virginal state presupposes the state of marriage and confirms it. The virgin state esteems the Sacrament of marriage as Christ’s blessing on conjugal love. The virgin seeks to sacrifice this great value for a value and love that is

greater still. Whoever despises marriage cannot esteem virginity, as St. John Chrysostom reminds us.¹⁰¹

9. ROLE AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF CONSECRATED LIFE IN THE PASTORAL CARE OF THE FAMILY

“Proclaiming the Gospel of the Family is urgently needed in the work of evangelization. The Church has to carry this out with the tenderness of a mother and the clarity of a teacher (cf. Eph 4: 15), in faithfulness to the mercy displayed in Christ’s kenosis.”¹⁰²

The specific contribution of consecrated persons, both men and women, to evangelization is first of all the witness of a life given totally to God and to their brothers and sisters (...). Consecrated life eloquently shows that the more one lives in Christ, the better one can serve him in others, going even to the furthest missionary outposts and facing the greatest dangers.”¹⁰³

The role and contribution of the Consecrated Life in the pastoral care of the family must be seen in the context of the evangelizing mission of the Church in her proclamation of the Gospel of the family. In fact, the Church must accompany with tenderness and clarity, attention and care her children, persons preparing for marriage and the married couples, especially the weakest of her children, who show signs of a wounded and lost love, by restoring in them hope and confidence: “Conscious that the most merciful thing is to tell the truth in love, we go beyond compassion. Merciful love, as it attracts and unites, transforms and elevates. It is an invitation to conversion.”¹⁰⁴ The Church is convinced that proclaiming the Gospel of the Family is urgently needed in the work of evangelization. The Church has to carry this out with the tenderness of a mother and the clarity of a teacher (cf. Eph 4: 15).¹⁰⁵ As a significant part of the Church’s agents of evangelization, the mission and contribution of consecrated persons indeed deserves in the area of family is worthy of special attention.

9.1. CONSECRATED PERSONS CONTRIBUTE TO CHURCH’S EVANGELIZING MISSION IN ALL DOMAINS

Consecrated persons contribute greatly to the evangelizing mission or the apostolate of the Church in all domains. “It is also difficult to measure ‘the immense part that they brought and they continue to bring to evangelization’ (Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 69). The pastoral contribution will be more fruitful to the extent that the action of the Holy Spirit will be more respected and that, in their life and works, the consecrated persons are more faithful to the charism of their Institute (Cfr. *Perfectae Charitatis*, n.2b; *Christus Dominus*, 35)”¹⁰⁶. While the responsibility to direct and coordinate the apostolate in his diocese belongs to the Local Ordinary (Bishop) of the diocese, he however carries out that duty in respect for the charism of each institute (*Christus Dominus*, nn.33 and 35) and of the apostolic initiative of his collaborators (AG,

n.30).¹⁰⁷ One of the principal domains of the Church's pastoral activity to which the consecrated persons mission and contribute is the family.

Christian marriage is a vocation. As such, "it must be undertaken with due preparation in a journey of faith with a proper process of discernment. Therefore, formation is needed to accompany the person and couple in such a way that the real-life experience of the entire ecclesial community can be added to the teaching of the contents of the faith."¹⁰⁸ In this regard, consecrated persons should, in cooperation with the dioceses and parishes, strive to implement pastoral initiatives in favour of the marriage and family life.

The consecrated persons' dedication to pastoral care of the family has its requirements and conditions. Firstly, this apostolate calls for missionary *conversion* by the consecrated persons – as well as for every other evangelizer. This means that, we must not stop at "proclaiming a message which is perceived to be merely theoretical, with no connection to people's real problems. We must continually bear in mind that the crisis of faith has led to a crisis in marriage and the family."¹⁰⁹ The faith needs to be strengthened. Conversion also needs to be seen in the language we use, in such a way that it might prove to be effectively meaningful. Proclamation needs to create an experience where the Gospel of the Family responds to each person's dignity and complete fulfilment in reciprocity, communion and fruitfulness.¹¹⁰

In addition, the *Word of God* is the source of life and spirituality for the family. Apostolate carried out by consecrated persons in favour of the family must allow persons to be interiorly fashioned and formed through prayerful reading of the Sacred Scripture. The Word of God is not only good news in a person's private life, but also a criterion of judgment and a light in discerning the various challenges which married couples and families encounter.¹¹¹ A continuous and deep study of the Sacred Scriptures must nourish the religious life so that the Word of God, lived and experienced may be communicated in a credible and complete way.

Thirdly, it is necessary that consecrated persons take into account in the pastoral care of the family the *various religious experiences in diverse cultures*: these must be appreciated in their positive elements; and then evaluate their limitations and deficiencies.¹¹² In this regard the Church has continually taught the need and urgency for African Christians to welcome and use the authentic values in the rich African cultures in carrying out their mission and celebrations.¹¹³

The promotion of Christian unity and fraternity is another domain of the apostolate of the Church that increasingly engages the pastoral attention of consecrated life. The religious institutes in Africa often bring together into the same community the members of diverse ethnic groups and tribes. Thus, consecrated persons are to be witnesses of unity and fraternal life in community¹¹⁴, and, as such, be a model for married couples and the family.

Another domain of the Church's mission is the inculturation of consecrated life.¹¹⁵ Inculturation involves the judicious taking into account of the authentic cultural values and context of the people among whom we mission. Inculturation is "an indispensable condition" in order that consecrated life could be seen as a witness in its evangelizing mission (*Ad gentes*20; EN, n.69)¹¹⁶ in the area of marriage and family.

9.2. THE MISSION OF CONSECRATED LIFE ACCORDING TO THE *FAMILIARIS CONSORTIO*

Pope John Paul II's Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio*, gives clear indications about the place and the role of Consecrated persons in the sphere of pastoral care of marriage and family life¹¹⁷. Referring to some of the constant doctrinal teachings of the Church on the significance of Consecrated life, the document says, first of all, that through their consecration to God, the consecrated persons recall the "marriage made by God in which the Church has Christ for her spouse."¹¹⁸ By means of their consecration, moreover, Religious men and women are witness to the universal charity which, through consecrated charity, makes them more available to dedicate themselves to the service of God and to works of apostolate.

In addition, at a pastoral level, Religious men and women are able to develop their service to their families, with particular solicitude for children, especially if they are abandoned, unwanted, orphaned, poor or handicapped. Specifically, the Consecrated men and women, furthermore, may:

- take care of the sick persons;
- foster relationship of respect, and charity toward one-parent families or families that are in difficulties or are separated;
- offer their own work of teaching and counselling in the preparation of young people for marriage;
- Help couples toward truly responsible parenthood;
- Open the houses for simple and cordial hospitality, so that family can find their sense of God's presence and gain a taste for prayer and recollection, and see the practical examples of lives lived in charity and fraternity joy as members of the larger family of God.

Therefore, more relevant and opportune today than ever is the Church's exhortation to heads of Institutes of consecrated life, that they should consider - always with substantial respect for the proper and original charism of each one - the apostolate of the family as one of the priority tasks, rendered even more urgent by the present state of the world,¹¹⁹ especially in Africa.

9.3. THE AFRICAN EPISCOPATE ON THE ROLE OF CONSECRATED LIFE

Few Catholic Episcopal Conferences in Africa have expressly and formally dedicated to a significant level their reflections to the theme of consecrated life, and less so as it

relates to the consecrated persons' mission and contribution to the pastoral care of family. The Year of Consecrated Life might offer an opportunity for such reflections, and also for extended and richer dialogue with between the Consecrated Life and the Episcopate of any nation or Province. Meanwhile, some Episcopal Conferences and individual Bishops have referred to the theme, or a specific issue relating to it, here and there in their Directories, Messages, Communiqués and pastoral letters in the attempt to confront some matters arising from the evangelization work at a national or diocesan level.

From the teachings of the African Catholic Bishops it is clear that the areas of contributions of the consecrated persons to evangelization and development of marriage and family life in Africa are many and varied, expressed through diverse initiatives: the religious, pastoral, spiritual, social, cultural, political, medical and health care, educational spheres, etc. In particular, attention has been drawn to the following suggestions and initiatives:

- A continuous and deep study of the Sacred Scriptures must nourish the religious life so that the Word of God, lived and experienced may be communicated in a credible and complete way¹²⁰ to members of families and to other people.
- Programmes of on-going formation in the different Congregations and organized at different levels – say, by the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria (CMSN) or by the Department of Pastoral Agent of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria - should lead the renewal of religious life toward a more concrete engagement in the church and society, respecting the spirit of individual religious Institute.
- As pastoral workers, the consecrated persons should intensify regular and systematic visitation of all families, including those suffering irregularities of matrimony and willingly listen to their problems, and encourage them in their Christian faith and life. The apostolate of visitation to families maintain a rapport of respect and of charity with families in difficulties or separated;¹²¹
- Actively participate in the organization of courses for preparation for marriage, which should be all-embracing in content, including doctrinal and moral aspects, medical and psychological aspects, economic and social aspects;
- The witness to the consecrated persons' open unreserved charity and consecrated chastity, founded on the spirit of sacrifice consciously and freely assumed, are a great help to couples and to families.
- Consecrated persons should take charge of special work of help regarding family problems. Similarly, consecrated persons can assume work for children, especially the abandoned, the orphan, the poor or handicapped (Cfr. *Familiaris Consortio*, n.74);
- Consecrated persons should open their houses to the possibility of welcome for spiritual exercises of couples and household;

The Catholic Voyage: African Journal of Consecrated Life

Vol. 11, 2015. ISSN: 2659-0301 (Online) 1597 6610 (Print)

48

- Families can benefit from nearby monasteries which can complement the vocation of marriage with that of the consecrated life. The same can be said for the fruitful relationship between couples and priests, in their respective roles.

10. JOURNEYING TOWARD THE XIV ORDINARY SYNOD ON THE FAMILY: THE 3RD EXTRAORDINARY SYNOD OF BISHOPS AND THE COMMITMENT OF CONSECRATED LIFE

The 3rd Extraordinary Synod stated in its final *Synod Report*, issued on October 18, 2014, that its reflections or propositions - most (but not all) of which were approved in vote - "are intended to raise questions and indicate points of view which will later be developed and clarified through reflections in the local Churches in the intervening year leading to the XIV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, scheduled for October, 2015, to treat *The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and in the Contemporary World*. These are not decisions taken nor are they easy subjects." In other words, they are springboard, points of departure, not of arrival. In fact, on the basis of its *Reports* and other reflections, the *Lineamenta* (Outline) has been drawn,¹²² and then an *Instrumentum Laboris* (Working Document) will be prepared, for the mentioned Synod of Bishops (2015). Nevertheless, the Synod Fathers say, "the Holy Spirit will guide us in finding the road to truth and mercy for all."

The Final report of the Synod of Bishops 2014 presents, after an Introduction, three main parts, followed by a conclusion, thus adopting a "see, judge and act" method. Part I is titled "Listening: The Context and the Challenges of the Family", highlights the social, pastoral situation and the affectivity in life ; part II, focuses on "Looking at Christ: The Gospel of the Family" presents some doctrinal aspects of marriage and family in the light of God's salvific plan and the teachings of Magisterium of the Church. It reaffirms the indissolubility of marriage and the joy of sharing life together; it reasserts the truth and beauty of the family and the value of Mercy towards broken and fragile families. In Part III, titled "Facing the Situation: Pastoral Perspectives" an attempt is made to propose for further discussion, under seven subheadings, several practical pastoral issues. The Synod Fathers invite all to proclaim the Gospel of the Family today taking into account the various contexts in which the proclamation is done. The final *Synod Report* also allows one to discern areas of pastoral care of marriage that urgently need special attention today.

The Consecrated life is not mentioned in the *Report*, and neither is it cited in the *Lineamenta* for the Synod of bishops 2015). Nor are other agents of evangelization. Still, in Nigeria, as elsewhere, consecrated persons must ask themselves : "where and how can we come to offer help, contributing to the health of the family, in cooperation with the local Churches?" The pastoral perspectives that the *Report* proposes concern some of the main challenges and issues that the Church must address today. Briefly, some of the areas of pastoral challenges (Cf. *Synod Report*,nn.39-61) involves:

- Guiding Engaged Couples in Their Preparation for Marriage;
- Accompanying the Married Couple in the Initial Years of Marriage;
- Pastoral Care for Couples Civilly Married or Living Together;
- Caring for Broken families (Persons who are Separated, Divorced, Divorced and Remarried and Single-Parent Families);
- Pastoral Attention towards Persons with Homosexual Tendencies;
- The Transmission of Life and the Challenges of a Declining Birth rate; and
- Upbringing and the Role of the Family in Evangelization.

Since the *Synod Report* (which is essentially the same in content, except for its questionnaire, as the *Lineamenta (Outline)* for XIV General Assembly of the Synods of Bishops 2015 on Family) are addressed to the members of the entire Church, the proposed reflections of that *Report* and *Lineamenta* must, along with the *Instrumentum Laboris* (Working Document) to be published, be studied by Consecrated persons and used them as ground for reflection for the forthcoming Ordinary Synod of Bishops. In fact, it is important to raise awareness about and to study these preparatory documents in view of the forthcoming Synod of Bishops (2015), for formation and information. All members of the Family of God are involved in the Synodal process. Particularly the Formation Houses, the seminaries and other educational institutions, the Religious Communities, ecclesial associations, and the parishes and dioceses should engage themselves with the reflections on these preparatory documents. The comments and suggestions, fruits of one's reflections on the *Lineamenta* and the Working Document can contribute to the pastoral and spiritual enrichment of our apostolate in the local Christian communities; they could be sent to the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, Rome, and to the Bishops representing our country at the forthcoming Synod. The eventual publication of the propositions of the Synod and, most importantly, the Pope's post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation resulting from the synod will be another, more decisive phase of reflections and reception, mainly through implementation of the Synod by consecrated persons and all the people of God. Special and immediate attention ought to be given, firstly, to the *Lineamenta*, examining its "Questions Aimed at a Response to and an In-Depth Examination of the *Relatio Synodi*"

The preparation for the Synod 2015 is an opportunity to seriously evaluate the apostolate of Pastoral Care of the Family carried out by our religious Institutes and in the dioceses in view of renewal or update information and in ministry. In light of the widespread debates, the media reports, and the confusion sometimes that was created on the occasion of the 3rd Extraordinary Synod, it seems that as part of the preparation for the Synod of Bishops of 2015 it may be opportuned to offer to the people more explanation or clarification concerning the doctrinal teachings of the Church on some

of the current or disputed questions raised by the *Lineamenta*, but also to psychologically prepare the faithful in our parishes for whatever eventual changes and new orientations, or absence of them, in pastoral approach, if any, concerning some questions the forthcoming Synod may want to propose to the entire Church; in this way, particularly in the period of implementation following the celebration of the Synod, the faithful (laity and clergy) may “live through all this with tranquillity, and with interior peace.”¹²³ Also, each religious institute may encourage its members to be more sensitive to and address in an organized and on-going manner the issues relating to the family life according to its spirit and apostolic charism and taking into consideration the pastoral needs of the local Churches in Nigeria today. In all these, it is necessary to avoid the temptations of which Pope Francis speaks;¹²⁴ but should not let their presence frighten or disconcert us, nor even discourage us. Rather we should set before our eyes on the good of the Church, of families, the “good of souls” (cf. Can. 1752), our Religious Institute, and this always without ever putting into question the fundamental truths of the family and of the Sacrament of marriage.

FINAL REMARKS

This article attempted to expose the significance, the role and contributions of the consecrated life to pastoral Care of the Family in the context of evangelisation. It presented the significance of family and the consecrated life and their complementary relation, then we saw the vital role of the family in the discernment of vocations and in the formation of candidates are ineluctable. The general attitude towards consecrated life is welcoming and positive even the situation in some other regions is a bit more nuanced. From the religious and cultural viewpoint, the African vision of life seems to me to be one good context in which to understand consecrated life and appreciate the scope of its mission in Africa. Both the first and the second African Synods (*Ecclesia in Africa* and the *Africae Munus* respectively) highlight the responsibility of consecrated persons, insisting on the aspects of calling all to holiness, giving a prophetic witness, promoting communion and cooperation through dialogue with the local Bishop, the clergy and the laity; they call for fidelity the charism of the Institutes; they speak of fostering vocation and formation of candidates. While consecrated persons contribute to the evangelising mission in *all* domains, we have highlighted their role and contribution in the area of pastoral care of family, in the light of the *Familiaris consortio* and the interventions of African Episcopates.¹²⁵ Finally, I attempted to make some suggestions towards effective preparation for the forthcoming XIV Ordinary General Synod of Bishops (October 2015), suggestions to which, of course, you can add proposals. While we may not always have ready answers to all emerging questions, including the new and more difficult ones of today, the consecrated persons, often interrogated about the values of marriage and the Christian family, shall be disposed to respond to the best of his/her ability, in the desire to contribute to offering “a word of

The Catholic Voyage: African Journal of Consecrated Life

Vol. 11, 2015. ISSN: 2659-0301 (Online) 1597 6610 (Print)

51

truth and hope.”¹²⁶ We are assured that, in the collegial journey of the Church, the “Holy Spirit will guide us in finding the road to truth and mercy for all.”¹²⁷

**THE MAGNIFICAT OF MARY AND CONSECRATED PERSONS:
A SOCIAL-LIBERATING AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE**

Christopher O. Asamah OMV*

Abstract

The article focuses on the social-liberating dimension of the Magnificat and its message for consecrated persons. In the article, it was presented that Mary's Magnificat is an important canticle which helps us to understand Marian spirituality in its social context. Precisely because the Magnificat has had such influence on how we understand Mary in relation to social concerns, it was also fitting that a connection was made between Mary's Magnificat and consecrated persons, and how to respond to social issues in the light of the Magnificat.

Certain things were brought into the general framework of the article: the social context of African, the theological understanding of the Magnificat from a social liberating perspective, and the mission of consecrated persons in the time of upheavals in Africa in the light of the Magnificat. It was made clear that Mary's Magnificat has a social message for the people of Africa, and consecrated persons, by virtue of their consecrated lives, and called to be active participant in the social transformation of Africa, in the light of the social message of the Magnificat.

Introduction

Ours is a society wounded by the presence of endless issues of social concern. The men and women of our society are getting to be more aware of the issues of poverty, injustice, violence, economic inequalities, political instabilities and the likes. More than ever before, consequent upon the growth in technology and communications, it is easier to bring to global awareness even the remotest of social worries. This seems a providential reality, at a time when Pope Francis seeks, through pastoral charity, to awaken a more responsive spirit of global solidarity.

The great danger in today's world, pervaded as it is by consumerism, is the desolation and anguish born of a complacent yet covetous heart, the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience. Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor. God's voice is no longer heard, the quiet joy of his love is no longer felt, and the desire to do good fades.

The social gospel of the Church is not something new, but the constant attention Pope Francis has given to it underlines the urgency of bringing the gospel to cast its light upon the issues of social justice in the world. The message of Pope Francis brings

us to a deeper awareness of the realities that the joys, the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of today's world are those of the ecclesial community as well.

It is therefore in the light of Pope Francis's continuous message on social justice, and on the occasion of the celebration of the Year of Consecrated Persons in the universal Church, that this write-up hopes to reflect on the *Magnificat* of Mary and Consecrated Persons, from a social-liberating African perspective. And at the same time, to show some ways in which consecrated persons can respond to social concerns in the society in the light of the *Magnificat*.

Africa in its social context

Africa is a continent with her own peculiar history. It stands out for several reasons, especially with the centuries of experience of slavery, colonialism and other forms of oppression in the past. Even today, various forms of crisis, for example, famine, tribal tensions, political instability, etc., are still present. "A well-orchestrated view suggests that, in large part, certain peculiar events of Africa's history explain the continent's present predicament." Indeed, Africa is a continent with some sad past experiences. Any attempt to ignore its past, will only pave a way for the repetition of the past. "The history of any violent dispersal is the history of genocide, and genocide is the name of much of the scenario now being played out and re-enacted over and over again right on the continent."

In some ways, one is tempted to agree with Basil Davidson, that, "the actual and present condition of Africa is one of deep trouble, sometimes a deeper trouble than the worst imposed during the colonial years." In some of the countries in Africa, the endless presence of wars cannot be overlooked. The resulting effect is crisis of refugees and poverty and diseases, which often follow from war-like settings. These points are well presented by E. E. Uzukwu when he stated that,

Africa is seen today in the world community as a continent of misery. Many statistics trumpet this reality. Ecological disasters, such as flood and drought, bring agricultural production in many regions of the continent to a standstill (...). Economic depression of unparalleled proportions makes existing authoritarian regimes more repressive. Dictatorships and civil wars uproot women, men and children from ancestral homes to neighbouring countries.

The above situations have created some form of pessimism among Africans and afro-philosophers. The situation is further not helped by a media that has little or no positive news coming from the continent.

This is the wounded face of Africa frequently portrayed in the mass media, a media controlled by Western conglomerates. Apart from sport and music, one hardly hears any positive news item in Africa. For their parts, when Africans narrate their plight in these trying times they sound even more pessimistic.

In trying to trace the problems in Africa, some have attempted to blame it on external factors or the experiences of slavery, colonialism, and neo-colonialism. However, putting the blame on the experiences of slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism alone, is only a way of not taking responsibility of the actions of many African leaders and her people of today. For, "it does not follow that we should also subscribe to the populist opinion which exclusively and categorically imputes the blame for Africa's present malaise to outside factors or influences, such as slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism."

Looking at the overall nature of Africa's social troubles, there is no doubt that, what we see is a continent that keeps facing real and pathetic social, economic and political predicaments. It is evident particularly to consecrated persons who are present throughout the continent in virtue of their mission and, therefore, are in a unique position to see and share "the joy and hope, the anguish of the men of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1).

Who are Consecrated Persons?

Consecrated persons are "men and women who set out to follow Christ with greater liberty, and to imitate him more closely, by practicing the evangelical counsels." Consecrated persons live a life which is based on the Incarnate Word, who continues to shape the Consecrated Life.

The Consecrated Life, deeply rooted in the example and teaching of Christ the Lord, is a gift of God the Father to his Church through the Holy Spirit. By the profession of the evangelical counsels *the characteristic features of Jesus* – the chaste, poor and obedient one – *are made constantly "visible" in the midst of the world* and the eyes of the faithful are directed towards the mystery of the Kingdom of God already at work in history, even as it awaits its full realization in heaven.

Consecrated persons belong to Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life – "The direct reference to Christ and the intimate nature of a gift for the Church and the world are elements that define the identity and scope of the consecrated life. In them

the consecrated life finds itself, its point of departure, God and his love, and its point of arrival, the human community and its requirements.”

In the light of the goal of this work, certain questions come to mind immediately: how can consecrated persons translate their spirituality and charisms into concrete actions relevant in the important task of social transformation? What contributions can consecrated persons make to address the social realities of injustice, poverty, violence etc?

Theology of the *Magnificat*

John Paul II in *Redemptoris Mater* gave a foundation to our understanding of the *Magnificat* in its social contexts. The social contexts of the *Magnificat* and how the *Magnificat* has influenced the Church’s option for the poor is brought out in *Redemptoris Mater*. The Church has always modeled her earthly journey of faith on that of the Mother of God. The Church repeats the *Magnificat* constantly as her own prayer. Not only does the Church repeat the prayer of Mary, but in this prayer, she encounters God who has done great things for Mary. “From the depths of the Virgin’s faith at the Annunciation and the Visitation, the Church derives the truth about the God of the Covenant: the God who is Almighty and does “great things” for man: “holy is his name.” In this very action of God, the stage is set for the liberation of humanity, by God who in Jesus Christ, the Divine Word, became incarnate in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary. For “In the *Magnificat* the Church sees uprooted that sin which is found at the outset of the earthly history of man and woman, the sin of disbelief and of “little faith” in God.”

If we understand all the social issues in the human society in the light of the presence of sin, and also understand that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word can sin be defeated, then, we can understand the importance of the *Magnificat* of Mary in its social context. Humanity is raised to a new level when the Incarnate Word lived among us and died for our sake. It means therefore that, with the coming of Jesus Christ into human history, with his death and resurrection, the human person is not only an image and likeness of God, but a being that has been redeemed by God. Mary then becomes the first to share in this self-giving of God to humanity. “Mary is the first witness of the marvelous truth, which will be fully accomplished through “the works and words” (cf. Acts 1:1) of her Son and definitively through his Cross and Resurrection.”

Living in the world amidst the many trials and tribulations surrounding humanity, the Church keeps singing the *Magnificat* of Mary, and she is sustained by God’s power, even as she keeps proclaiming the liberating power of God in the world. With the truths of God, the Church sheds light on those difficult moments of human experiences. In those moments, when the weak of the human society are plagued by all

forms of dehumanizing realities, it is the mission of the Church to lead them in the path to liberation. This informs the reason why the Church stands for the poor and defenseless. It explains the whole idea of the option for the poor in the world.

The Church's love of preference for the poor is wonderfully inscribed in Mary's *Magnificat*. The God of the Covenant, celebrated in the exultation of her spirit by the Virgin of Nazareth, is also he who "has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly, (...) filled the hungry with good things, sent the rich away empty (...) scattered the proud-hearted...and his mercy is from age to age on those who fear him" (...). Mary truly proclaims the coming of the "Messiah of the poor" (cf. Is. 11:4; 61:1). Drawing from Mary's heart, from the depth of her faith expressed in the words of the *Magnificat*, the Church renews ever more effectively in herself the awareness that the truth about God who saves, the truth about God who is the source of every gift, cannot be separated from the manifestation of his love of preference for the poor and humble, that love which, celebrated in the *Magnificat*, is later expressed in the words and works of Jesus.

There can be no true liberation independent of the salvific plan of God, which the *Magnificat* celebrates. The *Magnificat* is a celebration of God's salvific action in human history. It is a story which leads humanity to authentic freedom and holistic liberation. Thus, at the moment of Elizabeth's greeting to the Mother of God, one could say the joy that was already gathering momentum burst forth into a canticle of praise. According CDF in *Libertatis Conscientia*:

At Elizabeth's greeting, the heart of the Mother of God would burst into the song of the *Magnificat*. It tells us that it is by faith and in faith like that of Mary that the People of God express in words and translate into life the mysterious plan of salvation with its liberating effects upon individual and social existence. It is really in the light of faith that one comes to understand how salvation history is the history of liberation from evil in its most radical form and of the introduction of humanity into the true freedom of the children of God.

One other dimension that is brought out in *Libertatis Conscientia* is that the liberating presence of God is not connected to the use violence, or ideologies that are counterproductive, and anti-gospel in their methods and applications. In fact, the use of violence and ideologies that are not Christian is a sign of not being faithful to the message of the *Magnificat* of Mary. A liberation that is faithful to the values of the gospel, says the document, is a true liberation.

Thus, a theology of freedom and liberation which faithfully echoes Mary's *Magnificat* preserved in the Church's memory is something needed by the times in which we are living. But it would be criminal to take the energies of popular piety and misdirect them toward a purely earthly plan of liberation, which would very soon be revealed as nothing more than an illusion and a cause of new forms of slavery. Those who in this way surrender to the ideologies of the world and to the alleged necessity of violence are no longer being faithful to hope, to hope's boldness and courage, as they are extolled in the hymn to the God of mercy which the Virgin teaches us.

The document shows the dangers of reducing the whole idea of liberation to a mere social liberation and forgetting the core of liberation, which is centered on the liberation from sin. And this holistic liberation is achieved by the Redeemer, Jesus Christ through his death and resurrection.

The *sensus fidei* grasps the very core of the liberation accomplished by the Redeemer. It is from the most radical evil, from sin and the power of death, that he has delivered us in order to restore freedom to itself and to show it the right path. This path is marked out by the supreme commandment, which is the commandment of love. Liberation, in its primary meaning which is salvific, thus extends into a liberating task, as an ethical requirement. Here is to be found the social doctrine of the Church, which illustrates Christian practice on the level of society.

The *Magnificat* is a canticle of liberation, of the victory of the people of God, because with the Easter victory of Jesus Christ, the prince of this world was defeated. In the theology of A. Valentini, the *Magnificat* of the Blessed Virgin Mary, is a memorial of the great interventions of the God of Israel, and also, of the definitive salvation of Jesus Christ, and a radical prophesy of what would happen in the future, when the victory of God will transform all things. The *Magnificat* is a celebration of the entrance of the reign of God that bursts forth into the story of humanity, but right now, it still awaits its final fulfillment.

The *Magnificat* anticipated and celebrated what God, who has visited his people and redeemed them will definitively accomplish in the Paschal mystery of Jesus Christ. It is also eschatological because it speaks of the perfection of the Kingdom of God.

It is the truth of the mystery of salvation at work today in order to lead redeemed humanity towards the perfection of the Kingdom which gives true meaning to the necessary efforts for liberation in the economic, social and political orders and which keeps them from falling into new forms of slavery.

C. Boff provides two key ways of understanding the *Magnificat*. The first is in the light of the exodus experience of the people of God, while the second is in the light of Easter. Thus, both refer specifically to the people of Israel, and by way of analogy to the social conditions of the people of today. The second refers specifically to the Church, in her spiritual sense and eschatological reality. It is also a messianic song, in an integral sense, which is open to touch also on other areas of human existence, in our context, the social-political reality of a people. In fact, the door of liberation is open only when it is fixed on and hinges on spiritual salvation and eschatology. C. Boff sees all the liberations of the Old Testaments, as the prophetic and literal backgrounds from which Mary sang the song of humanity's liberation from sin and death.

In the light of its social message of the *Magnificat*, M. A. Getty-Sullivan, writes, "Mary sings of the justice of God, who reverses the standards of this world and supplements them with the justice of God's own kingdom. Mary epitomizes the lessons of the Beatitudes: the poor, the hungry, the weeping, those hated, excluded, and insulted are blessed." While for K. Coyle the meeting of Elizabeth and Mary is one of prayerful meeting, and in this meeting their hope for changing the unjust structures in the human society is what is woven into a song by Mary. In the meeting of these two women:

There were engaged in radical, subversive conversation and prayer that expressed their hope of changing the unjust structures of their society. This could only be achieved by putting down the powerful, raising up the lowly, the poor and the marginalized of their world, and filling the hungry with good things.

M. C. Nolan, places the different reversals that we have in the *Magnificat* as God's own action in the world. It depicts the reign of God in the world.

The upside-down nature of the kingdom of God is revealed once again, as the proud who put their trust in princes and powerful ones are confused in their hearts by God's action for the lowly. In a leveling of the social situation, God has deprived the powerful of their base of oppressive power and drawn the marginalized, powerless, and oppressed into the realm of control over their own lives.

M. C. Nolan presents a very vivid picture of how the *Magnificat* can lead us to appreciate better not only the spiritual dimension of the canticle, but also the social and ethical dimension of the canticle. For, God is a God who is not only interested in the soul of the human Person, but also interested in everything that holds the human person in captivity: sin and all its consequences.

Mary's words depicting the action of God in lowering the proud and exalting the humble, dethroning the powerful and empowering the lowly, feeding the hungry and sending the rich away empty are dramatic. The appeal to our sense of distributive justice....A *Magnificat* spirituality holds strong conviction that God is at work bringing about the final victory over all forces that oppress and diminish those he loves. A sign of the presence of the reign of God, that is, where God is acting, is wherever people are striving to establish a political and social situation of just relationships in keeping with God's will.

The *Magnificat* is not a call to a violent approach to address the social inconsistencies and injustices in the world. It has no place for the use of violence in dealing with the social issues present in the world. It is a song of hope in the God of justice, peace and love. E. L. Johnson, puts it:

The language of this canticle makes it clear that divine love is particular on the side of those whose dignity must be recovered. God protects the poor, noticing their tears, while challenging the comfortable and the proud to conversion, to genuine discipleship, even at the loss of their own comfort. The divine intent is not to take revenge and to create a new order of injustice but to build up a community of sisters and brothers marked by human dignity and mutual regard.

The *Magnificat* and Consecrated Persons

The connection between consecrated persons and the *Magnificat* is such that, consecrated persons, in their own way and within the context of their particular charisms, and also because of their own call to live out the message of justice, peace and love in the society in which they live and express their faith, have a strong connection with the *Magnificat*. If the Church is called to represent the incarnate word, who chose to be born and embraced human dignity and poverty, in order to liberate humanity from the shackles of sin, reflected in the unjust systems and economic social stratifications, and the untold unjust situations of the many people of our time, such message of bringing the gospel of hope to the poor, and of standing with the poor is even more urgent task for consecrated persons.

The consecrated life is inspired by love, just as the mystery of the incarnation is inspired by God's love for us. "Christ the eternal Son of God (...) sets aside his glory and emptied himself so that he could be like us in all things (...) But the reason for all this is his love, a love which is grace, generosity, a desire to draw near, a love which does not hesitates to offer itself in sacrifice for the beloved."

Consecrated Persons in Solidarity

In the light of what we have mentioned in this work, Mary through her *Magnificat* stands in complete solidarity with the marginalized, the poor, those who hunger for justice, and liberation. For her, the incarnation of the Divine Word, was a fulfillment of God's solidarity with his people. In the words of John Paul II, "solidarity involves committing oneself to the good of the other seen as one's neighbour; and a readiness to sacrifice oneself in the service of the other instead of exploiting or oppressing him for one's own advantage." "The Church's witness must be accompanied by a firm commitment to justice and solidarity by each member of God's People." The Church's commitment to social justice is not

something reserved for a small group of experts; it is about us, all of us, as we live out our lives and make choices in relation to one another. It is about how we order our relationships in society, the kind of structures we set up, and how they either promote or impede the full realisation of the free and equal dignity of all women, men and children.

In solidarity consecrated persons are able to collaborate with others as well for the social transformation of the society. "The fruit of solidarity is peace, an inestimable good for peoples and nations in every part of the world. For it is precisely by means of fostering and strengthening solidarity that the Church can make a specific and decisive contribution to a true culture of peace." The desired intention of solidarity is always to create a more just society where everything works together for the good of the human person, who is created in the image of God. "The individual wishing to be in solidarity with the poor – and so become an agent of change – must "immerse" him/herself in the life and environment of the poor and oppressed. It demands a firsthand knowledge of the situation in which he or she wishes to operate."

Consecrated Persons and Prophetic Witnessing

Consecrated persons are also to be the new voice singing and celebrating the tenets of the *Magnificat* in the social situations they find themselves. Consecrated persons are first of all to be good witnesses in a wounded society by their life style and by their vocation. They are to be clear signs of the values of the gospel in a secularized and unjust society. In the light of their prophetic presence in the world, they are able to prophetically testify to the mercy of God, and of his justice. Through a life rooted in Christ, they make the *Magnificat* meaningful-

The Church must always seek to make her presence visible in everyday life, especially in contemporary culture, which is often very secularized and yet sensitive to the language of signs. In this regard the Church has a right to

expect a significant contribution from consecrated persons, called as they are in every situation to bear clear witness that they belong to Christ.

In a time of upheavals, where the idolatry of wealth has eaten deep into the marrows of the people of our time, and created untold countless economic, political and social crisis, consecrated persons have to awaken in the consciences of people to the need to counteract the said idolatry. "When power, luxury and money become idols, they take priority over the need for a fair distribution of wealth. Our consciences thus need to be converted to justice, equality, simplicity and sharing." This mission in itself, requires authentic faithfulness of the values of the gospel for the much needed conversion of the hearts and the change of mentality of the people of our time. "Genuine witness by believers is essential to the authentic proclamation of the faith in Africa today. In particular they should show the witness of sincere mutual love." Through their commitment to cause of the values of the gospel, and in solidarity with the poor, consecrated persons, show to the world that "inordinate love of money or its equivalent...as the root of all evil."

Within the social context of the message of the *Magnificat*, and the prophetic mission of consecrated persons, the need to renew the social mission of the church in the society becomes an urgent task. Together with the Christian people, consecrated persons share in the prophetic mission of the Church for the social transformation of the society, with a special place for the poor.

Taking up the Lord's mission as her own, the Church proclaims the Gospel to every man and woman, committing herself to their integral salvation. But with special attention, in a true "preferential option", she turns to those who are *in situations of greater weakness*, and therefore in greater need. "The poor", in varied states of affliction, are the oppressed, those on the margin of society, the elderly, the sick, the young, any and all who are considered and treated as "the least."

For "option for the poor is inherent in the very structure of love lived in Christ. All of Christ's disciples are therefore held to this option; but those who wish to follow the Lord more closely, imitating his attitudes, cannot but feel involved in a very special way." And option for the poor "is not an attempt to create divisions within society: poor against the rich, those who are disadvantaged against the advantaged. Rather, it is an awareness that the whole society is the Body of Christ and that every part of the body has to be in good health for the whole body to be healthy."

Consecrated Persons in defense of Justice

The defense of justice is always directly connected with the mission of the Church. This mission requires “the preaching of the gospel” which necessarily includes demands for justice.” Consecrated persons cannot ignore the sublime vocation to stand for and defend the cause of justice in the society in which they live out their consecrated life. What this entails in the light of the *Magnificat* is that, issues of justice are an essential part of the Christian vocation of Consecrated persons. “The Church as the Family of God in Africa must bear witness to Christ also by promoting justice and peace on the Continent and throughout the world.”

The gospel invites the followers of Christ to stand for the cause of justice and in defense of the poor and marginalized. “If the proclamation of justice and peace is an integral part of the task of evangelization, it follows that the promotion of these values should also be a part of the pastoral program of each Christian community.” In like manner, consecrated persons should take active roles in the pastoral plans for the promotion of justice in their local communities. This of course should be done always in the light of the social mission of the Church, and in communion with the ecclesial community.

Consecrated persons “cannot rest content until all structural and residual forms of these basic violations of the rights of people created in the image of God, are eradicated from the statute books, as well as from the basic fabric of society.” Together with the Christian people (the Church-as-family), consecrated persons have “the right and duty to be present wherever man is and the right to intervene wherever and whenever man’s dignity is threatened or offended. In fact, the Church’s involvement in the world enables her to be an effective agent for social agent for change.” Consecrated persons are invited to be antithesis of a materialistic society. “Another challenge today is that of a *materialism which craves possessions*, heedless of the needs and sufferings of the weakest, and lacking any concern for the balance of natural resources.”

Consecrated Persons as voice of the voiceless

To speak for the voiceless in the society is to enter into solidarity with them, and to give them a voice in the promotion of liberation and transformation. Africa needs `more radical witnessing from consecrated men and women, more than ever before. Precisely because, the men and women of our time look up to us for so many answers to their many social, political and economic questions. Consecrated persons need to enter into more solidarity with the poor like the Blessed Virgin Mary, who through her *Magnificat* entered into an eternal solidarity with the poor and made their case and story her own. The Blessed Virgin Mary sang on behalf of the poor to Yahweh, who has brought down the mighty and raised the humble, and who continues to have a special place for the poor in the society. “To abandon the poor would amount to a betrayal of Christ present in the poor people.” Solidarity becomes a call and a mission with the poor and the

marginalized in the society. For, “before the tragedies and total indigence and need, in which so many of our brothers and sisters are living, it is the Lord Jesus himself who comes to question us.”

Conclusion

Actions in favour of social justice must take into consideration the principles of love, justice and peace. Such actions should flow from the concept of justice, human solidarity with the poor and oppressed in the society. From what we have seen thus far in this work, Consecrated persons have much to learn from the social message of the *Magnificat*.

As a woman of liberation, Mary has proclaimed the great acts of God and his presence in the lives of the poor, the oppressed, and those who hunger for justice. Thus, “Mary’s proclamation that God has “filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty” is a prophetic call to awareness.” More than ever before, the world needs to hear the *Magnificat* again and again. Consecrated persons by virtue of their consecration should be at the forefront of proclaiming the social message of the *Magnificat* with Mary. If the world is going to be a better place, there is a need to join Mary, our Mother of liberation in echoing the *Magnificat*. For, “God is a believer, a firm believer in the promises and possibilities of social justice.” The hope expressed in the *Magnificat* can become the driving force for consecrated persons.

If the message of justice and peace within Catholic social teaching takes root in the hearts of many believers, these people would work energetically for a better world, a world characterized by not only acts of individual *charity* but also structures of *justice* and equity for all people. Discrimination and unfair barriers to progress would be eliminated.

Whenever consecrated persons intervene in the social realities of the people of our time, they are living the values of the *Magnificat* of Mary, and also “following the great traditions of the prophets of Israel for whom justice was a sacred trust.” Thus, through the *Magnificat* Consecrated persons are eternally united with Mary for the social transformation of Africa.

* Fr. Christopher Oshiofa Asamah, is member of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary. A theologian, specialized in Mariology, he presently works in the Archdiocese of Messina, Sicily, Italy.

**EFFICIENCY OF COMMUNICATIVE DIALOGUE
IN RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY LIFE**

Paul Etafo Ubebe, OMV*

Abstract

Community life should be a life enjoyed when everyone in a given community get to understand each other and make themselves available for the development of everyone in the community. It could also become unbearable or unaccommodating, when some individuals in the community refuse to internalize the essentials of communal living especially when some persons see themselves inferior to themselves. The essence of community life promotes dialogue and fraternal understanding. Therefore, when sincere communication exist, people can live together not minding individual limitations and opinions.

Introduction

It can be argued to be indubitable that community life can be more fulfilling, when there are avenues of reciprocal dialogue. In a situation, whereby, effective communication is impeded either by tribal or racial differences, one may not be wrong to say that community life is reduced to a situation where people stay together not with same motive of building a home.

Adding to this efficiency of communicative dialogue, is the expression of true Christian love which Pope Francis suggests should always possess the quality of concreteness. For example, when Jesus speaks of love, he often used concrete things like feed the hungry, visit the sick, assist the dying, etc. Pope Francis recommends that: "When this concreteness is lacking, we end up living a Christianity of illusions, ... Love that is not concrete, he said, becomes "an illusory love".¹²⁸

Thus, this presentation shall focus on the importance of promoting true democracy so as to encourage or give room to sincere dialogue and sharing among the community members. As a consequence, we shall strive to explain how efficient communication becomes necessary in religious life today.

Efficient Communicative Dialogue

Online dictionary sees, efficient as an adjective which means performing or functioning in the best possible manner with the least waste of time and effort; having and using requisite knowledge, skill, and industry.

When there is efficient dialogue existing in the community, each member is able to relate freely and a visible growth becomes eminent.

According to Jacob Srampickal, communication can be efficient, when the proper language or expression is put to use.¹²⁹ Those engaging in this form of communicative dialogue, should be ready and willing to use language and expression which should accommodate the parties involved. Therefore, one can say emphatically that any language that downgrades the other person as not having sufficient prowess to contribute to growth would rather create conflict and barrier amongst persons. As it is common with most humans, that no one is prepared to be seen as inferior to another.

From the foregoing, it is important to state that efficient communicative dialogue to greater extent is one of the most required element in any healthy community of persons living together as religious experiencing evangelical vows.

Democratizing Phenomenon amongst Community Members

In this, it can be said too that when everyone in the community sees each other as equal whereby no one begins to lord it on another whether because, he or she is handling a particular office. Then a true and authentic community can be established through this way.

The idea is being able to come together as we are, by bringing our own individual gifts and placing them at the service of others in the community especially in tolerating each other at those special moments of encounter.¹³⁰

In this aspect, we can add that democratization in community life promotes a culture of encounter which specifies that everyone in the community should be ready not only to give, but also to receive in equal measure, whether it be through fraternal criticisms or compliments.

Renewed communicative dialogue

There might be situations where some religious use their own preference to judge or condition others as yardstick for every community member to embrace.

Pope Francis did not mince words when he was emphatic saying that the path of peace or development has its beginnings from dialoguing and it is through this that we build bridges of

peace in relationships rather than walls that create distance among persons. Here, the most appreciated or recommended form of dialogue should be that which promotes sincerity of intentions. Pope Francis continues that what is needed in sincere dialogue is humility where those involved do not need to raise voices but to always consider that the other person has something by exhibiting a readiness to acknowledge the potentials of the other person.¹³¹

On the other hand, Adele becomes correct to say that where a supposed companion in the same journey begins to speak judgmentally by competing about who is right or wrong destroys and endangers the transformation of communal relationship which is required in religious life.¹³²

Thus, this renewed communicative dialogue entails rendering of oneself to the service of all in the community. Better put, it implies a self-emptying service which should pave way for genuine collaboration amongst all in the community.

Sincere sharing preserves common good

“common good, ... today takes on an increasingly universal complexion and consequently involves rights and duties with respect to the whole human race.”¹³³

In religious life what encourages each to promote growth is when those practicing the life are able to promote sincere dialogue by giving each the opportunity to contribute one's idea even when it may not appeal to the hearing of the other persons living in the same community. In fact, it suffices to say that true communal living, and really give room for an avenue for sincere encounter. The words “true” and “sincere” were carefully chosen, because, there are some occasions, that some members of a particular community, especially those who are in the helm of affairs will claim to give room for democratization of ideas, even when they know that they already have made decisions on specific issues. Thus, when any of these are absent in a dialogue, then, one can say that, there was never any need for dialogue or soliciting ideas. No wonder, *Vita Consacrata* insists that community life can be better enjoyed as “a life shared in love”.¹³⁴

This life of sharing in love according to *Gaudium et Spes* where everyone should always try to enlighten one another through honest discussion, which must preserve mutual charity and care for all in the community for the purpose of maintaining common good.¹³⁵

On a second instance, one can add that, sincere sharing or dialogue includes moments when an individual in the community will be opportuned to admonish each other. Thereby, giving opportunity for everyone in the community to be able to tell each other the truth in love

without bias or favoritism. This aspect, we must emphasize is important in communicative dialogue. Like Francis Cardinal Arinze will say in some informal gathering while defining what dialogue really means: it is when each is giving opportunity to talk, while the other party listens and then roles are reversed in the same way. Thus, as *Communio et Progressio*, puts it that efficient communication is seen to be more than the expression of ideas and the indication of emotion but rather it remains the giving of oneself in love.¹³⁶

Jesus when choosing his apostles was able to bring people from different fields or professions. He was able to entrust a fisherman, zealot, tax collector with the special task of forming a unified community.¹³⁷

Since efficient communication refers to all forms of life communication, whereby people communicate with each other verbally and non-verbally. *Vita Consacrata* recommends that efficient communication is when dialogue is conducted in a climate of mutual trust and openness.¹³⁸

Efficient communication in other words to a greater extent is when people are able to encounter one another at different instances. But in this era of people focusing on themselves alone, we have in promoting true communal living, the option of using efficient communication to achieving the required goal of encountering one another in a sincere and fraternal way.

Again, one can join George Kaitholil to state that sincere sharing in a genuine community, can be experienced when every member of the said community can be free to think and work knowing that it is through love and support for each other that selfishness and destructive competition can be eliminated.¹³⁹

Conclusion

The core of this write is to emphasize that for a community life to be commendable, those in this type of life, should be able to do things that will promote or maintain the common good of all, which most times, may be hard to ascertain because, of the different personalities engaged in this way of life.

Consequently, we shall conclude with the words contained in CCC 1925 concerning the practice of common good which presents the essential elements necessary for common good as when there is the reciprocal respect for and promotion of the fundamental rights of the human person. Indeed, when this mutual respect exists and none is made to be seen as inferior or of lesser personalities, one can truly boast of the presence of an efficient communicative dialogue in the community life.

The Catholic Voyage: African Journal of Consecrated Life

Vol. 11, 2015. ISSN: 2659-0301 (Online) 1597 6610 (Print)

68

* Fr Paul Ubebe, is a priest of the Congregation of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary, and is the Project Manager of the *Catholic Television of Nigeria* in Abuja. Specialized in Social Communications, he obtained his degree from the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome.

**APPROACH TO DEEPENING THE KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF
CONSECRATED LIFE AMONG THE LAITY IN THE CHURCH IN NIGERIA**

Monica Omowumi Rowland, SSH*

ABSTRACT

Unity being one of the marks of the church cannot be more appropriate a topic for reflection than now when our nation, Nigeria, is being plagued with so many challenges that seem to threaten the bedrock of her foundation - her unity. The family of God here on earth which subsists in the Catholic Church continues to be a point of reference for the larger society. Consequently, concerted effort must be made to strengthen this bond of unity that exists among the three states of life within the Church. One way of doing this is through constant dialogue among the various states of life within the Church. To this end, this paper will reflect on ways to better strengthen the existing relationships between the consecrated life and the lay life within the Church in Nigeria. Our task in this paper is of fourfold, first and foremost, we will reflect on the role and place of the consecrated life and the laity within the Church. Second, we will also look at the consecrated life within the context of the evangelical counsels; thirdly, we will further explicate the mission of the consecrated persons in the modern world, and lastly we will proffer proactive approaches and attitudes to better understanding of the consecrated life by our lay men and women.

Ut Unum Sint (That They May Be One), John 17:21

INTRODUCTION

The Church of the Post Second Vatican Council has witnessed a rise in lay activity within the Church. The documents of the Council, especially Chapter 4 of *Lumen Gentium* and the decree on the lay apostolate *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, clearly give an impetus to the pivotal place the laity occupy in the Church's mission in the world. The documents encourage the laity to be leaven in the world through the holiness of their own lives. They are also to infuse the Gospel values in their families, places of work, and public life.

In the same instance, the Consecrated Life has also undergone a dramatic change in the last few decades, and there is the possibility of even more radical change in the next two to three decades. This, social scientists call a major paradigm shift. The Church of Christ which subsists in the Catholic Church here on earth consists of these three states of life - the clerical life, the consecrated life and the lay life or married life. Each has its different roles and functions to play within the body of Christ. As St. Paul

states in his Letter to the Corinthians; "There are different kinds of gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord... even though many different parts but one body (Cf. 1 Corinthians 12: 4-6 & 12). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains that the very differences which the Lord has willed to put between the members of his body serve its unity and mission. What in a plain language can be referred to as "Unity in diversity." Thus, unity remains one of the marks of the Church. In the Creed, we profess the church to be one. Since, the church is made up of many and different parts with different roles and functions, each being unique and important to the mystical body of Christ, concerted efforts must be made to strengthen this bond. One way of doing this is through constant dialogue among the various states of life within the Church.

Our task in this paper, therefore, is of fourfold. First, we will look at the role and place of the consecrated life and laity within the Church. Second, we will also look at the consecrated life within the context of the evangelical counsels; third, we will further explicate the mission of the consecrated persons in the modern world, and lastly we will proffer proactive approaches and attitudes to better understanding of the consecrated life by the lay men and women.

WHO ARE THE CONSECRATED PERSONS?

In recent times, it has been observed that people and even consecrated persons themselves have demonstrated a clear confusion concerning their identity which has led to an even greater confusion within the Church. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines the Consecrated life as a state of life which is constituted by the profession of the evangelical counsels, while not entering into the hierarchical structure of the Church, belongs undeniably to her life and holiness. Christ proposes the evangelical counsels, in their great variety, to every disciple. The perfection of charity to which all are called, entails for those who freely follow the call to consecrated life the obligation of practising chastity in celibacy, poverty and obedience. It is the profession of these counsels, within a permanent state of life recognised by the Church that characterises the life consecrated to God. It can also be said to be the act by which the Consecrated person dedicates himself or herself totally to God, to God's service and to His Church. Consecrated life is a gift of God to His Church. It is a vocation like marriage. Both men and women can choose to consecrate their lives to God as a way to seek an intimate relationship with Him. These men and women bear witness to God as the ultimate goal of their existence and He, alone, the consecrated person is called to be united with. Thus, consecrated life is a deeper way of living out the baptismal promises by the consecrated person who felt called by God and so responded generously, out of his or her own free will to this call of God. This state of life (i.e. the consecrated life) is one way of experiencing a more intimate relationship with God. In the history of the Church, there exist different categories of consecrated life - such as Order of Virgins;

Hermits and widows; contemplative life; Apostolic Religious life, secular institutes and Societies of Apostolic Life.

Since consecrated life is a divine calling; a gift from God, it cannot be imposed or forced on anyone by anybody. It can only occur whenever God wills it and to be conferred on whomever it pleases God to confer it on; just as we so read about the consecration of David in I Samuel 16:12-13. That is why discernment is a vital part of this calling, even before the profession of the consecrated person; discernment is the first part of the consecration and it is very essential. Like the consecrated life, the laity also have their role and place within the mystical body of Christ, and they are important to the building up of this mystical body. To this we now turn to explicate.

WHO IS THE LAITY?

The term *Laity* can be defined as the body of the faithful, outside of the ranks of the clergy and those belonging to the consecrated life approved by the Church. These faithful are incorporated into Christ and His Church through Baptism. The decrees of the Vatican II Council have a profound effect on the spirituality of the laity. For instance, *Lumen Gentium* states emphatically that the lay state is not a lesser state, a concession to human weakness, rather they are those concerned primarily with temporal order. The laity form part of a people brought into unity from the unity of the Father and Son and the Holy Spirit. In other words, everything said about the “people of God” equally applies to laity, consecrated persons and clerics alike. With this phrase the “people of God,” used by the document, the laity is no longer relegated to the bottom line of the Church, but by baptism they are incorporated into Christ; they, in their own way, share in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly office of Christ, and to the best of their ability carry on the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world. Imperatively, this life of communion is at the very heart of the Church.

Lumen Gentium further focuses on the role and mission of the laity. Article 31 of this same document, speaks of their special vocation to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God’s will. Article 33 speaks of the laity having to build up the Church and describes the lay apostolate, commissioned by baptism and confirmation, as a participation in the saving mission of the Church.

As earlier alluded to, St Paul says though we are many parts but we remain one body. Different services but to the same Lord (Cf. I Cor. 12: 4-6 & 12). Why is it that this unity is rarely reflected in our actions towards one another? This image of the Church as the family of God becomes very faint in our minds and evasive and misleading in our actions towards one another. We speak more particularly to the relationship that exists between the Consecrated persons and the clergy; and even between the consecrated persons and the laity? Can the Church in Nigeria in particular and the Church in Africa at large be categorised as the “family of God” in the real sense of the word? What is the nature and mission of the Church in Nigeria? Are they different from that of the Universal Church? Of course not! *Ut Unum Sint (That They*

May Be One) John 17:21. However, it is obvious that confusion also characterized the nature and role of the consecrated life within the church. This confusion affects more than the consecrated persons themselves. It influences the laity's attitude to the religious life, and thus often becomes a negative influence in the contemporary crisis of vocations to the priesthood and the religious life. For instance, parents will not encourage their children to embrace vocations to the religious life, simply because they have little or no understanding of what the consecrated life is all about. In the same vein, one listens to layers of comments and complaints from the consecrated persons over lack of knowledge and understanding of a life consecrated to God by the lay faithful; yet the consecrated persons made little or no attempt in helping the laity understand their place and role in the Church. It is our aim and aspiration that this work can help to bridge the existing dichotomy between the laity and the consecrated persons. It is also our desire that this work will steer up a deeper reflection on the relationship that exists more particularly between the consecrated persons and the laity with the bid to bridge the gap if any.

Miguel Garijo-Gembe rightly submits that the tension between the horizontal and vertical dimension of the faith is the most obvious issue which divides contemporary Church at times. What are these horizontal and vertical dimensions of faith all about? Vertical dimension is for those who are concerned primarily with a direct relationship with God and almost totally care less about their neighbours; often than not we find some Consecrated persons in this category. It worries them less whether the laity have a clear understanding of the consecrated life or not. On the other hand, the horizontal dimension is for those who stress a social liberation that is to be achieved through social interactions with their neighbours in the name of the gospel. Their primary preoccupation is how to live out the gospel values in our contemporary world. They focus more on relational dimension of the Church. They see God in their neighbour and treat them as such. So, Miguel Garijo-Gembe says if there is variance in the way people perceive God and relate to God, it can automatically have an adverse effect on the way they relate to one another. Therefore, he sees the expression of the different spirituality as an obstacle to unity in our contemporary Church. Should the expression of the various spiritualities disfigure our unity in Christ? The answer rests with the individuals. On the other hand, there is the belief that the people of God understands Communion within the Church to mean variety and not uniformity. Communion is a gift of the Spirit present in the variety of charisms and states of life. *Vita Consecrata* sums it up in these words:

In the unity of the Christian life, the various vocations are like so many rays of the one light of Christ, whose radiance "brightens the countenance of the Church." The *laity*, by virtue of the secular character of their vocation reflect the mystery of the Incarnate Word particularly insofar as he is the Alpha and the Omega of the world, the foundation and measure of the value of all created things. Sacred ministers, for their part, are living images of Christ the Head and Shepherd who guides his people during this time of "already and not yet", as they await his coming in glory. It is the duty of the

consecrated life to show that the Incarnate Son of God is the eschatological goal towards which all things tend, the splendour before which every other light pales, and the infinite beauty which alone can fully satisfy the human heart.

Nigerians want a church that is communion and congenial. As Emmanuel Orobator asserts, it will be presumptuous for anyone to negate or challenge the commonly accepted African notions of communality and interrelatedness. One of the strengths of the African race is communal life, and we will continue to thrive in this even within the body of Christ; especially within the Church in Nigeria in particular and the Church in Africa at general. St. Thomas Aquinas puts it this way, the presence of the three states - ordained ministers, consecrated life, and laity - is essential for the perfection of the Church, for her dignity and her beauty. If this be so, one cannot understand the meaning of any one of the three states without some understanding of the other two. And thus without an adequate vision of the consecrated life, the whole people of God - clergy, religious, laity - will be poorer in the understanding of the Church, and of their own vocation.

THE EVANGELICAL COUNSELS

What are the evangelical counsels of the Consecrated Life? The evangelical counsels are the three vows (i.e., poverty, chastity, obedience) which consecrated persons make to God out of love for God. They are called counsels for those who desire to become "perfect". In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus told the rich young man, if you want to be perfect, go and sell your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come follow me (cf. Matthew 19:21). It can be described in this term that the way of the Counsels is a path to perfection. A desire to attain sanctity, does play an important role in a person's decision to embrace the life of the evangelical counsels. Constitutions of religious orders and congregations give sanctification of members as their primary purpose. The monastic tradition presents the life of a monk as the expression of a desire to seek God, to live the Gospel literally, to obey the Lord's invitation to the young man: "If you would be perfect, go sell what you possess and give to the poor . . . and come, follow me" (Matthew 19:21). Moreover, the counsels are specifically effective means of attaining holiness. Aquinas asserts that observance of the evangelical counsels frees the human heart from attachments to worldly things, and therefore constitutes a particularly effective means of attaining that perfection of love in which Christian perfection consists. The Second Vatican Council reaffirms this when it states: "The way of the counsels represents a clearer and more complete way of being conformed to Christ." What more could be said?

According to the mind of the Church, the evangelical counsels are not binding on all and hence not necessary conditions to attain eternal life. Rather, they are "acts of supererogation" that exceed the minimum stipulated in the Ten Commandments. Yet the question remains, Why is it that only a few choose that which is better and makes one more happier? The New Testament gives a response to this: "Not all who can

The Catholic Voyage: African Journal of Consecrated Life

Vol. 11, 2015. ISSN: 2659-0301 (Online) 1597 6610 (Print)

74

accept this but only those to whom that is granted" (Mt 19:11); again, St Paul says "Each has his particular gift from God" (1Cor 7:7). Another pertinent question that arises is: Why does God call some to this "better" path and not others? Does God has favourites? Of course not. The Second Vatican Council points to the universal call to holiness in which the laity also share in. Those whom God calls, he also consecrates. Baptism is the consecration of those called to the Church. For this reason all the baptized possess "a common dignity of members deriving from their rebirth in Christ, a common grace as sons, a common vocation to perfection, one salvation, one hope and undivided charity." This universal baptismal vocation is a call to apostolate; but it is also, indeed primarily, a call to holiness; without holiness the apostolate will not bear fruit.

Thus, Christians who made religious vows before a competent church authority are recognised as members of the consecrated life. Religious vows in form of the three evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience were first made in the twelfth century by St. Francis of Assisi and his followers, the first of the mendicant orders; however, as noted in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Christ proposes the evangelical counsels, in their great variety, to every state of life within the Church. More particularly, Consecration in religious institutes is made and effected by means of the evangelical counsels. For instance, the religious are consecrated, by the fact of their assumption of the evangelical counsels. Therefore, the counsels constitute the exact manner of living consecration to God. There is invariably a relationship of cause and effect between consecration and the evangelical counsels, notes Gerard Nwagwu. The Code of Canon Law states that consecrated life through the profession of the evangelical counsels is a stable form of living in which the faithful follow Christ more closely. Consequently, the evangelical counsels become a means to an end. In other words, the profession of the evangelical poverty, chastity and obedience are not made for the love or fun of it, but for the glory of God and in this way they are truly consecrated to God. What are these three counsels all about? We begin first with the Evangelical Chastity. The Evangelical Chastity embraced for the sake of the Kingdom of God, is a sign of the world to come, and a source of greater fruitfulness in an undivided heart. It involves the obligation of perfect continence observed in celibacy. The Evangelical Poverty embraced in imitation of Christ, who for our sake was made poor when he was rich, entails a life which is poor in reality and in spirit, sober and industrious, and a stranger to earthly riches. It also involves dependence and limitation in the use and the disposition of goods, in accordance with each institute's own law. Evangelical Obedience undertaken in the spirit of faith and love in the following of Christ, who was obedient even unto death, obliges submission of one's will to lawful Superiors, who act in the place of God when they give commands that are in accordance with each institute's own constitutions. The question is what is the relationship between the counsels and the vows? What is a vow? A vow is a deliberate and free promise made to God to do some good for love of God. For the consecrated person, the three religious vows coincide in content with the three evangelical counsels. As

asserted by Nwagwu, when the consecrated persons embrace these counsels in the form of vows, there s/he fulfills the necessity of stability in the consecrated life. The counsels assumed as vows therefore demonstrate the intention of permanence, stability, sincerity, and seriousness of living the commitment involved in consecration to God.

However, the consecrated person is called to live these counsels in a more radical way. When such a person does so, he or she appears to move against the current and values of this world which the lay persons hold in high esteem. The Consecrated person becomes a sign of contradiction to the world. While at the same time, the counsels aim at challenging and remedying these human and cultural values. For instance, the Evangelical Obedience challenges the pride of life and the tendency for self assertion and all manifestations of power and domination. By this evangelical obedience, the consecrated person renounces his or her will power for that of the constituted authority while the lay people go out of their way to seek power and recognition in this world. The Evangelical Chastity challenges the human tendency of giving one's heart in love and expecting love in return. As well as the tendency of the flesh to draw one to pleasure, self gratification and all forms of adornment of the flesh. Thus, by this evangelical chastity, the consecrated person renounces the pleasure one derives from sexual activities; bearing and rearing of biological children while the lay persons find their fulfilment in them. Lastly, the Evangelical Poverty, challenges and remedies the propensity of acquiring material goods and possessions, while the lay persons work very hard to acquire money and amass material wealth, the consecrated person by the vow poverty moves against this current of acquiring money and amassing wealth to living poor and simple lifestyle in the actual sense of the word and serving God in the poor of this world.

No issues touch the lay man and woman more profoundly and universally as these three things- money, sex, and power. No issues cause more controversy than these three. Yet, the consecrated persons chose out of free-will without any duress to renounce them for the sake of the kingdom to be free enough to serve of God and neighbours. To this end, *Lumen Gentium* affirms that the state of life, which is constituted by the profession of the evangelical counsels, while not entering into the hierarchical structure of the Church, belongs undeniably to her life and holiness. Therefore, it cannot be devalued nor underestimated.

COMMUNION AND MISSION OF THE CONSECRATED PERSON

Vita Consecrata acknowledges that in recent times, one of the fruits of the teaching on the Church as communion is the growing awareness that her members can and must unite their efforts, with a view of cooperation and exchange of gifts in an effort to participate more effectively in the Church's mission. *Lumen Gentium* also reaffirms the relevance of the consecrated persons to the larger world when it states, "Let no one think either that their consecrated way of life alienates religious from other men or makes them useless for human society." The consecrated persons are called to a

unique vocation in order to be commissioned and sent to perform functions proper to their vocation. Mission is the necessary counterpart of a vocation. The task of devoting themselves wholly to the mission is inclusive in the vocation of the consecrated. *Vita Consecrata* further makes it clear that the Church entrusts to the consecrated persons, the task of spreading the spirituality of communion, firstly in their inner lives and then the ecclesial communities and beyond its boundaries “Consecrated men and women are sent forth therefore to proclaim, 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.

Furthermore, St. Pope John Paul II notes in *Vita Consecrata*, “I hope that reflection will continue and lead to a deeper understanding of the great gift of the consecrated life in its three aspects - consecration, communion, and mission.” By recognizing in Baptism the common sacramental origin, consecrated men and women share a common vocation to holiness and to the apostolate with other members of the faithful. By being signs of this universal vocation, they manifest the specific mission of consecrated life. Thus, the consecrated persons and the laity must and will continue to tread the path of communion and mission, since this is the task entrusted by Christ to His Church: That they may be one (Cf. Jn.17:21), and in his Valedictory speech to His Apostles, he gave them the mandate to “Go into the world proclaiming the Good news” (Mk.15:16) To this end, we will make a concerted effort to actualize this prayer of Jesus and His missionary initiatives in our world. We now present a proactive approach to better understanding of the consecrated life by the laity.

Constant Dialogue and Communication

The dichotomy between the laity and the consecrated persons can be bridged through constant dialogue and communication among their members. These can be achieved in variety of ways either through Mass media like internet, movies, documentary, through articles in journals, through sermons and faith sharing, through seminars and workshops, etc. Fully aware of some of the challenges that plagued us as a people and as a race, we must nevertheless rest on our awl. Challenges that characterised the unusual slow pace of communication include, power, illiteracy, and the slow pace of getting information to the grassroots among the laity; even the Mass Media in Nigeria are heavily constrained by one factor or another which more often than not are totally outside the control of those who might yawn to use them in the service of the mission of the church. With poor communication network systems to convene messages, this may make this proposal unreliable. However, notwithstanding all these hurdles, efforts can still be put together in this regard.

Authentic Witnessing to the Consecrated life: The Consecrated persons are called to witness to the Risen Lord through the authentic living out of their vows or the evangelical counsels. In doing so, they remain a sign of contradiction to the world, As

the psalmist says: "No sound, no voice is heard yet their span extends throughout the world and their message reaches the ends of the earth" (Psalm 19: 3-4). St. Augustine once said that neither eloquent words nor passionate speech persuade the way lives persuade. It remains no less true of today that the life of the speaker has greater effect in persuading than the most eloquent speech. Consequently, there is no dichotomy between the good news and the bearer of the good news. Our world needs more witnessing. Our world needs more consecrated persons who are living the evangelical counsels in the actual sense of the word. The consecrated life observed faithfully is a martyrdom. In living of the evangelical counsels, there must be demands and experience of real sacrifice and actual suffering. This, if accepted in good faith, can communicate volumes to the laity who are daily faced with the challenges of married life and parenting. St. Pope John Paul II reaffirms this when he says that consecrated men and women are sent forth to proclaim, 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.

Holiness of life and Apostolate efforts

An authentic and sincere witness of life to the evangelical counsels requires interior conversion of heart that matures through personal life and develops to external commitment and service. There is a need for the practice of intensified prayer and rigorous asceticism lived in generosity of heart by the consecrated persons. Witness of holy life counteracts effects of shallow faith that offers no satisfactory answers to the vital questions of life which often make our lay men and women run from pole to pole after immediate solutions proffered by the new age religions and miracle worker pastors. By their prayers, works of penance, sufferings and witness through holiness of life, the consecrated persons propagate the faith better. Consequently, their apostolate among the laity will become more fruitful and effective, and they in turn will be making a difference in the lives of those they serve and daily encounter in their apostolates.

Education and collaboration between the laity and the Consecrated persons

When the vocations of both married life and religious life are properly understood, both will flourish. The laity are to infuse the secular world with the Gospel, but how will they know what the Gospel teaches or how to carry it out effectively without the living witness of priests and consecrated persons who have given their entire lives to Christ? Religious live the radical self-gift of the vows and prayer, becoming a beacon and encouragement to the laity. Conversely, the laity living out the marital vows and authentic family life foster and encourage their children's generous response to the vocations God is calling them to as clerics or as consecrated persons. Furthermore, by their witness of marital fidelity, they encourage and strengthen the ongoing faithfulness of the consecrated persons.

The Lay Movements Sharing some Aspects of the Consecrated Life

Pope John Paul II's Post-Synodal Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, acknowledges that in recent times, one of the fruits of the teaching of the Church as communion is the growing awareness that her members can and must unite their efforts with a view to cooperation and exchange of gifts, in order to participate more effectively in the Church's mission. One way the consecrated persons are doing this is by allowing the laity share some aspects of their lives. It is stated in *Vita Consecrata*: "Institutes have come to the conclusion that their charism can be shared with laity. The laity are, therefore, invited to share more intensely in the spirituality and mission of these Institutes... a new chapter, rich in hope, has begun in the history of relation between consecrated persons and the laity." Groups of laity are formed with various titles, commit themselves to sharing the apostolic mission and the spirituality of various Institutes, and in this way, come to be identified in the same spiritual family. They have their own specific contribution to make to the mission of the Church - precisely by virtue of their lay status - a contribution that cannot be realized by the priests nor the religious. They bring along with them an enthusiasm, freshness, and a variety of experiences which enrich the institute. An initiative of this nature has led to a better understanding and cooperation between the consecrated persons and the laity, and this should grow even more and be encouraged.

Collaboration in apostolate initiatives

In recent time, especially in the Western world, we have seen lay people taken on roles and responsibilities that were once given to the religious institutes. For instance, schools and hospitals that used to be staffed entirely by religious sisters and brothers are now being served entirely by lay faculty or staff. If a religious is still present, she/he is often in an administrative position or far removed from the classrooms or hospital wards, leading some to think they are far removed from the ordinary people. The major problem is that there is no longer vocation boom in the West. Even in Africa where we still have a fresh experience of vocation boom to the priesthood and the consecrated life, there are no reasons why these two states of life cannot collaborate in fruitful and meaningful apostolate initiatives both in the hospitals, schools and other social and pastoral works. A less clericalized ecclesial environment will facilitate healthy collaboration between the laity and consecrated persons, especially in Nigeria. Such collaboration will only make the lives of the individual richer and the church better and effective in her mission to the world.

Inculturation of Consecrated Life

Most traditional Africans see the consecrated life as a strange and weird kind of life meant for the Europeans and the Western world. Consequently, they discourage vocations to the Consecrated life and the priesthood. The Church demands and expects the inculturation of authentic African values, especially in the Consecrated life. Speaking to Africans and recognising their desire, the Church strongly calls for the

The Catholic Voyage: African Journal of Consecrated Life

Vol. 11, 2015. ISSN: 2659-0301 (Online) 1597 6610 (Print)

79

“Africanisation of the religious life.” The Congregation for Institute of Consecrated Life and Society of Apostolic Life and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples state: “This africanisation requires that the consecration to God in the religious life be lived in the social-cultural context proper to Africa and that it may be seen by those around as a manifestation of real love of God and neighbour.”¹⁴⁰ To Africanise religious life means also to integrate into it the values of the African culture in harmony with the Gospel. ‘The Church considers with great respect the moral and religious values of the African Tradition.’¹⁴¹ We are, therefore, not to deny our cultural values but to study them with great attention to discern what they have that is good, true and beautiful and to give these a new dimension in our consecrated life. There are some that can be immediately adopted such as: the sense of the presence of God, natural to the African; values of community life: joy, sharing, hospitality, availability, etc. There are others that ought to be purified like: the sense of clannish solidarity, (wrong understanding of) the sense of fecundity, etc. All these require research and some efforts of which we are aware.

Above all, it is necessary to remember that culture, like human being, needs to be converted in spirit and truth (Jn.4:24), and that the passage from African values to those of the religious life will always demand a qualitative jump and should transcend the assumed values.

We are very attentive to your desire to reach this much needed africanisation. While it is necessary to make every effort in view of generous evangelisation of culture, our consecration to God must take into account the socio-cultural context where it is lived.¹⁴² This is an indispensable condition in order that it could be seen as witness.¹⁴³ We encourage every consecrated person to continue to study this aspect of the religious life without forgetting that a true consecration to God is based, above all, on the supernatural, universal values and on fundamentals common to all the religious. This africanisation of religious life must extend to all genres of vocations.¹⁴⁴

Along the same line of thoughts, St. Pope John Paul II and the African Bishops themselves have passionately called for the inculturation of Consecrated life in Africa.¹⁴⁵ Consequently, the consecrated persons must wake up to this challenge of owning up to the life and living it as Africans by imbibing in their own lives and communities all that is good, true and beautiful in the African culture that can better enrich the consecrated life. For example, Religious communities can intensify the liveliness of their liturgical celebrations by making use of local musical instruments and symbolic gestures that are African in style and nature. They can also inculturate the way they practice the evangelical counsels, say of poverty, the way they live community life, and so forth.

The Promotion of the African Sense of Sacredness among the Laity

The traditional African way upholds and promotes reverence for that which is sacred and even the traditional priests among the people are revered. That attitude and

outlook must be encouraged among our laity who often than not no longer see any value or sacredness among clerics and the consecrated persons due to secularism, modernism and relativism. That which is considered sacred is giving way to the fastest growing modern life, though this has its positive and negative aspects. It is within this reality that the consecrated men and women must continuously give themselves to God through living out of the vows authentically, through prayer, solitude, self denial, services to the poor and needy, and alleviating the sufferings of the poor.

Conclusion

If the Church in Africa and particularly in Nigeria are to grow to its full potential, there is a strong and urgent need to continually promote and encourage mutual collaboration which bears genuine understanding and forbearance among the consecrated persons and the laity, as well as the inculturation of consecrated life. As St Pope John Paul II once told some group of religious:

As religious you are in a position to make a special contribution to the promotion of the unity of the Church. Your experience of community life, common prayer and cooperate apostolic service prepares you for this task. May you dedicate yourselves to the great cause of unity with renewed vigour; seeking, in a spirit of openness and respect, to break down barriers of division and to encourage the progress of harmony and mutual collaboration.

May this message of the Holy Father continue to be in our consciousness as we live out our lives as consecrated people.

* *Monica Omowumi Rowland, SSH is a member of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus for the past twenty seven years. She holds B.A in Pastoral Ministry and Sociology from Viterbo University, Lacrosse, Wisconsin, U.S.A ; Post-Graduate Diploma in Education from the University of Benin and Masters Degree in Theology From Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, U.S.A. Presently, she works as the Director of St Boniface Catechetical/Theological Centre, Catholic Archdiocese of Benin City, Benin City, Edo State. She is also currently the Vicar General of her Congregation.*

ENDNOTES

Lumen Gentium #8 All quotations from the documents of Vatican Council II are taken from *Vatican II: The Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery, Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1988.

Catechism of the Catholic Church #873

Catechism of the Catholic Church #914

Lumen Gentium 42-43; *Perfecta Caritatis* 1

Cf. Mary Gerard Nwagwu, *Consecrated Life in the Church: Discipline and Praxis* (Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt Press,2008),p.1

Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* # 897

Lumen Gentium #4

Lumen Gentium #30

Lumen Gentium #31

Lumen Gentium #31

Lumen Gentium #33

The Catholic Voyage: African Journal of Consecrated Life

Vol. 11, 2015. ISSN: 2659-0301 (Online) 1597 6610 (Print)

81

- Miguel Garijo-Gembe, *Communion of the Saints* (Collegeville, Mn: Liturgical Press, 1994), p.235.
Cf. *Vita Consecrata* #4
Vita Consecrata #16
A. E Orobator, *The Church As Family: African Ecclesiology in its Social Context* (Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa, 2000)p.35
Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province II-II,
q. 183, art. 2,
Rule of St. Benedict, 58, 7
St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1-II, 108, 4c;
Perfectae Caritatis 1b; *Lumen Gentium* 42b.
Lumen Gentium 10a, 44a
Lumen gentium 32b.
Lumen Gentium 17; *Apostolicam Actuositatem* 2; *Ad Gentes*
Lumen Gentium #39.
Catechism of the Catholic Church #915
Mary Gerard Nwagwu, *Consecrated Life in the Church: Discipline and Praxis*, p.16
Canon #573
Canon #599
Canon #600
Canon #601
Mary Gerard Nwagwu, *Consecrated Life in the Church: Discipline and Praxis*, p.23
Lumen Gentium #44
Vita Consecrata #54
Lumen Gentium #46
Cf. *Vita Consecrata* #51
Cf. *Vita Consecrata* #51
Vita Consecrata #13
Starting A fresh from Christ #8
St. Augustine, *De Catechizandis Rudibus*, 10.14- 14.22
Vita Consecrata #51
Vita Consecrata #54
Vita Consecrata #54
John Paul II, *John Paul II Speaks to Religious 1981-1982 Book II* compiled by Jena Beyer, S.J #45

**THE FAMILY IN THE MESSAGES OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE MAJOR
SUPERIORS OF NIGERIA (CMSN)
TO CONSECRATED PERSONS AND THE SOCIETY**

Oseni J. Osilama Ogunu, OMV

Abstract

Since 1998 the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria (CMSN), men and women, regularly issued Communiqués after its annual General Assembly on a selected theme. These Communiqués frequently refer, here and there, to the subject of family. This article briefly exposes the idea of family, exploring some identified issues relating to it as indicated in the Communiqués published till date. These issues are in some way of major interest to Consecrated Life and its mission in Nigeria today and solicit the collaboration of everyone in the Church, including religious institutes, and in the society. This reflection, hopefully, will contribute towards an adequate, balanced appreciation - at least from historical, theological and socio-pastoral viewpoints - of the meaning, the importance, scope and the rights of the family in life of the Church and society according to the discourse of the CMSN.

Introduction

The Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria (CMSN)¹⁴⁶ frequently refers to the *family* in her messages, the *Communiqués*, issued annually since 1998. Apparently, the CMSN is yet to formally examine the question of family life in her General Assemblies. The *Communiqués* refer to *family* on several occasions in the context of its treatment of diverse topics (e.g., Formation, Church as Family of God) in the course of several years. The messages are addressed mainly to all consecrated persons, the Church and the society in Nigeria. Altogether, the word “family” is, in general, used in varying senses throughout the *Communiqués*. In this sense, it is only partially, that is, to a limited extent, do the materials available permit us to explore the stand or attitude of the CMSN concerning the family. However, its many references - found here and there - use this word, family, pointing to a clear understanding of the status, the value and centrality of the family in society and Church. It seems appropriate, therefore, that we attempt to identify and reflect, albeit summarily, on the main issues that are related to marriage and family, as manifested in the *Communiqués* of the CMSN issued till the present moment.¹⁴⁷ Therefore, this article will dwell on the following topics: vocations and formation, the vow of poverty, commitment to Christian Faith (vis-à-vis inter-religious marriage, or money), the Church-as-Family of God, Reconciliation-Justice- peace, health and human life, and identified obstacles to family life, and to these will be

added a consideration on the barriers to the family life, followed by a concluding remark.

1. *Vocations and Formation in religious institutes*

The CMSN speaks about the place and importance of the family in the discernment of candidates for consecrated life. She suggests that “candidates can only be fully known in their family contexts, so the family visitation/contact is important during initial formation. These family contacts can also be used to help educate our families about the true meaning of vocation and discernment.”¹⁴⁸ She also acknowledges there are some lights and shadows in matter of formation, in so far as the family is concerned. Parents eagerly release their children to pursue religious vocations. Parents support aspirants to religious life financially and morally. However, she recommends, it is also important to make some efforts to understand the types of the aspirants that desire to join the seminary and institutes’ Houses of Formation, along with the family background of the aspirants, though this demands much time.¹⁴⁹ Some families of aspirants do not understand the true meaning of religious vocation and mission.¹⁵⁰ Consequently, we must not undermine them but rather take into account the important place and role of the family (and indeed of the laity) in the process of vocational discernment of candidates not only at the phase of the first admission but also during the years of his/her initial formation.

2. *Vow of poverty and the Family*

The vow of poverty has been identified as “an area of much misunderstanding and even conflict.”¹⁵¹ It should not be seen nor can it be lived in abstract, but must be understood and lived in clear and real context, indeed in an inculturated way.¹⁵² For this reason, the CMSN specifically recommends, the necessity of founding at local level a community of leaders and religious communities to reflect on the vow of poverty together in the context of the Gospel, with particular reference to some current elements - including the demands of the family experiences, namely:

- (a) Actual and practical difficulties that people experience with poverty;
- (b) the demands made by the family and cultural experiences;
- (c) What compels some individuals to go begging for their needs outside their community, and whose responsibility is this.¹⁵³

The understanding and the way of practice of the vow of poverty in the Church has evolved throughout the centuries, while the constant, essential elements of this value remain. In an African milieu like the Nigerian society, a realistic and inculturated

understanding of the evangelical counsel of poverty, which takes into account the family and cultural values, will contribute to making the interpretation, the acceptance and the practice of the religious poverty less problematic and hypocritical as well as cause less anxiety. It will accelerate its opportunity for a greater serenity, transparency, faithfulness and service to the people on the one hand and deepen its interiorized acceptance and practice by the consecrated persons on the other. It will lead to a more harmonious and peaceful relation between the local community and the religious community, The more often than not heightened and continual pressure and tension between the consecrated person and his/her family members will be whittled down to lowest ebb. It will definitely advance a clearer understanding of both the nature and limits as well as the boundaries of respective vocations, and thus, encourage a more realistic and honest expectations and a better appreciation of religious vow of poverty vis-a-vis the family's needs.

3. *Christian Marriage, or Money? Know, Deepen and be committed to Your Faith*

The CMSN recognises the need to educate the Christian community on the pastoral implications of Sharia law in Nigeria. Unfortunately, there is a widespread lack of information; as a result, there is palpable ignorance among most Christians concerning the Sharia legal system in the country. Positively, the CMSN not only summons Nigerian Catholics to "become more creative in its attitude towards meeting the various challenges from states, political parties and other religions." As a rallying call, the CMSN also strongly appeals to all Christians "to wake up from our slumber and begin to catch up with the lost time." The Christian community in Nigeria envisages and hopes that more families and the young people - not only among girls and women - will deepen their faith and demonstrate personal commitment in matters of Christian marriage, employment for job, and in politics.

In this context it is easy to understand the disappointment and lament expressed by many people, including the CMSN, regarding a rather frequent phenomenon observed also in the area of marriage. It was noted that some Moslems in Nigeria take advantage of both the lack of information and a certain indifference among many Christians and the inability of the legal system to offer prompt and efficient justice needed to offer an alternative way to perpetrate their untoward deeds. Hence, it appears frequently that "from a purely financial interest, we see a young Christian woman taking an offer of a marriage from a Muslim man. Similarly, a young Christian job seeker quickly gives up his faith in exchange for promising job (...)" and "Christian families unwittingly support these moves because of financial interest accruing from them."¹⁵⁴

However, having enumerated the several negative influences of Sharia legal system on citizenship,¹⁵⁵ the CMSN tried to look at positive side effects of the Sharia situation in Nigeria and admits that:

“Sharia has challenged Christians to work in cooperation with one another, it enables us to re-examine our value system and the needs of the society. Also it makes us to be a little more aware of our responsibilities to one another in the family community and the nation as a whole, as well as challenge good and honest Christians to move into politics in order to sanitize it.”¹⁵⁶

Therefore, even in the area of the challenges posed by to the citizenship and to Christians in Nigeria by some aspects of the Sharia legal system, Christian families have a vital role to play. They can and should discourage “moves” that undermine the Christian faith and ethics; Christian families should protect and promote the rights of the child and therefore discourage early or child marriage; they should be more aware that the values and stability of marriage and happiness of family life cannot be based on mere financial gains. The risk of being entangled in a polygamous union cannot be ruled out. Finally, Christian families should actively help and encourage their members - especially children and youth -, through education and information, to know, deepen and be more committed to the Christian Faith and moral values. To achieve this, consecrated persons have a decisive prophetic role to play in the church and in society in the areas of counselling, sourcing and provision of payable jobs and facilitation of courtship among Christians.

4. *Giftedness of the family: The Church as the Family of God*

It is equally necessary and useful to explore more deeply the “giftedness of the family.” The CMSN acknowledges it. Following the footsteps of the first African Synod, she recognises that the family, African family, is one of the basis and model for understanding the Church as the *Family of God*. In fact, the CMSN says, as Africans we hardly define ourselves apart from family. The family occupies a pre-eminent position in how we conceive life and how we envisage and experience our position in the universe. The Church as the family of God does not mimic family; it creates a new kind of family. It draws on our indigenous knowledge, traditional practices, local resources and understanding of family life, but it also challenges, enriches and transforms them.¹⁵⁷ Furthermore,

“Family in the African understanding is the foundation of life in community and society. Against this background, the Church as the family of God can only mean one thing: as ecclesial principle of reconstruction and rescue of the family. Conscious promotion of diversity is the hallmark of the Church-as-Family. Formation in the context of the Church as family is diametrically opposed to the divisive tendencies of tribe and clan. Hence, the idea of the Church as family suggests an inclusiveness which accommodates a diversity of orientations.”¹⁵⁸

Ultimately, the Trinity is the foundation, the model of the family which is called to life in unity. The Triune God “invites every person to a life of communion within a larger human family. A fuller expression of this is experienced within the model and framework of the Church as ‘the family of God’. Every individual brings into this family his or her own uniqueness, giftedness and inner beauty which we must welcome with openness and gratitude. This fact has its implications for the concept and practice of vocational discernment and formation of candidates:

“We recognise that vocations are special gifts from God to His Family, the Church. To accept these gifts with gratitude from God is to welcome, nurture, accommodate, patiently accompany the candidate on a journey of self-discovery. We need to enhance a greater openness to the Spirit, awareness of the contemporary society, acquisition of basic navigational tools to function and live within the prevalent society with a view to helping it conform to the will of Author of creation. We strongly hold and believe that the task of genuine, Gospel-based formation in the context of the Church as Family of God cannot be overemphasized. God is the origin of vocation, he makes vocation work. We hold that the Father calls, the Son is the Way, and the Spirit moulds and nourishes vocations.

Another implication and demand is that we must recognise and promote in practice the dignity and the value of women in the society, the Church and in Institutes of consecrated life, and within the families themselves. This is because:

“A family without a woman is like a hut without supporting post. The wider society is not kind to women. Some structures of the Church have been unkind to women. In the Church-as-Family, our Religious Institutes ought to take the side of the Gospel and resist the temptation to further traumatize our already brutalized and subdued women.”¹⁵⁹

And to the families themselves the CMSN turns its appeal for the creation of a favourable environment: “We appeal to families to create conducive environments for proper upbringing in genuine love. This will in turn enable children accept their uniqueness and offer their gifts to the family and society at large.”¹⁶⁰

5. Promoting Reconciliation, Justice and Peace in the family

Sometimes relationships are broken, injustice reigns, peace and harmony are shattered. People are hurt, wounded, divided at various levels of their lives (spiritually, psychologically, materially....). This happens in society, in the Church, in the families, and within religious communities of consecrated life too. Therefore, the persons concerned need and seek reconciliation, justice and peace. Everyone has a duty to promote and bring about the attainment of these values. The Church-as-Family is

called into a mission of witnessing in reconciliation, justice and peace in all the spheres of social and ecclesial life, especially in the family life. Today, “the Church must continue to deploy all her facilities and forces, with every member of the Family of God playing his or proper role in the service of reconciliation, justice and peace.”¹⁶¹ In particular, Consecrated persons must be engaged and committed in carrying out this service: “Consecrated women and men, being at the heart of the Church-Family of God, have their special part to play in the service of the Church for reconciliation, justice and peace.”¹⁶² To fulfil this service, one of vital ways recommended is that everyone - clergy, consecrated persons, laity - “should advance and spread the knowledge of and personal encounter with the Word of God as well as make concrete and specific efforts to implement the directives and orientations of the second African Synod.”¹⁶³

6. *Protecting Health and human Life*

God in his love created the human person, set him at the centre of creation and gave him the gift of health, the intelligence to develop the science of medicine and healthcare. Sometimes, human persons are negligent and less attentive to matters concerning their health and the health of other persons. The CMSN identifies some causes of the numerous sicknesses and ill-health that people suffer in Nigeria today. For example, the dirty environment and mismanagement of the eco-system, and the insecurity in the country.¹⁶⁴

Concerning the family, the CMSN encourages the protection of the life and health, good relationships among its members, and she shows compassion for bereaved families. She recommends that “human life and health be treasured and protected in every sphere of life by individuals, groups and government.” Being a part of a holistic health care, it is necessary to ensure mental and emotional health and sanity; this, however, can deteriorate sometimes by broken human relationship and stress. Consequently, almost as a preventive measure, the CMSN also proposes that “we foster good relationships in our families as a way of reducing the situations that induce stress.”¹⁶⁵

At the same time, we are aware of the fact that there have been deaths and much agony in many families in Nigeria. Many persons have died or wounded, lost properties and impoverished as a result of continuous terrorist attacks and bombardments and other ethnic conflicts in many parts of Nigeria, caused by Boko Haram and other groups. These leave countless families in untold pains and sufferings. To the bereaved families, the CMSN proffers a word of compassion and sympathy, and for them offers prayers: “We also commiserate with their family members, friends and relatives and ask God to give them the courage and fortitude to bear the loss.”¹⁶⁶

Therefore, the Consecrated persons, as indicated in the CMSN’s interventions, are aware of the responsibilities and the mutual relation between consecrated life and

family life. They endeavour to be present in some way and as much as possible in various aspects of life of the family, and to have a positive impact on the family. Solidarity of the consecrated persons with Nigerian families in good times and in bad times, in joy and hope, is an evangelical way of witnessing Christ's love. Recognising the vital place, the value and mission of the family in society and church, they appreciate that "the concept of the Family as domestic church should be upheld as this is a fertile ground for the transmission of faith from one generation to the next";¹⁶⁷ and it is a foundation for the service of human life.

7. Combating Obstacles against the Family

The obstacles militating against authentic growth and advancement of families are a source of concern to the Consecrated persons in Nigeria:

"We condemn modern trends mitigating against genuine growth in human families such as gay marriages, lack of due commitment and action against HIV-AIDS, marital breakdowns, women and child trafficking, prostitution, etc."

Everyone has a responsibility towards combating these barriers. Particularly, the families and the Formation houses of Religious institutes have roles to play in order to overcome the obstacles against the family. Their contribution in the areas of, for example, education and the formation of consciences is invaluable and can be lasting. To overcome the obstacles to family, the CMSN appeals to all sectors of society: "The family is at the heart of God and also at the heart of society. We call on segments of society to work towards a fuller realization of the human race as the people of God."¹⁶⁸ As regard the Formation of consecrated persons, and the Church in general, it is recommended that:

"Our formation should acknowledge and encourage indigenous models of holiness and commitment to God in the Religious Life. It is the task of formation in the Church-as-Family to empower women and men to begin to construct and tell their own stories - stories of their models, heroines and saints."¹⁶⁹

Final Remarks

This brief reflection highlights some major themes around which the CMSN spoke about the family: Vocations and formation, the vow of poverty, Christian Faith (vis-a-vis inter-religious marriage), the Church-as-Family, Reconciliation-Justice- peace, health and human life, and identified obstacles to family life. The range of the different issues reaffirms the conviction about the centrality of the family in society, and that the health of society depends on the health of the family. The family is closely

connected with almost all facets of life. The CMSN demonstrates to be in touch with the real life situation and the pastoral happenings affecting the family in the church and society in Nigeria.

The CMSN's interventions contribute, even if in an unassuming way, toward the protection and defence of rights of marriage and family in Nigeria. The Year of Consecrated Life is a propitious occasion for consecrated persons, at different levels, to embark on deeper, courageous reflections on the challenges and pastoral care of family in Nigeria today, keeping in mind the spirit of their respective Institutes and the needs and pastoral concerns of our local churches.

II. PHILOSOPHICAL, ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND SOCIO-CULTURAL ISSUES

TRANSFORMING RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES THROUGH THE VIRTUE OF JUSTICE

Fr. Bartholomew Chidili, OSA, PhD*

Abstract

Since the virtue of justice governs relationships between one another¹⁷⁰ and since it particularly teaches us to specifically give to each other what belongs to him/her, we decided to explore it with a view to seeing how it can assist us reform our religious communities. Because human person is a free and intelligent being, created in the image of God, he/she has a dignity and a worth vastly superior to the material and animal world by which he is surrounded. Hence, it is within the purview of human person to know, love and worship his/her creator. Moreover, humanity is made for an end which he/she is destined to attain perfectly in future, which is immortal and never-ending life. In view of this God equipped humanity with faculties and liberty in order that he/she might freely work for the accomplishment of this destiny. Since humanity is under obligations to fulfill the God-given duty he/she is consequently invested with rights, God-given and primordial, antecedent to the State and independent of it. Such are human natural rights, granted to him/her by nature herself, sacred, is their origin, and inviolable. Beside these, humanity may have other rights given to him/her by the Church or State, or acquired by his/her own industry and exertion. All these rights, whatever might be their source, are the object of the virtue of justice.¹⁷¹ In this essay therefore, we study the virtue of justice with a view to seeing how its requirements can afford all persons in our communities, free enjoyment of all their rights for the purpose of their transformation.

1. Introduction

This essay is out to explore the virtue of justice with the intention to seeing how it can impact on the formal structure of religious life and effect a positive transformation. By definition transformation is a change that brings about renewal of a person or thing in a given environment. Hence, we are compelled in this essay to explore justice as a virtue that can bring about fundamental and indeed positive change to avowed men and women in communities. In effect justice will be defined in all its ramifications as we search all its parts to contribute much needed constructive change in this regard. Besides definition, there will be a meticulous analysis of the parts of justice to outline its potentiality in the production of a worthwhile change that will reform religious life in our clime. Consequently, we are going to examine contributive or legal justice, commutative or retributive justice and distributive justice, respectively with a view to discovering their potentiality in effecting a positive change in human persons that form the religious Orders and Congregations and then we draw a conclusion.

2. Definition

Slater maintains that justice in its ordinary and proper sense, is a moral quality or habit which perfects the will and inclines it to render to each and to all what belongs to them.¹⁷² Moreover borrowing from Aquinas, Kelso defines justice as “the firm and constant will to give to each one his due.”¹⁷³ Even as he has dropped this seeming complete definition, Kelso still complained of his puzzlement over “what is due.” However, Peschke has since argued that many scholars of philosophy and theology have adopted the above definition as a classical working definition for justice.¹⁷⁴ Hence, Aquinas endeavors to extend the definition beyond the duties of strict right to the obligations of gratitude, obedience, respect of persons, even friendliness and worship of God.¹⁷⁵ Following other scholars, however, Kelso aptly defines justice as “the fulfillment of that to which our neighbor has a strict right,” or as “rendering to each what is his own or due by right.” Peschke further explains that since certain items like duties of worship are not ordinarily considered obligations of justice, the last definition has to be attuned to read, rendering to each person and collectives what is their own or due by right, although, such duties actually constitute strict duties of a person and a divine right. Hence Aquinas is right when he argues that since religion is a virtue that involves offering God his due honors it falls under justice.¹⁷⁶ Peschke further draws our attention to the fact that human community is mentioned in this definition means that communities and not just individuals are subjects to right. He further draws our attention to the distinction between what a person owns and what a person is due to own by right. Hence we can rightly say for certain that justice gives to people not only what is rightfully their own now, but also gives people what they do not yet own but what is rightfully their own. Peschke, citing the principle of equality in exchange, distribution and contribution, asserts that goods owned or obligations due by right are usually protected and enforced by families and communities who stake their interest on such a property. “Since obligations of gratitude, common respect, and friendliness are not of this nature, they are not included in this definition.”¹⁷⁷ Hence, Peschke finally maintains that “the understanding of what is owned or due by right will basically depend on the theory of justice a person adopts.”¹⁷⁸ At this juncture we classify the forms of justice with a view to discovering their transformational values.

3. Classification of Forms of Justice and their Transformational Values.

Attributive Justice

Jackson together with Peschke drawing from many other scholars before them asserts that justice is rendering to each person and human community their own thing and what is their due by right.¹⁷⁹ They explain that when justice is defined in this way, it means two basic forms of justice, namely: justice that gives to people what is their own by right and at the same time attributes to them what they really are. Peschke names this type of justice, “attributive justice,” saying that it encompasses the right to one’s person, to the property which one has acquired, to one’s honor and merited reputation, to one’s discoveries, to impartial acknowledgement of one’s qualifications.

According to Jackson this aspect of justice, indeed amounts to “the value of personal dignity.”¹⁸⁰ In this connection, Lanari explains human dignity as something deriving from God as a consequence of his/her creation in the image and likeness of God.¹⁸¹ This understanding therefore, exposes that aspect of justice which demonstrates that each person has God's life, law and love deeply imprinted in his/her very nature. She further explains that as a consequence of this derivation, each person has the ability and desire to give and receive life, and to give and receive both law and love to others. This capability to practice virtues to fellow human persons is also the part of grace God inserts in human person which places humanity above every other creature on earth. Hence, human ability to practice virtues of charity, prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance and other allied virtues enables a religious to hopefully bring in the powers and gifts of loving communion with God and his fellow humans to bear.¹⁸² It is this packaged individual that becomes a religious by choice and desire to further fulfill one's baptismal vow to be for Christ and serve God and humanity forever.

Thus, when this individual duly takes a vow of chastity, poverty and obedience, the individual totally becomes a full religious and as such is incorporated to the full membership of the Order or Congregation. What this means is that the avowed person becomes an individual within a group of professed men or women. It means then that this individual becomes a participating individual who through the power of profession acquires the power to share in everything pertaining to the Order or Congregation. Thus, this individual belongs to a juridical body of religious who from all intents and purposes participates in everything pertaining to the Order or Congregation. This is what Christ taught when he told his disciples that he was no longer going to call them slaves because a slave does not know his master's business but that they should be addressed now as friends because he had taught them everything from his father.¹⁸³ Hence, when a religious undergoes religious training from postulancy through novitiate to simple profession and finally to final profession the candidate becomes a full-fledged religious; he/she becomes a friend and not a slave anymore since he/she has learned everything that appertains to life and duty of a particular Order or Congregation he/she has chosen to serve God and humanity. Such an individual with full consent in religious vows should be seen and addressed as a full member and friend by the members since he/she has fulfilled all the legal requirements to become a religious. With this understanding of full membership in Christian community, Paul addresses the Ephesians as follows:

You are strangers and aliens no longer. No, you are fellow citizens of the saints and members of the household of God. You form a building which rises on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone. Through him the whole structure is fitted together and takes shape as a holy temple in the Lord; in him you are being built into this temple, to become a dwelling place for God in the Spirit.¹⁸⁴

But empirical evidence has shown that at times the human dignity of some religious members is evacuated by obnoxious religious Superiors, rendering them non-human. This aspect of justice demands now that such Superiors should reconsider their attitude to fellow religious with the intention to do a fundamental attitudinal change. When such Superiors reinvent themselves and change in the interest of justice, the maligned religious members will of course, begin to change and rediscover themselves as human beings created in the image and likeness of God who happen to be a religious. From this standpoint, the affected communities will begin to experience the feeling of transformational value which justice renders to communities intent upon God. Alternatively, when such a Superior fails to see the reason to change in the name of justice, the community in question must resort to their Constitution addressing impeachment matters and honorably remove him or her from office in the interest of justice; because all humans are called for peace.¹⁸⁵ When the community takes up this kind of posture any elected or appointed Superior should sit up and justifiably carry out his/her religious responsibility judiciously in the name of God of justice. It is when religious communities savor the peace resulting from this kind of justice that they can realize the transformational values of justice. At this juncture, we shall further analyze the concept of proportional justice. Proportional justice is subdivided into the subspecies of commutative, distributive, and contributive (legal) justice as follows:

4. Contributive or Legal Justice: Jackson explains contributive or legal justice as characterizing the relationship between an individual and the political order.¹⁸⁶ This is the aspect of justice that guides all religious communities in enacting moral laws every member must obey under the penalty of serious punishment. In democratic government for instance, because the people make the laws themselves they are generally evenhanded and fair. At least in theory, all are equal before the law. For instance, rules for voting, trial by jury, right to cones, and protection against arbitrary arrest are regulations that signify fairness for all citizens.¹⁸⁷ In democratic religious communities, people are equal before the law. For instance, rules for voting, for further studies, for appointment, for meals, for prayers, for recreation and indeed for anything pertaining to the religious Order or Congregation. This distinguishes comparatively with the rule by military dictatorship for instance or one party system, as is the case in most communist countries as it frequently demonstrates little respect for the individual. Hence, Peschke maintains that contributive or legal justice further obliges the members of a community to comply with the demands of the common good.¹⁸⁸ Compliance to common good demands in this context means members of the Order or Congregation adhering to a conception of the good life that defines the community's 'way of life.' This means that no community will submit to adjusting the common good to people's preferences. Rather communities should insist on the way of life which forms the basis of their ultimate ranking system of preferences. Here, lies the justice within the membership as they follow their shared common religious values. Since, its substantial life is lived in a certain way, a way faithful to the shared understandings of

the members. We must bear in mind that the objective of a communitarian state is to encourage people to adopt conceptions of the good that conforms to the community's way of life, while discouraging conceptions of the good that conflict with it.

Whereas distributive justice is concerned with the individual members of a community, contributive justice is concerned with the general good of the community (therefore this form of justice is sometimes also called general justice). Furthermore, within the state, contributive justice obliges the citizens above all to comply with the just demands of law, e.g. tax laws, social legislation, military service; and it obliges authorities to contribute to the common good by appropriate laws. Because of this close relation, contributive justice to the law within the community, it has been named legal justice. However, it would be wrong if this term misled one into the assumption that contributive justice is almost exclusively operative in the realm of law.¹⁸⁹ Even independently of positive law and prior to it, people have the strict duty to contribute their share to the common good of those communities that essentially help them in securing their existence and development or assist them in the fulfillment of their obligations. Hence this duty is also effective in the Church, in intermediate communities such as local communities or religious Orders and Congregations, and even in the family.¹⁹⁰ He suggests further that states as members of the community of nations are bound by legal justice to comply with the laws enacted by a legislative authority of this community. Here, Paul the Apostle would say, "obey the legal authorities because it is God who put them in the Government."¹⁹¹ This implies that every member of the community is obliged to obey the communitarian law in justice. This means that there should be no sacred cows or status symbolic difference. Justice compels all the community members to obey the law. Hence, every well-meaning religious member makes it a point of duty to obey the law of the community. Thus, when a bursar is appointed to a community, he/she is bound by law to keep and account for the money accrues to the community and to provide sufficient and required food for the community. Now, justice demands that the bursar dispenses his/her duty to the satisfaction of the community and not seizing the opportunity for his/her selfish aggrandizement. It is therefore against the spirit of justice for the bursar to seize the opportunity to procure only the type of food of his/her delights abandoning the community to perish on want and penury. Hence, it is when the laws justice are heeded to that the virtue of justice brings relief to the Orders or Congregations in question. It is this resultant relief therein that people regard as the transformational values, which the virtue of justice offers to a people. This is the virtue this paper earnestly argues with hope that it will transform our communities. Meanwhile, let us consider commutative justice as we search all parts of justice to contribute to the reformation of our lives.

5. Commutative Justice

Jackson maintains that commutative justice is to give opponents equal share of respect or common courtesy in all situations.¹⁹² It is under this provision that this paper thinks

that arrogant religious superiors, parish priests within religious communities and bursars offend against commutative justice since they construe leadership as domineering and dictatorial. To the extent that some parish priests among the religious insulate themselves so high that they render other members of the community as salves and even at times non-existent at all. This understanding denies women and men religious equal respect as avowed religious and indeed as creatures of one God. It permanently renders member religious as inferior and underdogs. Perhaps, that is why I strongly side with some religious congregations who have obliterated the word 'parish priest' or 'superior' from their lexicon. Since this has brought so much bad blood within many religious communities; it is high time we considered with civility the life of the pristine church where every member lived with concern of the other in heart; to the extent that resources were pulled together to ensure equality and non-privation of any sort.¹⁹³ Or more importantly, we passionately heed the suggestion of Oduyoye.¹⁹⁴ While speaking in the case of family life, Oduyoye rightly suggested that a family situation should be a "policy of mutuality, a situation where women and men will live together and share their lives and whatever they have together on the principle of equal partnership and not servant-master or inferior-superior situation."¹⁹⁵ When we understand religious communities in this way and endeavor to practice what we believe, then the purpose of commutative justice will be served since it accords respect and dignity to the humanity of every member. Besides, we give mankind an enormous respect as we recognize women and men religious as equal on the basis of their profession and in indeed their creation. This will then ensure responsible partnership between vowed religious persons not just a mere cohabiting member in the world but a living together that honors human persons and the God who created them. When this is brought to bear, we discover that commutative justice cancels the archaic and primitive idea of religious communities being one-man/woman-show phenomenon. With this understanding of equal partnership then, all should be recognized as vital members of the community all the time. This brings respect and dignity to all members as a whole. This, in effect, transforms the communities and indeed the nation where the communities are domiciled for better.

When the communities assume this position, Ackermann suggests that the best metaphor for community situation in this case is 'relationality'.¹⁹⁶ She reasons that it is relationality that gives justifiable meaning to the injunction of Jesus "You must love your neighbor as yourself."¹⁹⁷ Citing Martin Buber, Ackermann claims that his I-Thou concept is tantamount to the love enjoined by Christ in that it produces a genuine relationship. She maintains that relationality is good because it neutralizes power domination, spiritual deprivation, apartheid, sexism, racism, patriarchy and above all engenders the power to choose what one wants and likes to do. It is under this rubrics of affording every person common courtesy and respect in all situation that Minuchin suggests the knowledge of boundaries – a family situation where every member of the family knows the rules of coexisting subdivisions, formed by generations, gender,

interest, or role and function within the family and knows when and how to apply the knowledge effectively. ¹⁹⁸This understanding exposes not only commutative justice in action but also encourages mutual freedom and boosts individual self-esteem in the family. In this way men and women religious will understand that they are but representatives of the full humanity, unveiled by Jesus of Nazareth.¹⁹⁹

This means therefore, that frequent cover-ups, cheating, and double-dealing operating in many religious houses should be redressed since they are against commutative justice. Thus, when people duly profess into any religious community, the person, by that very fact becomes a full member of the community. This means that the person should in justice share in everything pertaining to the community. Every professed member should as much as possible participate in every duty justifiably. Thus, this idea of some people qualifying for profession but not qualifying for justifiable appointments is against commutative justice. Or people not giving the opportunity for further studies whereas the supposedly loved ones of the Superiors are not only sent many times but even begged at times to go for such studies is totally unacceptable to commutative justice. It is when every member of the community is given what is due to him/her in this regard that commutative justice is practiced and seen to be practiced. It is in this way that justice brings progressive transformation to professed members of religious community. Furthermore, it is in this connection that expectation is made in regard to the dignity of the religious communities whose temporal effects are emasculated by mighty hands of the local Ordinaries. Since these religious communities are juridical bodies,²⁰⁰ they must stake to their temporal property such as land, buildings, schools, etc. and guard them jealously as they explain the implications to the Ordinaries in the interest of justice.²⁰¹ Next is retributive or vindicatory justice.

6. Retributive or Vindicatory Justice

While all types of justice gear towards human development, Peschke points out that “retributive or vindicatory justice” is particularly framed for human development and social coexistence.²⁰² He argues further that any attempt to violate them must be vehemently resisted. This is why injury infliction relies on retributive justice to demand for reparation. Retributive justice also demands compensation of the injured person and active punishment of the offender.²⁰³ Thus, it is justice to punish any religious felon who selfishly siphons the congregation’s fund for their own aggrandizement. Such religious persons should be investigated and punished according to their religious Constitution and seen punished if convicted by competent jurors set by the Provincial and his Council. This is not happening now simply because many religious felons happen to be the beloved friends of the ruling powers that be, who cover up their iniquities in the name of chumship. When such acts are persistently covered up, they beget carefree religious minded people who follow suit with impunity. In this way the goddess of impunity is allowed to ruin the avowed communities. What develop in the process are mediocre and very weak religious communities who parade themselves as religious but

a quite sepulcher full of bones and rotten bodies. But if the retributive/vindictory justice is applied all the time; all religious communities will sit up and serve God in justice, with fear of God. Next is distributive justice.

7. Distributive Justice: According to 2013 version of Wikipedia, distributive justice is clearly directed at the proper allocation of things such as wealth, power, reward and respect among different people. Jackson contends that since there are natural inequalities in abilities, talents, age, education and other various areas of human existence, all things will never be equal.²⁰⁴ For some people are indeed naturally more energetic, more productive, and more responsible than others and therefore have a right to have more right of allotment to certain jobs requiring their potentiality. While this is not expected to conjure any pride to such a religious, it is an opportunity for him/her to demonstrate humility in serving the community in that capacity without counting the cost. Since we are one human family called to live in solidarity with one another, any burden given to any member of the community will be assumed as a vantage position to serve the community and God dutifully. Those who are blessed with more talents should consider that as an advantage to serve as in many areas as they have comparative advantage. It is in this way that such a person shares with his/her community and the world at large the wealth of divine bounty on him/her without counting the cost. Furthermore, distributive justice regulates the relations of a community with its members. It demands that benefits and burdens be distributed in the community according to proportional equality. Distributive justice has to guide those in authority, be it in the state, in the Church, in smaller communities, such as religious orders or in the family. Insofar as individuals and groups are not all equal in their qualifications, resources and dedication to the common welfare; aids, burdens and honors must be distributed in proportion to needs, capacities and merits, i.e. according to proportionate equality, where things are understood and done according to comparable destiny. This means that no good religious should whine and complain when functions are proportionately shared. Religious should rather work assiduously in any rear they are judiciously assigned. This paper also wants to draw an example of tax gradation to illustrate the principle of proportionality in communities. This is to say directly that taxes should be paid according to community's income; communities who earn more in a way of having plum parishes and great philanthropists within the parish should help the communities that are less privileged. Plum parishes also should be sensitive to the needs of the poor parishes and help them. And in case of paying taxes, communities who earn less should pay less and those who earn more should pay more; this is what we know in common parlance as 'pay as they earn;' this is totally in agreement with the spirit of distributive justice.

Moreover, we must understand that disproportion in the distribution of burdens and partiality in the award of favors is contrary to distributive justice. Above all we must know that lack of distributive justice promotes nepotism; produces mediocrity, and

maximizes substandard religious; the underdogs in the community are always forced by the prevailing circumstances to whine and lament of their marginalization and malignancy. This is why the powers that be must be aware of distributive justice as they portion out the burdens and favors to member religious men and women. Above all, because of its potentiality to produce peaceful environment, authorities of different areas of human endeavor should be mindful of distributive justice so as to ensure that each member of the community receives something proportionate to his/her ability and contribution. This is what is called justice in action. This in effect is what transforms the spiritual power of avowed communities and we need it now.

8. Conclusion

This essay has considered the virtue of justice in all its ramifications and discovered its incontestable values in transforming avowed communities. It is the belief of this paper that when justice is served and seen being served the communities will be transformed progressively for better. Moreover, among other things, the paper discovered that according proper attention to the virtue of justice will bring succor to the marooned religious persons and or communities. Moreover, the paper further discovered that the lack of punishment to various felons in religious communities is the cause of the deepening corruption in all fibers of avowed life and therefore appealed for justifiable and commensurate punishment to all the felons so that justice would be seen served. The paper hopes that when the punishment is carried out, justice will not only be served as a correction but also deter future offenders from venturing into crime. The paper frowns at being an avowed religious and developing chumship and nepotism that certainly mars the true understanding of religious life and indeed retards the progress of life lived in communities as it produces carefree religious thinkers, mediocre and lazy religious members who discover complaint and whining as their religious duty. Besides, the paper discovers that the application of justice in all ramifications of religious life transforms avowed religious persons and communities. It is on these that we can robustly conclude this paper saying that the virtue of justice is the only virtue our communities need now for its transformation and wellbeing.

*Fr. Bartholomew Chidili, OSA, PhD, is a lecturer in the Faculty of Arts, Department of Religious Studies, Kaduna State University, Kaduna. He is also an adjunct lecturer of African Religion and African Theology in Good Shepherd Major Seminary, Kaduna.

References

Ackermann, D. (1991). Patriarchy. In D. Ackermann et al. (Eds.). *Women hold up half the sky*. Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: Cluster Publications.

The Catholic Voyage: African Journal of Consecrated Life

Vol. 11, 2015. ISSN: 2659-0301 (Online) 1597 6610 (Print)

99

Aquinas, T.(1947). *The Summa Theologica: Second Part of the Second Part*. Catholic Way Publishing Retrieved April 5, 2013: http://www.amazon.com/The-Summa-Theologica-Second-Volumes/dp/1481885553/ref=pd_cp_b_2

_____ (1993. Trans). *Commentary on Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics (In NE)*. Notre Dame, IN: Dumb Ox Books. Retrieved, May 7, 2013.
https://www.google.com.ng/#output=search&sclient=psy-ab&q=summa+theologica&oq=summa+theolog&gs_l=hp.1.0.0l10.5154.8915.1.22283.13.10.0.3.3.1.770.4393.3-

_____ (1975.) *Summa contra gentiles (SCG), vol. III*. Vernon Bourke (Trans.). Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press. Retrieved, May 7, 2013.
https://www.google.com.ng/#output=search&sclient=psy-ab&q=summa+theologica&oq=summa+theolog&gs_l=hp.1.0.0l10.5154.8915.1.22283.13.10.0.3.3.1.770.4393.3-

Jackson, O. R. (1985). *Dignity and Solidarity: An introduction to Peace and Justice Education*. Chicago: Loyola University Press

Kelso, L. (2013). *The Third Way: A New Paradigm for Economic Empowerment of the Family in the 21st Century*. Retrieved, May 2 2013. <https://www.google.com.ng/#sclient=psy-ab&q=Defining++Economic+Justice+and+Social+Justice&oq>

Lanari, B. (2013, March 13). *Ignatius Insight*. Retrieved May 5 2013
http://www.ignatiusinsight.com/features2011/blanari_rerumnovarum_may2011.asp

Minuchin, S. (1974). *Families and Family Therapy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, Press

Oduyoye, M. A. (2001). *Introducing African Women's Theology*. Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrims Press

Peschke, K. H. (2004). *Christian Ethics*. India: Theological Publications.

Slater, T. (1910). *Justice*. In *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. New York: Robert Appleton Company. Retrieved October 5, 2012 from New Advent:
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08571c.htm>

Wikipedia (2013). *Distributive Justice*. Retrieved April 5 2013.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Distributive_justice

ENDNOTES

¹ The citations from the English version of the Bible in this paper are from *The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, Catholic Edition*, unless otherwise indicated.

The Catholic Voyage: African Journal of Consecrated Life

Vol. 11, 2015. ISSN: 2659-0301 (Online) 1597 6610 (Print)

100

² In this paper, there are three terms that are used interchangeably; these are “the vow of chastity”, “perfect continence” and “celibacy”. They all refer to the third category of eunuchs mentioned by Jesus in Matt 19,11-12.

³ The phrase “the Kingdom of Heaven” found conspicuously in the Gospel according to Matthew is the same as “the Kingdom of God” occurring in the other Synoptic Gospels of Mark and Luke. Matthew prefers to use “the Kingdom of Heaven” because of his tendency to use circumlocution. It is used, among others, when a person or thing is spoken of by some attributes, instead of by its proper simple name (cf. E. W. BULLINGER, *Figures of Speech used in the Bible* [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 2003] 419). Matthew meticulously adheres to the Jewish usage of not mentioning the Divine name. Word like “heaven” is used instead. Surely this was not strange to Matthew’s addressees or “real readers”.

⁴ B. KEDAR-KOPFSTEIN, “*sārîs*”, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* vol. X (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1990) 344-350.

⁵ Note that the Latin version of the Bible, the Vulgate, adds “eunuch” to the text of Deut 23,1: *non intrabit eunuchus, atritis vel amputatis testiculis et absciso veretro, ecclesiam Domini*.

⁶ JOHN D.W. WATTS, *Isaiah 34-36* (Word Biblical Commentary 25; Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1987) 249

⁷ EDITORIAL STAFF, “Eunuch”, *Encyclopaedia Judaica* vol. 6 (Jerusalem: Ketter Publishing House 1996) 959.

⁸ J. SCHNEIDER, “Eunuch”, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament II* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1995) 765-766.

⁹ “Ben Azzai”, www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/2859-ben-azzai; accessed on 9 July 2014.

¹⁰ SCHNEIDER, “Eunuch”, 767.

¹¹ Cf. POPE JOHN PAUL II, “The ‘Superiority’ of Continence does not devalue Marriage”, General Audience of April 7,1982, *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1997) 274

¹² Cf. POPE JOHN PAUL II, “The Value of Continence is found in Love”, General Audience of April 21,1982, *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1997) 281.

¹³ Cf. SCHNEIDER, “Eunuch”, 765.

¹⁴ POPE JOHN PAUL II, *Vita Consecrata: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996) 14

¹⁵ JOHN PAUL II, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*. Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2002.

¹⁶ BULLINGER, *Figures of Speech*, 419-422, has some examples of this figure of speech.

¹⁷ BULLINGER, *Figures of Speech*, 419.

¹⁸ JOHN PAUL II, *Vita Consecrata: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996) 14.

¹⁹ Cf. “Pastoral Guide for the Use of the Bible in Preaching”, *The International Bible Commentary: A Catholic and Ecumenical Commentary for the Twenty-First Century* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1998) 1894-1895.

²⁰ Cf. J. FUELLENBACH, *The Kingdom of God: The Central Message of Jesus’ Teachings in the Light of the Modern World* (Manila: Logos Publications, 1993) 168-188. The author fully analyzes Paul’s definition of the Kingdom of God in Rom 14,17 in the light of the modern world

²¹ Cf. POPE JOHN PAUL II, “Virginity or Celibacy for the Sake of the Kingdom”, General Audience of March 10,1982, *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1997) 263.

²² See further examples in Matt 5,4: “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted”. Matt 5,6: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled”. More examples can be found in Matt 3,10; 5,5-9; 5,25-29; 6,7.9.10.33; 7,1.2.19; 10,19.30 etc. We find in all these

The Catholic Voyage: African Journal of Consecrated Life

Vol. 11, 2015. ISSN: 2659-0301 (Online) 1597 6610 (Print)

101

instances another attempt in Matthew to avoid mentioning the divine name. It reminds one of the expression “Kingdom of Heaven” in Matthew, instead of the “Kingdom of God” seen in other Synoptic Gospels.

²³ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decree on the Up-to Date Renewal of Religious Life, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 12.

²⁴ JOHN PAUL II, *Vita Consecrata*, 14.

²⁵ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decree on the Up-to Date Renewal of Religious Life, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 12.

²⁶ Cf. POPE JOHN PAUL II, “The Vocation to Continence in this Earthly Life”, General Audience of March 17, 1982, *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1997) 266-267.

²⁷ M. J. OBIORAH, “Who may abide in your house? (Psalm 15,1): the vertical and horizontal dimensions of worship in Psalm 15”, *Bigard Theological Studies – A Journal of Bigard Memorial Seminary* Enugu vol. 29 no. 2 (2009) 7-25 Enugu: Bigard Memorial Seminary (ISBN: 978-2396-00-1).

²⁸ V. M. OKEKE, *The Measure of Love: Lenten Pastoral*. Enugu: SNAAP, 2005.

²⁹ OBIORAH, “Who may abide in your house?”

³⁰ G. D. FEE, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1987) 625-652.

³¹ Cf. J. FUELLENBACH, *Proclaiming his Kingdom* (Manila: Divine Word Publications, 1992) 168.

³² VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decree on the Up-to Date Renewal of Religious Life, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 12.

³³ BROTHER ROGER, *The Rule of Taizé, “Celibacy”*, London: Society for promoting Christian Knowledge, 2012 (books.google.com.ng/books?isbn=0281068283).

³⁴ Cf. POPE JOHN PAUL II, “The Value of Continence is found in Love”, General Audience of April 21, 1982, *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1997) 280.

³⁵ FUELLENBACH, *Proclaiming his Kingdom*, 172.

³⁶ CONGREGATION FOR THE INSTITUTE OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE: *Starting Afresh from Christ: A Renewal Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium: Instruction* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2002) 33.

TOWARDS AN AUTHENTIC RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY: MODELS FROM AFRICAN COMMUNALISM

Agatha C. Kunuba, NES

Abstract

This article tried to establish how an authentic religious community ought to be, by adopting the values of African communalism as a basis.

I. Introduction

Community living is an essential aspect of the life a religious, which is lived out according to the proper norms of an institute of consecrated life. Communal way of living is not a strange pattern of life but from time immemorial has been lived by the Africans. Africans share life in common, celebrate together, and also share certain things in common, such as farmland, streams, shrines, market, habitation, etc.

This article adopts a deductive method based on some presuppositions of the African sense of community life. In doing this, it seeks to explore the values of African community life and apply them to the community life of the consecrated religious. Though the African community has its disvalues but our interest is on the values or its positive aspects worthy of emulation.

In this article, we shall seek to understand the meaning of community, religious community, African communalism, the values of community in African Culture, and how these values can contribute to the building of an authentic religious community. The application of religious community here does not imply a Christian community but rather the community of the consecrated men and women within the Catholic Church.

II. Meaning of Communalism

According to Iroegbu, "By communalism we understand a theory of a just society in which the community is the foundation of political life, and in which the autonomy of the members of the community is assured."³⁶ The basic element in this definition is that there is a unity of two poles: community and individuality. Both are not contrasted to each other. Contrarily, both are brought into a relationship of mutuality and functional co-existence.

Two basic concepts are involved: *foundation* which community provides, and *autonomy* which individuality enjoys. To bring the relationships to a sharper focus, we shall conceptually articulate the meanings of community and individuality which brings them together.

III. Community

According to the general meaning of community as defined by the New International Webster's Dictionary, is the people who reside in one locality and are subject to the same laws, and who have the same interest.

In the New Dictionary of Theology, community is also described in terms of a family, in the sense that the relationships between members of the community are basically personal in character rather than impersonal. On the other hand, it is unlike a family in the sense that the association between members of the community is based on free choice rather than common ancestry.³⁶

A community is made up of human beings, different individual families who together form a one larger family. That is why the very word "community" designates a group of people united together. Unity or communion is a very important word to the concept 'community'. It is an essential attribute of community living. Kasper noted that communion (*koinonia*) in its original sense in Greek, does not mean community but participation (*participatio*). The verb '*koinoneo*' means 'to share, to participate, to have something in common'.³⁶ Thus, this participation is taking part in the joys and sorrows, problems, needs, worries, fears, successes and failures, etc, of one another within the community.

IV. Biblical Background of Community

According to Collegeville Pastoral Dictionary of Biblical Theology (CPD), the term community does not formally appear in the Bible, although there are many terms for assembly, convocation, association, meeting, people of God, household of God, etc. The NT names Jesus' disciples as 'Church' and 'synagogue'. Hence when readers examine the notion and reality of community in the Bible, they must take special care to examine the specific how and why ancient Jews and Christians assembled together, which will be different from modern associations.³⁶

[a.] Community in the Old Testament

The notion of community in the OT was rooted in the idea of belonging to a large extended family. Individual households included parents, their married children, wives and offspring, slaves and servants, all under one house. One's primary identity rested in this family, with its extended relationships to tribe or clan. This notion implies the sharing of wealth of the family (e.g., wells, fields, animals, etc.), its network of support and defense, its honour and respect. Ideal marriages were between cousins, thus cementing the network of trust and support, wealth and power, among families and tribes. One's basic nation of community then was that of kinship, with its rich and overlapping strands of shared identity, trust, honour, and support.³⁶

[b.] Community in the New Testament

In the New Testament, people belonged to groups outside the family network, which are properly understood as fictive families. The community of Jesus' disciples describes itself as a (fictive) family.³⁶ With his blood relatives standing outside a house,

Jesus turns to those inside listening to his teaching and considered them as real members of his immediate family (Mark 3:34-35). Consequently, Paul spoke of himself as the “father” of the community (1Cor 4:14-15) and his co-workers as “brothers” (1 Cor1:11; Phil 2:25). Similarly, Paul identifies the members of the Church as kin (1 Thess 4:6; 1 Cor5:11). He expects the community members to extend the same respect, support, and indulgence to fictive kin as to blood kin (cf. 1 Cor 8:11, 13; Rom 14: 10-15). At Corinth Stephanus’ whole household joined the Church (1 Cor 1:16; Acts 16:15) and that kinship group became (fictive) kin with others in the household of God.

Social relations in the community of the disciples mirrored the pattern of relations in the family. Ideally all members of this fictive family were to be treated with due honor, support, and protection as members of the same household. Hence the sharing of fellowship (*koinonia*) characterized them.³⁶

Greek and Hebrew widows were both supported (Act6:1-6). Non - elite members should

be treated with respect (1 Cor 12:24-25). Acts of the Apostles describes the community sharing resources like a true family (2:44; 4:34) such is the ideal. Although fellowship characterizes Christian social relations, we should not imagine an egalitarian or communistic group.

The same social structures and classifications found in the family characterized the Christian community as well, and family structures were definitely not egalitarian.

[V] RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

From its biblical foundation, religious community was formed out of a way of life. This way of life was motivated and sprang up from the close followership of the Apostles with Christ their master (cf. Acts 2: 42-47). The community that was formed lived together in unison and shared fraternal love.

Religious community takes its model not only from the early Christian community formed around the Apostles but, from the Trinity. The Trinity is the source, the foundation, point of departure, the end and strength of every religious community. Hence, religious community could be referred to as “a people brought into unity from the Unity of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (cf. LG 4).

Religious community is that community which brings together people from different continents, nationalities and races as superb foretastes and anticipations of the Kingdom of God here on earth.³⁶ It is made up of people of different family background and formation who came to live together for the sake of the Kingdom of God. It therefore means that person and community are correlative concepts. To be a true person is to be a member of a genuine community.

Religious community is a family of God on mission. According to *Perfecta Caritatis*, it is a community gathered together as a true family in the Lord’s name who enjoys his presence through the love of God which is poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit (no 15).

The religious community as noted by Kaitholil is an association of persons who want to pursue sanctity. Since it is made up of persons, it is an organism and not a mechanism. It has a supernatural motive, and therefore, ought to be fulfilled through the communion of thoughts, of hearts, of works, of prayer, etc.³⁶

[VI] AFRICAN COMMUNALISM

According to Bell (cited by Faniran), two separate ideas inform the African worldview: unanimism and communalism. In line with Paul Hountondji's definition of unanimism, Bell explains that it refers to the illusion that all men and women in Africa speak with one voice and share the same opinion about all fundamental issues. He traces its root to Placid Tempels idea that all Bantu-speaking Africans believe in a unified spiritual force and therefore have a shared view of the world to which the idea of the individual as a separate being from the bonding force is foreign.³⁶

For the place of the individual in the community, Mbiti says that;

“In traditional life, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes his existence to other people, including those of past generations and his contemporaries. He is simply part of the whole. The community must therefore make, create or produce the individual; for the individual depends on the corporate group... Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the group happens to the individual. The individual can only say ‘I am; because we are, and since we are, therefore, I am’. This is the cardinal point in understanding of the African view of man.³⁶

In line with Mbiti's position, Menkiti (cited by Faniran) insists on the fact that the individual's identity is simply part of “a thoroughly fused collective ‘we’ and that as far as Africans are concerned, the reality of the communal world takes precedence over the reality of the individual life histories, whatever these may be”. In addition, Menkiti maintains that personhood is something which has to be achieved, and is not given simply because one is born of human seed.³⁶

The African communalism entails a tense relationship between the individual and the community. Gyekye (cited by Faniran) sums it up thus:

The fact that the African people express appreciation for both communal and individualistic values means that for them, these two seemingly opposed concepts can co-exist, however precariously. Their idea is that the individual cannot develop outside the framework of the community as a whole cannot dispense with the talents and initiative of its individual members either. The interaction between the individual and the

community (or group) is therefore considered basic to the development of the individual's personality as well as to the overall success and well-being of the community.³⁶

Nkafu (cited by Faniran) calls this tensed relationship between the individual and the community, 'the vital union' and defines it in philosophical terms as "a vision of totality in which beings, while perceived as distinct, are nevertheless ontologically and intimately related with each other."³⁶

However, there are signs that Africans communalism is fast giving way to Western individualism. African culture under the impact of modernization is disappearing, leaving its remnant in villages not yet contaminated by modernization.

Africans generally have their traditional communal way of life. It is a way of life whereby one needs the other members of the community for existence and to have meaning in life. Communalism is one of the utmost cultural values of Africans and it reveals the individual as part of the community. It is a concept that portrays African community spirit.³⁶ African communalism is not a speculative concept but the traditional way of life of the Africans.

According to Onwubiko,

"communalism in Africa is a system that is both suprasensible and material in its terms of reference. Both are found in a society that is believed by the Africans to be originally 'god-made' because it transcends the people who live in it now, and it is 'manmade' because it cannot be culturally understood independent of those who live in it now. Therefore, the authentic African is known and identified in, by and through his community. The community is the custodian of the individual; hence he must go where the community goes."³⁶

The implication is that community is vital in the life of the African, and therefore, cannot live in isolation. Life loses its meaning for the African once he/she isolates himself/herself from the community. It is the community that gives the African his/her identity.

Whoever has no identity does not have a history. The interrelatedness that exists in African communalism entails that no individual person can make it or survive all alone. One's survival depends on the survival of the community from where one draws his/her vital force. Therefore, the individual and community are correlated.

In the traditional African setting, there is no place for individualism. Ejizu noted the frequent use of the first person plural 'we', 'ours' in everyday speech of the African.³⁶ The idea of community among Africans, according to Iroegbu, 'is basically a spirit of communing'. It underlies the ideas of sociability, exchange, inter-subjectivity and reciprocity. In the community, the members relate to one another in a communal

fashion of fraternity, hospitality and care. In Igbo land, we live the basic community called the *Umunna* (kindred). The *Umunna* can today shift from the kindred to the national and the continental. A nation is a political *Umunna*.³⁶

The *Umunna* (community) constitutes the basis (fulcrum) of interpersonal relationships. From it the individual draws his life-force. To it, he contributes his individual talents. From the *Umunna*, the individual receives what B. Dudley calls the “mental furniture” of his entire life. Though, this can evolve with contacts with other communities and ideologies.³⁶

The community is also operational not only in the sense of being the receiver of the individual’s actions and possessions, but also in its function of provision for the individual. In the Church, legitimate diversity is a fact of life, and has been adopted as a fundamental principle in various documents of the Second Vatican Council. Subsidiarity is predicated on dedication to the welfare of the members and dignity of the individual. As Pope Pius XII pointed out;

“...the ultimate purpose of the Church Law is ‘the Salvation of souls,’ or the promotion of the conditions necessary for persons to respond in faith to Christ’s call in their lives. Co-responsibility, on the other hand, emphasizes the contribution each is called to make in building up the Church at various levels. Each person contributes to the welfare of the whole Body of Christ, whether at the most local level, in its world-wide aspect, or any place on the continuum in between.”³⁶

VII. RESUME: AFRICAN COMMUNALISM THE SURE BASIS FOR ENSURING AUTHENTIC RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

As Africans, we have our core values which are deeply communalistic in nature. As a people, we also have our history. In Africa, emphasis on communal activities is dominant. Since they are community minded people their activities are often animated by the spirit of team work. Similarly, the Church is fundamentally a community of people who share the same values and live these out individually and in community. Anytime people gather together for a common purpose, some type of structure or organized interaction develops, even informally. More formal expression of these interactions is developed to protect the rights and freedoms of people within the group.³⁶ The Religious community exists to praise God, develop the Christian life among its members, and to proclaim the Gospel of Christ and his liberating, healing presence to a sinful world. This they do through their respective apostolates.

Nevertheless, Placid Tempels (cited by Faniran) noted that all bantu-speaking Africans believe in a unified spiritual force and therefore have a shared view of the world to which the idea of the individual as a separate being from the bonding force is foreign.³⁶

However, to put these principles into practice, there is the urgent need for all to attempt a rediscovering of the values of African communalism in order to deepen our religious sharing in the Communities. Already, an increasing number of theologians and canon lawyers are recommending the 'communal' or 'communion model' of the Church. This sees the people of God as a community of persons, hierarchically structured but equal in responsibility for the life and mission of the Church itself. This model has deep roots in the tradition of the Church. It was also one of the most influential ways of thinking about the Church at the time of the Second Vatican Council. It equally provides a basis for the reform of Catholic life which the Council mandated.

VII. CONCLUSION

Therefore, this work seeks to posit in line with Iroegbu, 'a community-individual relationship, not Western atomism, not (Old) Russian communism, but a balanced integration of the values that both the society and the individual present, [but] for the full flourishing of the human person'.³⁶ Only such a religious community would succeed in modeling itself after the early Christian community where the Gospel was preached, the Sacraments celebrated and Christians lived in a community of love and concern for one another.

This kind of community lays emphasis on the effective transmission of the Gospel values. Such communities enhance the mission of the Church within the local milieu and provides basis for full participation by all members in the very life of the Church itself.

* Sr. Agatha C. Kunuba is a member of the Congregation of New Evangelization Sisters, Issele-Uku Diocese, Delta State. She is a senior lecturer and General Coordinator of Sandwich Programme, Institute of Ecumenical Education, Thinker's Corner, Enugu.

ATTITUDES IN THE ADVANCEMENT OF KNOWLEDGE OF THE CONSECRATED BROTHER: THE NIGERIAN CONTEXT

Kesiki Simon, FSC*

For the sake of dissemination of knowledge, some attitudes the Consecrated Brotherhood faces in Nigeria. It cites how the Church esteems the Brotherhood but not forgetting the particularity of the Nigerian Church as an entity with experiences worth noticing. Objectively, it briefly investigates into the innate human tendencies to develop attitudes, given situations. Using situational experiences, it exposes how the Nigerian social situation and the Consecrated Brother have come a long way with their understanding for each other studying some sources of these attitudes. It further prints specific stages of training towards the Brotherhood, expatiating each stage briefly. The consecrated Brotherhood is seen to be lived in either the exclusive congregation or the mixed congregation and some light is thrown on the different structures. The Religious Brother is further challenged to seek to be understood and not simply wait to be understood. Pragmatic suggestions are offered, both implicitly and explicitly, to speed up dialogue between the Brother and the Nigerian society. In conclusion, the article appreciates the fact that change is basic. It goes ahead to call on the need for both parties to adjust both physically and socially without losing relevance.

Introduction

The intention of this paper is to create and speed up an ongoing encounter and dialogue between the Consecrated Brother and the Nigerian society in the twenty first century. It would not be justifiable to discuss the attitudes without investigating some root causes of these attitudes. Here, we shall seek to provoke the parties to reconstruct the lenses through which they view themselves. Here too, I have in mind a Consecrated Brother of Nigerian origin living and ministering within the Nigerian society.

While the universal Church esteems the distinct life of the Consecrated Brother, the existential experience of Nigeria as a particular Church poses an interesting study. St. Pope John Paul II said of the consecrated Brother; *'I am convinced that this form of religious life, which has, throughout history, been of such great service to the Church, is still today most suitable for the new apostolic challenges which the proclamation of the gospel message must face.'* The assorted theological documents on the Consecrated Brother (as our

experiences tell us) are not an automatic marriage of ideologies of the Brother and his Nigeria situation and this is no fault of anyone.

Social psychology teaches us that attitudes are learned tendencies. Gordon Allport, one of the founding fathers of social psychology, explains that attitudes are formed by actual, imagined or implied presence of other human beings. It is very human to have attitudes and the Nigerian society has got full rights to have attitudes towards a consecrated Brother.

Who is a Consecrated Brother?

A consecrated Brother is a man who takes the three evangelical vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. The Brother is the prophet of his time guided by the Holy Spirit to live out his baptismal vows in Community with other Brothers. *Lumen Gentium* 43.

In Nigeria, a Consecrated Brother belongs to either the exclusive or the mixed religious Congregation. The exclusive Congregations are those that have solely Brothers and no priests as members, while the mixed ones are those congregations that are made up of both Brothers and Priests. Some exclusive congregations are Marist Brothers, Brothers of the Christian Schools (De La Salle Brothers) Presentation Brothers, Brothers of St. Stephen, Christian Brothers etc. Mixed congregations include; The Augustinians, Salesians of Don Bosco, Spiritans, Claretian Missionaries, Carmelites, Oblates of the Virgin Mary, Jesuits, etc..

The Brother in the Official Church

The traditional Doctrine of the Church and the official Ecclesial positions on the consecrated Brother in recent times as expressed in the Church's document, the *Vita Consecrata*, published in 1996 upholds the life of the Brother. The Code of the Canon Law among other church documents holds the Consecrated (Life) Brother in high esteem. No one is in doubt. Our focal point here is the Consecrated Brother in the Nigerian context.

As a prophet to his society, is it the Brother who creates his environment or the environment that creates the Brother? I feel these relationships are mutual. The Brother should not be a contradiction to his society and at the same time, the Brother should be cautious in adjusting to social expectations. Losing a distinct nature just to be socially accepted is not the point of the consecrated Brother in his capacity as a prophet of his time.

Sons of Sceva?

The Nigerian society views the life of the Brother in direct comparison to the life of the priest. As such, they expect to see a very close life style in all aspects of their lives. At the end of the day, the Brothers have come to be seen as the seven sons of Sceva who were told by the spirit;

'Jesus I recognise, Paul I know, but who are you.' Acts 19:15. In the same vein, the Nigeria context more often than not seems to say to the Brothers, 'Reverend Fathers we recognise, Reverend Sisters we know, but who are you Reverend Brothers? This is the basis for some of the attitudes often created from deep concern to know the Brothers.

Stories of Hope

Some Brothers had gone to visit a parish priest, a long term friend of the Brothers. His parishioners were informed beforehand of the visit and the priest intimated them of the fraternity he enjoyed while with the Brothers. The priest had once lived with the Brothers when he studied outside his Diocese. His cordiality with the Brothers was spontaneous and both parties enjoyed good time together. Then a time came for the introduction and the priest presented the Brothers to the people in the following words; *'These are the Brothers. They have refused to marry and they have refused to be priests. In fact, they are in between.'*

The Vocations Director of a Brother congregation once received a bulky letter from the Vocations Director of the Diocese where the Brothers served. Therein were forms of candidates who had applied to join the Major seminary and an accompanying letter from the priest to the Brother. The letter cited that the young men whose forms were enclosed were genuine young men with all the recommendations to join the Major seminary. He continued that these young men however, lacked the educational qualifications for admittance into the major seminary and if the Brothers could admit them into the consecrated Brotherhood.

A recruit into a consecrated Brother congregation shares some thoughts about his new found vocation just few months into his initial formation programme; *'my identity as a candidate for the Brotherhood remains a thing of keen inspection. Often I overhear people saying that I am wasting my time being a Brother. I am struggling against the human forces that see no sense in my choice.'*

During a two week pre-profession retreat for Novices , a young novice shared his situation with other fellow retreatants. He maintained that, if in two weeks from then he was professed, he would be the first professed Brother from his area. Most interesting was that in the same area, there were forty three priests and over seventy sisters and he concluded, *'I have been almost alone in my journey to the Brotherhood. My greatest challenge does not lie in silencing the voice of opposition but in assuring myself that I am not deceived; that I am not mad.'*

A Rev. Sister once asked a question; *'Brothers, how do you survive as a teaching Brother in a highly clerical society like Nigeria?* She concluded with an underlined sympathetic tone as to why Brothers have to suffocate in a vocation no one understands or cares to understand when they have got the option to be priests.

A Bishop who was a chief celebrant at a wedding mass saw a consecrated Brother in the procession and this Brother eventually sitting on the altar. After the liturgy, the Bishop expressed his displeasure. The Bishop felt it was not okay for a Brother to join the procession and sit on the altar.

A Brother was once told that his life was a senseless waste. In response he said, *'Commitment to consecrated life is no more senseless than a God becoming a human person suffering, dying and rising for us. Love does such things that are senseless.'*

A group of students engaged in a casual discussion with a Brother and the following attitudes they held about the Brothers surfaced.

- Brothers are always looking serious; do they dance at all?
- I see the Brothers as being too formal and perfect in everything they do and highly structured for a young person like me.
- I admire the life of the Brothers but I don't think it is for me.
- Brothers don't have personal cars.

A Brother visited his home parish after his final vows to show his appreciation to his people for the support he got during the final vows ceremony. After the mass on that day, the President of the Catholic Women Organisation (CWO) signaled the Brother aside and asked him why his ordination was taking too long to come. Ironically, this very devoted Christian woman was the very one who had organised the women to come out in mass to support the Brother at his final vows.

Making of a Brother

There are many Catholics in Nigeria who have never seen a Brother going to school. On the other hand, there are chains of seminaries where all Catholics I dare to say, know to be great areas of learning for future priests. The faithful do contribute at some special masses to feed and support the seminarians in their studies. This is a common fact. On the other hand, they have never heard of contributions for Brothers' training, not to talk of seeing an institution like the seminary where the Brothers are trained. The following paragraphs give brief stages a young man follows to his perpetual vows as a Brother. Advancing the knowledge on the Consecrated Brother is the surest way to correct or harmonise some attitudes.

a. Aspirancy

This is a period when any young man interested in joining the Brothers keeps touch with the Consecrated Brothers. Visits to and from the community of Brothers is part of this stage. Familiarisation is the key factor at this stage. Students, who are still in school, be it secondary or tertiary institutions are recruited as aspirants. During their holidays, they could come and spend some time with the Brothers, to see how the Brothers live.

This aspirancy period is flexible as the young man is still busy in another commitment. Both the Brothers and the aspiring young man at this stage observe each other for possible admission when both parties are ready. It is a good experience for any young man and it is not compulsory that once one aspires he must join the Brothers. This period could go for six months, three or more years. The young man can commence his Aspirancy period even when he is in secondary school so that as soon as he graduates, he can join the Brothers.

b. Postulancy

The Postulancy is a more structured stage similar to the Spiritual year in the Seminary for better understanding. At this stage, the young man moves into a structured programme with other young men to further nurture their call to the consecrated Brotherhood. The Postulancy is normally managed by specially trained Brothers on the staff. They accompany the young men to discover their call in a more formal way from the Aspirancy. Gradually, the young man is being introduced to the life in stages. During this period, there is a designed syllable of study. Rudiments of the Scriptures, Church History, institute resource materials, Religious life and psychology among other courses are taught. Some congregations affiliate some of the courses to gain credits from universities or equivalent institutions. This period ranges from six to eighteen months depending on the religious Congregation.

c. Novitiate

The novitiate is a more structured stage. This stage comes immediately after the Postulancy or after the tertiary studies as spelt out in the Congregational policies. No matter the time it comes, its structured nature remains fundamental. After this stage, the novice is ready to take his first religious vows as a member of the congregation. Novitiate is characterised by deep prayers and discernment. Structured courses are also available and like the Postulancy too, the courses could be affiliated to a university for credits. However, the focus of the novitiate is deepening one's prayer life, the spirit and charism of the congregation, discernment process and other facets of the human development.

d. Scholasticate/Professional training

The Scholasticate period is the time to specialize in a professional skill according to the talent and interest of the Brother. This training takes place in the secular universities or its equivalent institutions, that can meet the needs of the Brothers. In the Nigerian case, over 95 percent of the Brothers are trained during this time outside the country. This

has largely been so, because of the strikes in the Nigerian universities that interfere with the smooth training of the Brothers in public universities.

The visibility of the Brothers in Nigerian society would have been most pronounced during this stage if the Brothers had a particular university of studies. During this period, the congregational needs and the individual's talent and interests are explored for maximum utility of the human resources. The Brothers go to school depending on the ministry the congregation is engaged in. These ministries include medical, educational, youth ministry, communication, charity, engineering, journalism, hospitality ministry etc.

e. Perpetual profession/vows

After following the various stages of initial formation and experiencing the community life, the young man is ready to take his perpetual vows, final vows or perpetual profession as one chooses to term it. The period from Postulancy to final commitment lasts for an average of 8 to 10 years.

f. On-going formation

The on-going formation embraces programmes of continuous renewal that the perpetually professed undertakes in order to keep abreast with the realities of the evolving situation in his congregation, church and society. These programmes take different forms, for example: further studies, renewal courses, seminars, retreats, sabbatical leaves, new skill acquisition programmes, educational researches, etc. depending on the paradigm shift stirring the individual Brother. On-going formation is continuous.

How some attitudes evolved

A Chinese proverb says that; "The best time to plant a tree is twenty years ago and the next best time is today". Relating this to the reality of the foundation of the consecrated Brother in Nigeria, it suffices to make some connection. What is the connection? Most of the congregations of Brothers in Nigeria have their foundations outside Nigeria. When these Brothers came, they did a lot in terms of ministering to the educational and other needs of the people. They aided in offering architectural expertise and used their engineering skills to drive through bumpy regions to get the missions into the remotest areas. Very little was done in many congregations to recruit local Brothers to replace them in comparison to the effort put in recruiting local priests to replace the aging priests. So, the next best time to talk about the consecrated Brother is today, now and here.

When eventually some need to promote vocation to the consecrated Brother was considered, the advertisement bred some unintended attitudes in the local church. In

many cases, the adverts required six credits including English for those who wanted to be priests and five credits including English for those who wanted to be Brothers. The presentation of different educational qualifications for aspirants to Priesthood and Brotherhood, instead of opening door to brotherhood projected Brother as a man of lower educational standard within the Nigerian society. Each publication of The Ambassador Magazine carried these adverts throughout the 90s.

Those who were initially initiated into the consecrated Brotherhood had to be trained by the foreign formators. Some had very vague knowledge of the Nigerian society. These formators gave the impression that all that the Brother needed was provided in the community living. While their seminary counterparts had more time to come back home and be with their people during breaks and apostolic/pastoral programmes, the average Brother remained only in the institutions in which Brothers worked and from the institutions they went to the communities, with minimal interaction with the local church. From this onset, the local Nigerian church never really got to know the Brother. Finally, the attitudes that surround the consecrated Brother are emergency indicators that the Brother needs to speak more openly about himself in the Nigerian situation. These attitudes are nothing negative but revolutionary in that they are a call to the Brother to dialogue with the Nigerian society, how to be a Nigerian Consecrated Brother in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Some of these attitudes are there because, the emerging spiritualities of the said society are increasingly contrasting the basic life style of the Brothers as observed by the people. Historically, the age of persecution, the early Christians felt they had no heroic perspective in their religious practice. Therefore, individual men and women took off to the deserts to live as hermits in strict solitude and prayers. After some time, the monasteries emerged and moved away from the desert to live in rich agricultural areas, praying and farming. I am sure older hermits were seen as obscured with the appearance of monasteries. As the society changed, mendicants who begged to sustain themselves emerged. Gradually, the feudal culture produced canons that mingled with the land owners and political law makers singling themselves as rich landlords.

The lavish life of the canons saw the mendicants adapting their lives to live in townships to beg and support those who were wretched. A social response to the society saw some canons giving up their wealth to help the poor. They also received from the rich sources to enable the paupers to live decent lives.

At each turn of history, attitudes developed. We see the society changing to maintain its relevance without missing its focal point: service to humanity and love of God. This remains the challenge of the consecrated Brother and the Church in Nigeria today.

*Kesiki Simon, FSC, is a Brother of the Christian Schools known as De La Salle Brothers in Nigeria. He currently serves in the Postulancy

Formation House of the Brothers in Benue State after four years of experience as the Vice Rector of St Peters Minor Seminary, Yola Adamawa State. Passionate for youth ministry, Kesiki has engaged in youth activities in and outside Nigeria. He is author of the book, *The Gift of Youthfulness*.

References

John Paul II, *Discourse to the plenary session of the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes*, 24 January, 1986.

Smith E. R & Mackie D. M (2007), *Social Psychology*. London: Psychology Press

Carl K. (1991) *The Catholic Church, journey, wisdom and mission*. Winona, Minnesota: St. Mary's Press.

PART 3. SPIRITUALITY AND CHARISM

MEDITATION: SOURCE OF SPIRITUAL WEALTH AND BODILY HEALTH

Juliana Kemi Osiyemi, EHJ*

ABSTRACT

Meditation is a vital tool for anyone who wants to make progress in his/her social and spiritual life. When one meditates properly one gets an abundance of physical health and well as spiritual wealth. Meditation is highly valued in the Eastern tradition and in the Christian world. The psalmists valued meditation, mentioning it sixteen times, and urged us to reflect on aspects of God's character (such as unfailing love, Ps. 48:9), God's works (Ps. 77:2; 143:5; 145:5).

The use of Scripture for meditation is very beneficial for Christian growth. Just as there are many ways to pray and study Scripture, Christians throughout the ages have found many ways to meditate on the scripture. Silence, posture and place are of utmost importance when we meditate. Bible study should not be confused with meditation, but Lectio Divina (reading a passage, meditating on that passage, praying and contemplating God) is closely associated with it.

That meditation is good does not mean that there are no difficulties with it. We often battle with distractions, feel sleepy, cannot stop the mental chatter in our heads, feel restless, cannot achieve the state of absolute focus.

To meditate properly, we need to visualize the scene of the bible passage and make active use of our five senses. To get the fruit of meditation - bodily health and spiritual wealth - we need to do our meditation regularly and faithfully. Meditation needs discipline, fidelity, consistency and resilience.

INTRODUCTION

“Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all” (1 Tim 4:15).

Christian meditation focuses on the Word of God in the Bible. One of the ways of encountering God is in *Meditation*. It is not meant for Priests and Religious alone. It is meant for all believers. Meditation is the prayer of the heart when we stay silent, remain still and simple as we ponder the Word of God in scripture.

Meditating on God is like taking spiritual medicine, which will make you feel better and act better and do a better job. These days, even Medical personnel seriously recommend meditation as a healing process for their patients. They ask them to do it daily for five, ten, fifteen minutes or more. This is good, but Christian meditation is different from this. Christian meditation is also different from Eastern style of meditation, though some of their methods do enhance Christian mediation.

All spiritual practices recommend using meditation, prayer or quiet time daily. Meditation helps us to progressively connect with our senses, calm the mind, detach from our emotions and harmonize our whole being. As we practice regularly, we can begin to contemplate abstract qualities to consciously move into experience of the universal. Meditation also strengthens our ability to use intuition to connect with the divine. There are many different approaches to meditation and prayer, and lots of wonderful resources available to guide us in learning the art of going into silence.

SCRIPTURE BASIS FOR MEDITATION

One important but often overlooked way to connect with God is meditating on Scripture. Joshua wrote that as you meditate, you become “careful to do everything written in [the book of the Law]” (Josh. 1:8). God moves beyond the door of our inner being through Scripture meditation and works important heart changes. The psalmists valued meditation, mentioning it sixteen times, and urged us to reflect on aspects of God’s character (such as unfailing love, Ps. 48:9), God’s works (Ps. 77:2; 143:5; 145:5), and God’s precepts and ways (Ps. 119:15). Just as there are many ways to pray and study Scripture, Christians throughout the ages have found many ways to meditate.

EXPERIENCE AND ENCOUNTER WITH GOD: I urge us to desire to have an encounter with God. We should let the Word of God take root in us through the daily practice of meditation. We cannot be the same again when we encounter God. If the Word of God takes root in us, we simply cannot be the same again. If we experience God, our life will change. An experience and encounter with God will help us. Let’s desire it. Twenty or thirty minutes of daily meditation on scripture is ideal. Yes, we live in a busy world. There is noise all around us, but we must struggle to find that time in our bedroom, chapel or parish Church and meditate on the word of God. Read the Bible two or three times or more, think over the passage that has been read. For example, it is only in meditation that we can understand the gospel reading that Jesus is not casting any negative shadow on Mary who bore Jesus in her womb, but that Jesus is inviting everyone to receive God’s blessing. I can assure us that when we meditate, things will be revealed to us. No one will need to go after people with higher spiritual power. The Spirit of God will give us answers from within the center of our hearts.

Meditation is *experiential*, it is not *theoretical*. It is also called mental prayer. Many John Cassian, John Main all explored the beauty of meditation and the different methods that can be used. Early morning is the best time for meditation. There is no distraction yet – no phone calls, no television and newspaper yet. Evening time, after the day's work is also a good time for some people. The best way to meditate is first to sit down, sit still, keep one's back straight, breathe from the belly, be relaxed but alert. The place and posture adopted is very important for fruitful meditation.

THE FIVE SENSES

Let's look at how we can use the five senses approach for meditation. One of the best-known ways to meditate is to enter into Scripture with all five senses: sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell (a format originated by St. Ignatius of Loyola). Scripture itself urges us to use our senses: "O taste and see that the Lord is good"; "My sheep hear my voice" (Psalm 34:8; John 10:27). Using the five senses allows you to experience the text in a fresh way.

We place ourselves fully within a story from the Gospels. We become onlooker-participants and give full rein to our imagination. Jesus is speaking to a blind man at the side of the road. We feel the hot Mediterranean sun beating down. We smell the dust kicked up by the passersby. We feel the itchy clothing we're wearing, the sweat rolling down our brow, a rumble of hunger. We see the desperation in the blind man's face and hear the wail of hope in his words. We note the irritation of the disciples. Above all we watch Jesus – the way he walks, his gestures, the look in his eyes, the expression on his face. We hear him speak the words that are recorded in the Gospel.

The best-known example of this use of the imagination in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola is the contemplation on Jesus' birth in the second week. St. Ignatius suggests that we imagine "the labors of the journey to Bethlehem, the struggles of finding a shelter, the poverty, the thirst, the hunger, the cold, the insults that meet the arrival of God-with-us." In the course of the Exercises, Ignatius proposes many such scenes from the Gospels for imaginative contemplation. He chooses scenes of Jesus acting rather than Jesus teaching or telling parables. He wants us to see Jesus interacting with others, Jesus making decisions, Jesus moving about, Jesus ministering. He doesn't want us to think about Jesus. He wants us to experience him. He wants Jesus to fill our senses. He wants us to meet him.

For example, as you enter into the text of Mark 10:17-22, you may take the role of the rich young ruler and see what he saw. In verse 21, Jesus "looked at him and loved him," then immediately challenged him to give up what he apparently loved best: his wealth.

LET'S GO TO THE MEDITATION LABORATORY NOW AND HAVE SOME PRACTICALS

Shut your eyes now. Imagine Jesus' look of love followed by this challenge. I began doing that years ago, and ever since, I have repeatedly had a sense of God looking at me

with love and challenging me to give up ingrained habits: self-centered thinking, judgmental attitudes, the need to be right. When I just can't give those things up, that picture of Jesus' loving yet challenging gaze resurfaces and I gradually relinquish them. As I meditate on a passage, I wonder what the biblical scene looked like. While meditating on the transfiguration of Christ, I've imagined Jesus' radiant face. Once as I imagined the scene, I wondered (as a skilled movie director would), What was Jesus doing when his appearance changed? I peeked at the original script and found that Jesus was praying (Lk. 9:29). I prostrated myself on the floor and said to God, 'As I pray, change me too'. Make me the person You wish me to be.

Another meditation question I use is, "How would I have behaved if I'd been a disciple sitting in the boat?" As Jesus talked to Legion in that graveyard by the sea, how would I have responded to the screams of the demonized man and the smell of blood from his cut flesh (Mk. 5:5)? What would I have thought of my teacher, who was not intimidated by this naked, crazy man, but cared for him? Would I have wanted to run for the hills? Would I have gotten out of the boat to watch Jesus in action?

BIBLE STUDY IS DIFFERENT FROM MEDITATION

Meditation requires that we pay attention to the details of Scripture, but it's different from Bible study. In Bible study, we dissect the text; in Scripture meditation, we savor it and enter into it. In Bible study, we ask questions about the text; in meditation, we let the text ask questions of us. Meditation helps us absorb scriptural truth, see in our minds how God behaved in Scripture, and become open to behaving the same way.

"SACRED READING"- LECTIO DIVINA

As I tried to meditate on the New Testament letters and Old Testament poets and prophets, I found that another classic method helped: lectio divina. This widely used method consists of four parts: reading a passage, meditating on that passage, praying and contemplating God. After the Scripture is read aloud, participants wait for a word, phrase or image from the passage to emerge and stay with them. From this phrase or image, the participant asks, What does this passage say to me right now? (Bible study is good preparatory work because it asks, What did the passage say to listeners then? This keeps us from coming up with absurd answers to this question.)

DISTRACTION

During meditation, I have had to battle with distractions. Sometimes I fall asleep. Many times I could not stop the mental chatter in my head. I feel restless. The day to day stress keeps pulling me out of mediation. I have also severally asked myself 'How do I stay awake during meditation? Can I be focused during meditation? Am I doing my meditation.

CONCLUSION

My personal experience tells me that the key to good mediation is being absolutely focused. To get the fruit of meditation, bodily health and spiritual wealth, we need to do our mediation regularly and faithfully. We need to visualize the scene of the bible passage and make active use of our five senses. This takes discipline no doubt, but it is achievable. We need consistency and resilience in order to reap the fruit of mediation.

References

1. Michael Harter SJ, *Hearts on fire: praying with Jesuits*,
2. *28 ways of praying*, edited by Spirituality Committee members
3. *The Jerusalem Bible*
4. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*
5. Lawrence Freeman, OSB, *Christian meditation: your daily practice*
6. Adelmo Spagnolo, *Seven minutes a day with Jesus - Year C*
7. Thomas a Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*
8. Vishen Lakhiani, *You do it everyday, but do you do it right*, Youtube
9. Allison Peers, *The interior Castle: St. Theresa of Avila*

* Sr. Juliana Kemi Osiyemi, EHI is a member of the Institute of the Sisters of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus. She is the immediate past Executive Secretary of the *Nigeria Conference of Women Religious*. She is currently on the leadership team of her Institute.

PART 4 INTERVIEWS - EXPERIENCES - TESTIMONIES

DOMINICAN SISTERS OF ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA, GUSAU, NIGERIA: EXPERIENCE OF MINISTERING IN THE NORTH-WESTERN PART OF NIGERIA

*Faustina Jimoh, OP
Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena,
Gusau, Nigeria.*

Introduction

North-western Nigeria covers a total of nine (9) States, namely; Sokoto, Niger, Kebbi, Zamfara, Katsina, Kano, Jigawa, and Kaduna. It is a region that is blessed in terms of vastness of land which provides opportunity for engaging in agricultural projects especially in the large production of grains for which the area is known. It is also a region that is very passionate about religion and religious practices. Being predominantly Islamic it retains an atmosphere of strict Islamic ethics which gives an impression that people of other religious affiliations are

either lackadaisically tolerated or totally unwelcomed. In spite of this reality, people of different religious beliefs have continued to co-exist in this region and engage with one another although sadly in mutual distrust especially in recent times. This is the region where the Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena, Gusau, Nigeria, were founded over forty years ago, and where most of their communities are sited.

The Dominican Sisters: A brief history

In 1956, at the invitation of the Dominican Fathers of the Province of St. Albert the Great, USA to work in the then Sokoto Prefecture, the Dominican Sisters of Great Bend, Kansas, USA missioned three Sisters to Gusau to respond to the need for a Christian presence, and to carry out the most needed work of evangelization, healthcare and education in that region. These Sisters expended their youthful energies in these ministries. They established clinics/maternity in Gusau, Malumfashi, and Yelwa-Yauri (now Kontagora Vicariate). This was at a time when Nigeria was far from what it is today. The Sisters delivered healthcare services both at the clinics and in homes as at this time many of the rural dwellers thought that going to the hospital meant going to die. So rather than meet the Sisters at the dispensary/hospital for treatment and delivery of babies, the Sisters went to their homes for such services. They also engaged the rural women in skill acquisition programs.

After many years of strictly engaging in evangelization, medical and educational ministries, the Sisters saw the need to start an indigenous foundation of Dominican Sisters to assist them and to continue the ministries when they return to the United States of America. In 1966, six young women who were recruited as “preps” (preparatory to Secondary School) were sent to a Secondary School started by these Great Bend Dominican missionaries at Amakohia, Ikeduru in the present day Imo State at the invitation of Bishop Whelan of Owerri diocese. Unfortunately, this first attempt of training indigenous young women who would later become Dominican Sisters was interrupted as in October 1967, the Sisters at Amakohia who almost got trapped in the Nigeria/Biafran crises left the country at the last minute and as a result were not allowed entry when they wanted to return. That school was taken over by the then East Central State government soon after the civil war.

In 1973, a fresh move was made to start again the establishment of an indigenous Dominican Community. Two young women were received as postulants in 1973. The fresh move of any worthwhile venture, however well planned initially, always carries with it its difficulties, hardships, uncertainties, and sometimes seeming failure. It was no less so for this community in its nascent stage as it had to face the challenges of seeking appropriate recognition both from Church and State for its survival. In 1977 the community had the first profession of its members. Growth came in trickles at that early stage in that first professions were not had every year. However, from 1982 things took a different turn. There were first professions yearly, sometimes even twice a year. It is so to this day.

The growth of the Congregation is evident in the presence the Congregation has registered in other Arch/Dioceses within Nigeria and beyond. So far the Sisters are ministering in the

Catholic Archdioceses of Abuja and Jos, Issele-uku, Lokoja and Makurdi Dioceses and Kontogora Vicariate; the Archdiocese of Chicago and the Diocese of Denver USA; the Diocese of St George's, Grenada and the Diocese of Mampong, Ghana In these different ecclesiastical jurisdictions, the Sisters minister the love of Christ to all through the education, health, pastoral/grassroots evangelisation and social work apostolates.

Initial challenges faced by the Congregation

Like all other missionaries whose institutions were taken over by the Nigerian Government in the 1970s, the Dominican Sisters grappled with the challenge of the closure of their clinics and dispensaries in Gusau (now Zamfara State), Malumfashi (now Katsina State) and Yelwa-Yauri (now Kebbi State). Apart from the dispensary in Malumfashi which was later re-opened, the other two were never returned to the Sisters. The take-over of these institutions called for an "aggiornamento" – a reorientation of ministries and apostolates. The traditional ministries and the mode of running them had to be revisited. The sisters then played the role of "presence" among the majority Muslim community by working in government –owned hospitals and schools and offering literacy, hygiene and handicraft programmes to the less privileged rural women regardless of their creedal belief.

The Congregation was also faced with the challenge of a concerted effort by the Local Government to claim the property on which the administrative and formation house are located. From 1976 until 2013, the wall of the property could not be completed due to the Local Government's insistence on occupying the property within the Motherhouse premises on which the dispensary and maternity were located.

Present day Experience of ministering in the North-western part of Nigeria

The Dominican Sisters' presence in northwestern Nigeria for over fifty years has not been uneventful. Since life is said to be a combination of the good, the bad and the ugly, so has been the experience of the Congregation. Armed with the mission statement of her foundation, which is focused on being a Christian presence in northern Nigeria and ministering the love of God especially to youth and marginalized women, the Congregation has evolved through her many challenges which have enabled her to fashion out more creative ways of staying faithful to her mission. Refusing to be deterred by the take-over of her institutions, the Congregation again ventured into opening of schools and engaging in the running of health institutions as well as offering social services in favor of the poor and marginalized. Her overall objective of being a Christian presence has also got her involved in pastoral activities of different kinds.

Positive Experiences

Being a predominantly Islamic environment that is barely tolerant of other religions, one would expect that the Muslim community in these northwestern areas where the Sisters are present will be unwilling to engage with the Sister. On the contrary, however, the opposite has been the experience of the Sisters as observed in the following areas:

- ***Utilizing services rendered by Sisters:*** There is usually high turn out from the Muslims community in the use of the education and health services rendered by the Sisters. We record a situation of up to sixty percent of Muslim students in a good number of schools run by Sisters. Many Muslim families would want their wards to attend mission schools not just for the academic excellence it offers but also for the moral formation in character which the students receive. In the same way the health institutions run by the Sisters are attended by a good number of Muslims especially women. These have resulted from the confidence which they have come to develop in the quality of the services rendered by the Sisters and in the unbiased way these services are given.
- ***Respect for the being of Sisters:*** In spite of religious sentiments, the average Muslim has profound respect for the Sisters even though they do not quite understand the concept of consecrated celibacy (reason why one should not marry). Some have interpreted it as “masu kin maza” (people who hate/deny men) and Sisters are described in such words. However, the idea of setting oneself apart for the sake of the Kingdom evokes awe and respect in their Muslim neighbours.
- ***Appreciation of the works of the Sisters:*** A good number of Muslims appreciate the charitable works done by Sisters to improve the lives of people irrespective of their religious affiliation. Although there has been instances where such charitable outreach were refused due to suspicions that they are targeted at converting Muslims to Christianity, a good number of those who have been courageous enough to accept such offers have been very appreciative of them and even those who do not take the offer recognizes that they are helping to improve the lives of the beneficiaries.
- ***Likeness for the use of the religious garb:*** There is an appreciation of the fact that Sisters dress modestly. Wearing the habit especially the veil seems to resonate with the manner the Muslims expect their women to dress (use of the hijab). For this reason, they often comment that they wish all other Christian women would emulate the Sisters’ way of dressing.
- ***Friendliness:*** In spite of the hostility of the environment, some Muslims are very friendly towards the Sisters. They not only pay visits to the Sisters at the convent, they also share gifts with them at festive seasons. A very good example of this is the Magaji Sabon Gari of Gusau who always visits the convent with his family on Christmas day, a day which happens to be the birthday of his wife, and the Sisters would celebrate with the family. Also, the Emir of Gusau has, on occasions, sent gifts to the convent at festive seasons and the Sisters have also reciprocated such gestures of friendship by paying him visits and giving him gifts.

Negative Experiences

On a negative note, the experience of ministering in the northwestern part of Nigeria consists

primarily in the consistent air of tension that the people of this region breathe. The uncertainty that greets each day in terms of not knowing what to expect, makes the daily life of the Sisters stress laden. Apart from this, there are other factors that contribute to the Sisters feeling unwelcomed in this part of the country. Such include:

- The unjust way in which the Government especially at the Local Government level have treated the Sisters over the years in terms of the desperate efforts to take over properties belonging to the Sisters.
- Litigations against the Local government which the Sisters had to undertake as a last resort for getting back their piece of land at the Motherhouse and completing the fencing of the property after over fifty years of presence. Up till now, the staff of the Gusau Local Government still occupies the clinic within the premises of the Sisters' Motherhouse even after the court returned the ownership of the property to the Sisters. They have continued to operate this clinic and have refused to vacate the premises.
- Difficulty in acquiring land for developmental purposes. It is very difficult to acquire land directly as Sisters. We have always had to go through some individuals, sometimes Muslim individuals who purchased the land and later turn them over to the Sisters. This is the case with acquiring land for the building of a Secondary School which the Sisters began in 2011. This property has recently been taken over again by the State Government without any clear sign of compensation.
- Fear of what might happen to the Sisters at any time given the prevalent air of tension that is being witnessed in the north especially in recent years. There has been loud cry from the families and friends of the Sisters to relocate to other parts of the country for their safety and well-being. Responding to these suggestions have been quite challenging for the Sisters who are struggling between abandoning the Mission in favour of their safety and staying in the north at the expense of their lives.
- Effect of the crises in the north on vocations into the Congregation. This reality is becoming more worrisome as more and more young people are declining to come to the north to become religious. Even when the young women want to take this courageous step, their families do not accept their decision. This means less numbers in the formation houses the effect of which is crucial to the survival of the Congregation.
- Low income from ministries due to the fact that the people among whom the Sisters minister are mostly economically deprived. In recent times, many Christian families have moved to the southern part of the country as a result of the crises. This has also contributed to the decline in the support which the Sisters could receive for their upkeep.
- Subtle denial of basic rights such as acquiring land for places of worship, approval of education and health institutions without rigors, easy access to government facilities

which are supposed to benefit all citizens, etc.

Conclusion

A reflection on the situation of northern Nigeria and what role women could play

Many people have reflected on the situation of northern Nigeria especially in recent times and have come to the conclusion that what is happening is the outcome of a calculated attempt by a few people to impose their personal agenda on this country at all cost and they seem to have succeeded in doing so under the guise of religion as we see in the way Imams and Pastors use their pulpits to incite violence, and in the brand of religious bigots such as Boko Haram that has hijacked the life of the nation. Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama of the Catholic Archdiocese of Jos noted that some religious leaders and preachers are “happily fanning the embers of religious hatred and encouraging followers to fight in defense of their faith. This presupposes that the God they serve is too weak to fight his cause.”³⁶ To this end, he observed that “we are in danger of passing on our religious traditions that are characterized by hate messages, negative propaganda, mutual suspicion and bitter opposition to the other person who holds different religious views and beliefs. Muslims fighting Christians or Christians fighting Muslims will never solve our social problems. It is only through concerted efforts and using the values of our two religions that we can bring peace, prosperity and progress to our State and nation.”³⁶

Islam and Christianity are not the only religions practiced in Nigeria, in fact, they are later arrivals on the scene of religious beliefs and practices in our country because before the advent of these religions, the native people of Nigeria already adhere to the traditional African religion. This religion was soon looked down upon as obsolete and representing anything else but true religion and worship. With the taking over of the stage by Islam and Christianity, what Nigeria has come to witness is what John Cardinal Onaiyekan referred to as laying claims “each to the exclusion of the other, to absolute superiority and exclusive universal legitimacy.”³⁶ This, he observed, “is a claim that was never made by any of the great religions of the past, which as cultural expressions of the religious instincts of their respective peoples, left room for different expressions among other people.”³⁶ The same feeling of superiority of these religions over the traditional religion is what is still being perpetuated between the two religions causing unnecessary rivalry, the result of which is the untold hardships unleashed on the populace.

The biggest challenge of northern Nigeria is religious fanaticism and extremism, which as mentioned above, has been employed in most cases to advance personal agenda by a few. Religious fanatics or extremists have zero tolerance for anything that is opposed to their view point including their own way of practicing religion thus they regard those who hold other religious views as bitter enemies that must be ostracized or eliminated altogether. This way of understanding religion is at variance with the right of every individual to hold and practice whatever religious beliefs they so wish. Every human being has a right to “practice a religion and the right to share that religion with others. The exercise of this right should have no territorial boundaries...”³⁶ It is the lack of understanding of this basic fact of freedom to adhere, practice and share with others whatever line of faith one chooses to toe, that has resulted in

much violence across northern Nigeria for some years now. People have undertaken to fight for their God who has become too impotent to be able to fight his own course. They make inciting statements in Mosques and Churches in the name of defense of faith. Such unguided zeal as this is largely responsible for the many incidents of wanton loss of lives and properties across northern Nigeria as, for instance, we have recorded in the accounts of the Kaduna religious riot of 1987. The Christian youth at the end of their submission on this event stated, "we the Christian youths hereby reaffirm our commitment to the unity and peaceful co-existence of all citizens in Nigeria. We also wish to specially appeal to the Muslim youths in this nation to borrow a leaf from our self-control and peace loving nature. They must not allow themselves to be used by few ambitious, selfish and unpatriotic people to destroy our father-land. They should understand that silence does not necessarily mean cowardice."³⁶

As we reflect on these experiences, we perhaps need to look at what role women of both faith extractions in northern Nigeria could play in order to contribute to bringing about promoting life and fostering peaceful co-existence in the region. Although, the situation of mutual suspicion among people of both religions does not exclude women, it is also a known fact that women have a natural way of enabling life. By the very fact of being mothers, they are, irrespective of what faith they profess, on the side of promoting life thus whatever endangers or takes away life affects them adversely. It is on this common ground that women in northern Nigeria must stand to contribute their quota to bringing about an end to violence in northern Nigeria. Sr. Kathleen McGarvey observed that within their common experience of everyday life issues, friendships among women of all faiths develop, "some of which withstand the distrust and tension resulting from the conflicts."³⁶

This ability to bond as women, as mothers irrespective of religious affiliation is a fertile ground on which the seed of peaceful co-existence could be sown. Identifying and helping to cultivate and nurture such fertile ground is part of the challenges which the Dominican Sisters in northern Nigeria must grapple with in the face of the reality of the conflict in the north today. The decision to remain in ministry in northern Nigeria therefore, is not a decision to engage in a collective suicide mission or a vain desire to seek martyrdom at all cost as some who have questioned the rationale behind such decision may think. Rather it is coming from the understanding of mission as being sent with a specific message for a specific time. The specific message which the Dominican Sisters bring by their presence in the northwest of Nigeria today is the message of love for all God's people without bias and the conviction that it is possible to co-exist in spite of our religious belief. It is not an easy task, it is not the most convenient place to be but it is an expression of the hope they have, that someday Nigeria will overcome her challenges and people of all tribes, cultures and religious adherence will once again live side by side each contributing his or her quota to making Nigeria the great nation that God intends it to be. It is this light of hope that the Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena, Gusau, Nigeria, holds out for all Nigerians.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ignatius Ayau Kaigama, *Peace, not War; A Decade of Interventions in the Plateau*

State Crises (2001-2011), Hamtul Press Ltd. Bisichi, Jos, 2012

- Isidore Nwanaju, Christian-Muslim Relations in Nigeria, Free Enterprise Publishers, Ikeja, Lagos, Nigeria, 2005
- John Cardinal O. Onaiyekan, Seeking Common Grounds: Inter-Religious Dialogue in Africa (Vol.1), Paulines Publications Africa, Nairobi, Kenya, 2013
- Kathleen McGarvey, Muslim and Christian Women in Dialogue: The Case of Northern Nigeria, Sovereign Prints, Lagos, Nigeria, 2010
- CAN Kaduna Publicity Committee. Kaduna Religious Riot '87: A Catalogue of Events, Kaduna, Nigeria, 1987

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CATHOLIC VOYAGE
A witness's personal account of the beginnings: 2004 – 2009

Sr. Mary Agatha Osarenkhoe, EHJ

In the early 2000s, after series of brain storming at the executive meetings of the Nigeria Conference of Women Religious (NCWR), it was decided that there was the need to have a publication that would benefit the growing religious body in Nigeria. Prior to this decision, as a medium of communication, the Nigeria Conference of Women Religious was producing a newsletter through which important information was disseminated to her members. During these years, immediately after the celebration of the Jubilee Year 2000, members of the Conference saw the need to graduate from the present medium of communication (newsletter) to another medium that would give room to far richer contents and that would get to a wider population. This idea was unanimously accepted. And so the thought of a journal was proposed.

It was, however, obvious that a publication of that nature would need funds. Therefore a grant proposal was written from the office of the Executive Secretary of NCWR to a funding agency. Thanks be to God, a favourable response was received from the funding agency in 2003.

After the funds arrived, and with more insights received, members thought that the publication should be more than just a mere medium for information dissemination. The journal would be an annual publication, and should sell very well in the book market. The journal was destined primarily to consecrated persons in Nigeria, Africa, and to all persons interested in Consecrated Life. Therefore, its original mission, that is, the initial aim of setting up the journal was that it should be educative, informative and formative in contents.

To begin work on the journal, an editor and members of the editorial board were appointed with the task of producing the journal. Unfortunately there were unresolved issues either among the members of the board or between the members of the board and the members of the executive of NCWR. Hence the editorial board set up could not produce any publication. Efforts to resolve the issues failed. The board was then dissolved. It was not easy appointing another editor and getting members to constitute another editorial board for the journal. Different names were nominated but were not appointed.

In January 2003 at the Annual Business meeting of NCWR, the Sisters of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus were welcomed to serve in the Secretariat of NCWR and the National Renewal Centre (NRC) both situated in Enugu. It was during the interview session the Sisters of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus had with the members of the Executive of NCWR the preceding year, that it became known that Sr. Mary Agatha Osarenkhoe - who was presented by her Institute to serve as the Executive Secretary - had done series of studies in Communications and had rich experiences in the use of the Mass Media. Therefore, after she assumed duties as Executive Secretary in March 2003, she

was requested by the members of the Executive of NCWR in April during the executive meeting that same year to serve as the editor of the proposed journal. Sr. Osarenkhoe accepted the request made. This implied that she would be combining her duties as the Executive Secretary of NCWR with that of the editor of the journal, both of which were demanding responsibilities.

In September 2003 Sr. Osarenkhoe was elected by her Institute as the Vicar General. With this new assignment within her Institute, she left Enugu for Lagos in January 2004. Though the editorial office remained in Enugu at the National Secretariat of NCWR at Valley Road, Iva-Valley, Enugu, she would be operating from Lagos as the Editor.

Among the five names proposed for the journal, *The Voyage* was chosen. The first issue of the journal was produced by Sr. Osarenkhoe with the help of the assistant editor, Sr. Pricilla Aliu, SND and the then office assistant in the NCWR secretariat, Sr. Maureen Iwu, EHJ. It was printed in Enugu by Optimal International at 9 Ochuba Street off Achala Layout, Agbani. Thanks to divine providence and to the editor, Sr. Osarenkhoe, though combining the demands of two offices (the Secretary of NCWR and the editor of the journal), the Editorial Board ensured that the publication saw the light of day in January 2004.

The educating annual religious journal, *The Voyage*, was launched at the January 2004 meetings of both NCWR and the Conference of Major Superiors (Men). With this first issue, the long impasse with regard to the publication of the journal was over. It was a dream- come- true for the Conference. The Journal is the brain child of NCWR. The following are the sentiments of the then president of NCWR, Mother Maria Ifechukwu Udorah, DDL, writing to the editor after the first two editions:

"We wish to thank you immensely for your beautiful editorial works in the production of the journal titled 'The Voyage'. Through your hard work and wisdom you were able to fulfill our beautiful dream of producing a journal we can call our own. Our utmost joy is that the work is indeed a wonderful one with so many well researched and inspiring articles and reflections as contributions from people of good-will. The two editions, 2004 and 2005 that were produced have sold very well in the book market, and we are indeed very grateful to you."

Though the very first edition had as its publisher Nigeria Conference of Women Religious, the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria (Men) gave useful suggestions at the early stage especially as to what to do to keep the journal alive. It was during one

of the joint Executive Meetings that the men asked that the journal become the publication of both conferences – Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria (CMSN). The request was welcomed by the NCWR. Hereafter, starting with the 2005 issue, the publication had as its publisher Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria, that is, including both the women and men Religious.

The same group of people who worked with the editor to produce the first edition also worked with her to produce the 2005 edition. However, the second edition and subsequent issues were printed in Lagos by Oghene Prints Ltd., Lagos. The change of printer was necessary for proximity to the editor; his production was also judged to be of a very good quantity.

In January 2005 members of the editorial board were appointed and the official appointment of Sr. Osarenkhoe as the Editor was confirmed:

Sr. Mary Agatha Osarenkhoe, EHJ – Editor

Fr. Lawrence Okwuosa, SVD

Sr. Ifeoma Arinze, DC

The members of the board were given the deadline of ensuring that the publication was out from the press for the Annual General meeting in January each year. The members got started. The inaugural meeting of the editorial board was held on May 14, 2005 in the convent of the Sisters of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus Ikeja, Lagos.

THE CONCEPT OR FORMULA OF THE JOURNAL

The birth of *The Voyage* was inspired by the need to have a project that would enrich the life of Religious Men and Women in Nigeria. *The Voyage*, according to both Conferences, would perform twin functions - informing and educating. For these reasons, the journal would present to its readers well-researched contemporary and historical articles on varied themes as would be beneficial to them. Articles were written by very good Catholic writers (Priests, Religious and Lay faithful). Some contributors were commissioned to write on given topics around the theme that was decided upon for that year while others on topical subjects. For instance, one year, because many Congregations would be having their General or Provincial Chapters a writer was commissioned to write on Chapters. Many readers found that article very helpful. There were contributors who volunteered to write on interesting and relevant articles. In 2007 for example, one of the readers, Rev. Father Patrick E. Akekpe, MSP, Editor

of *The Catholic Ambassador*, after reading our journal, volunteered to be a contributor. Here is an extract from his letter to the editor:

"I read and marked every article in that volume. Many of the articles were very well written, and dealt exhaustively with the topics treated. I have not read the current edition, but I have no doubts that it will surpass even previous editions. I congratulate you for the work you are doing on behalf of the Nigerian Church under the umbrella of the Conference of Major Superiors. Let me know how I can make a contribution to your next edition, and what your guidelines are."

FORMAT

The very first issue came out in A5 size with a glossy sky-blue cover. This size was handy. Subsequent editions were in the same format but with a different colour for the cover each year. Contributing writers were asked to place notes, if any, at the end of their article.

CHANGE OF NAME

The first three editions of the journal had the name, *The Voyage*. This name was, however, changed starting with the 2007 edition because it was discovered on November 27, 2006 when an application was submitted to the library in Enugu to have the International Standard Serial Number (ISSN) that the name *The Voyage* already existed. The Conference was advised to change the name of the journal. 'Catholic' was then added to make the difference. Hence the new name, 'The Catholic Voyage.' The journal received the ISSN on December 21, 2006.

CONTENTS AND EDITORIAL POLICY

From its beginning, *The Catholic Voyage* was a wide range collection of articles and reflections on contemporary issues. Among the subjects matter published in the journal were Religion, Religious life, education, psychology, communication, socio-economy, Spirituality, Canon Law, and Health. There were also pages dedicated to book review. The CMSN also sent papers presented at their conferences, meetings, seminars/workshops for publication.

The editorial policy of *The Catholic Voyage* maintains that the journal should be an academic journal, offering well researched papers, and should have notes and bibliography. The members of the editorial board had terms of reference. They are

to meet twice a year or as the need arises; seek for articles and edit them; work in close collaboration with the Editor; and suggest means of (sustainable) marketing and distribution.

READERSHIP, FREQUENCY AND CIRCULATION FIGURES

The targeted readers of the journal were primarily the consecrated persons (women and men), priests and candidates in houses of religious formation, as well as all lay persons interested in Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic life as well as some laity. Some readers gave feedbacks with beautiful and encouraging comments, and also made useful suggestions. *The Catholic Voyage* was published once a year. One thousand copies were printed for each edition.

SALES AND DISTRIBUTION

The very first issue of the journal was presented and launched at the January 2004 annual business meeting of CMSN. The birth of the journal was well received by all. The presenter of the publication borrowed words from the Editorial of the maiden edition. She started thus: "There is a season for everything, a time for every occupation under heaven. A time for giving birth" 'A time for the journal to be born,' she added. And almost every member present bought copies of the journal. Each year the new edition of the publication was presented at the January meeting to be launched. After the meeting, NCWR secretariat would serve as the outlet for sales and distribution to Area Conferences and other readers. The price of a copy was affordable by members.

COMPLIMENTARY COPIES

Every year complimentary copies were given to the Apostolic Nunciature, Bishops, Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, Seminaries, and some major Catholic Institutions. Letters of appreciation and compliments in terms of content and quality of the production were received from some of these beneficiaries. The state library in Enugu highly commended the journal for contents and quality of production.

THE EDITOR REASSIGNED

In December 2008, the editor, Sr. Osarenkhoe, wrote to the president of NCWR, Rev. Mother Pauline Eboh, DMMM asking to be relieved of her appointment as editor of *The Catholic Voyage* because of the many other commitments both within and outside her Congregation that were competing for her attention and time making it difficult to

dedicate enough time to the journal. And so after the 2009 edition a new editor was appointed to replace her.

CONCLUSION AND PROSPECT

We cannot dismiss the need for a journal as *The Catholic Voyage* today. As a print medium, I never see *The Catholic Voyage* as one of those print materials out there serving as mere information dissemination. Through this journal we can inform, educate and form its readers. There is no gain listing its many benefits. Thank God that despite the challenge of lack of enough patronage facing the journal over the years it has not gone into extinction. If we want the journal to continue to exist and grow, we must patronize it and further publicize it. I encourage members of our two Conferences to invest on *The Catholic Voyage*. It promotes the mission of Consecrated Life in church and society. It is a very good venture – a venture which is non-profit making. It is necessary enterprise - where we all stakeholders. It is a laudable initiative. Today more than ever before, we need such journal as *The Catholic Voyage* to serve especially the clergy, the consecrated persons, and the candidates in Houses of Formation and seminaries, and also the lay faithful who desire to have a deepened knowledge of or share in the spirituality, charism or apostolic mission of the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Society of Apostolic Life who compose our two Conferences.

* Oseni J. Osilama Ogunu, OMV, a member of the Congregation of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary, is currently in the Formation Team and the Rector of *Lanteri Oblate Seminary*, Bodija-Ibadan. He is a lecturer in Moral Theology and in Bioethics at the *Dominican Institute*, Samonda-Ibadan (Nigeria). He is the Editor of *The African Enchiridion*, and the founding Editor of *Abuja Journal of Philosophy and Theology*, (APT).

³⁷ *Relatio Synodi* [The Synod Report] of the III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops: "Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization" (5-19 October 2014), 18.10.2014.

³⁸ Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, *Message to Religious Men and Women of Africa* (October 1976; published 3/6/1978), n.2.

³⁹ 1st African Synod, *Propositions*, 14.

⁴⁰ Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution, *Lumen Gentium*, n.11.

⁴¹ Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio* (21/11/1981), n.52

⁴² Cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, n.55.

⁴³ Cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, n.62.

The Catholic Voyage: African Journal of Consecrated Life

Vol. 11, 2015. ISSN: 2659-0301 (Online) 1597 6610 (Print)

135

-
- ⁴⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (=CCC), n. 1656: it also quotes Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, n.11.
- ⁴⁵ CCC, n. 1657: it also quotes Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, n.10; John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*, n.92.
- ⁴⁶ Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Africae Munus*, (19/11/2011), n.43
- ⁴⁷ Cfr. *Africae Munus*, n.42
- ⁴⁸ Episcopal Conference of Congo, “La Famille et la Formation au Sacerdoce”, in: *The African Enchiridion*, vol.III, Doc.773,n.3, pg.1901, and at paragraph n. 4, it affirms: “On comprendra aisément la valeur incomparable d’une bonne famille chrétienne et d’un bon environnement socio-culturel tant pour l’éclosion que pour la maturation de vocations prsbytérales solides.”
- ⁴⁹ *Africae Munus*, n.43
- ⁵⁰ *Africae Munus*, n.44
- ⁵¹ *Africae Munus*, n.45
- ⁵² *Africae Munus*, n.46
- ⁵³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nn.914-915
- ⁵⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nn.917-918
- ⁵⁵ Episcopal Conference of Angola and Sao Tome, “Formadores e Centros de Formacao: A Influencia das Familias Cristas”, in *The African Enchiridion*, (Edited by Oseni Ogunu), Editrice Missionaria Italiana[EMI], vol. III, Document 733, pg.1835; Episcopal Conference of Senegal, Mauritania and Cape Verde Island, “Le Contexte Socio-Culturel et l’Influence de la Famille”, in: *The African Enchiridion*, Doc.734, pp.1835-1836; Episcopal Conference of Ghana, “Role of the Families in the formation of Priests”, in: *The African Enchiridion*, vol.III, Doc.735, pg.1836; Episcopal Conference of Burkina Faso, “Niger, Familles et Mouvements”, in *The African Enchiridion*, vol.III, Doc.736, pg.1836; Episcopal Conference of Rwanda, “Family, Vocations and Formation for the Priesthood”, in: *The African Enchiridion*, vol.III, Doc.737, pg.1837; Episcopal Conference of Congo, “La Famille et la Formation au Sacerdoce”, in: *The African Enchiridion*, vol.III, Doc.773,n.2, pg.1901.
- ⁵⁶ Episcopal Conference of Tanzania, “Celibacy and Christian Family”, in: *The African Enchiridion*, vol.III, Doc.778, p.1905.
- ⁵⁷ Episcopal Conference of Rwanda, “Family, Vocations and Formation for the Priesthood”, in: *The African Enchiridion*, vol.III, Doc.737, pg.1837
- ⁵⁸ Episcopal Conference of Angola and Sao Tome, “Formadores e Centros de Formacao: A Influencia das Familias Cristas”, in *The African Enchiridion*, (Edited by Oseni Ogunu), vol. III, Document 733, pg.1835.
- ⁵⁹ Episcopal Conference of Ghana, “Role of the Families in the formation of Priests”, in: *The African Enchiridion*, vol.III, Doc.735, p.1836.
- ⁶⁰ Inter-Territorial Catholic Bishops’ Conference of West Africa (ITEC), “Indispensable Role of the Family in the Initial Formation of Priests”, in *The African Enchiridion*, vol. III, Document 739, pg.1839.
- ⁶¹ Episcopal Conference of Benin, “Les Formateurs et les Milieux Educatifs: Families et Mouvements”, in: *The African Enchiridion*, vol. III, Document 740, pg.1839.
- ⁶² Episcopal Conference of Senegal, Mauritania and Cape Verde Island, “Le Contexte Socio-Culturel et l’Influence de la Famille”, in *The African Enchiridion*, Vol.III, Doc.734, pp.1835-1836; Episcopal Conference of Burkina Faso, “Niger, Familles et Mouvements” , In *The African Enchiridion*, Vol.III, Doc 736; Episcopal Conference of Congo, “Reflexion sur la Formation des Pretres: Orientations et Directives” (1989), in: *The African Enchiridion*, vol. III, Document 741, pg.1840; Episcopal Conference of Ethiopia, “Family and Priestly Vocations”, in: *The African Enchiridion*, vol.III, Doc.742, p.1840; Episcopal Conference of Ghana, “Role of the Families in the formation of Priests”, in: *The African Enchiridion*, vol.III, Doc.735, p.1836.
- ⁶³ Episcopal Conference of Burkina Faso, “Niger, Familles et Mouvements” , In *Op.cit.*, Vol.III, Doc 736.
- ⁶⁴ Cfr. Episcopal Conference of Kenya, “Marriage, the Family and the Candidate to the Priesthood”, in: *The African Enchiridion*, vol.III, Doc.743, pg.1841; Episcopal Conference of Angola and Sao Tome, “Formadores e Centros de Formacao: A Influencia das Familias Cristas”, in: *The African Enchiridion*, Doc.

The Catholic Voyage: African Journal of Consecrated Life

Vol. 11, 2015. ISSN: 2659-0301 (Online) 1597 6610 (Print)

136

733; Episcopal Conference of Senegal, Mauritania and Cape Verde Island, "Le Contexte Socio-Culturel et l'Influence de la Famille", in *The African Enchiridion*, Doc.734, pp.1835-1836; Episcopal Conference of Ghana, "Role of the Families in the formation of Priests", *The African Enchiridion*, vol.III, Doc.735, pg.1836; Episcopal Conference of Burkina Faso, "Niger, Familles et Mouvements", In: *The African Enchiridion*, vol.III, Doc.736, pg.1836; Episcopal Conference of Rwanda, "Family, Vocations and Formation for the Priesthood", in: *The African Enchiridion*, vol.III, Doc.737, pg.1837.

⁶⁵ Joseph Nduhirubusa, "Vocation et la situation des Familles", in: *The African Enchiridion*, vol.IV, Doc.1016, p.2748.

⁶⁶ Episcopal Conference of Ghana, "Role of the Families in the formation of Priests", in: *The African Enchiridion*, vol.III, Doc.735, p.1836.

⁶⁷ Episcopal Conference of Burundi, "L'Eglise du Burundi et sa mission évangélistrice", in: *The African Enchiridion*, vol.III, Doc.809, p.2043, n. 1.1.4C.

⁶⁸ Episcopal Conference of Ethiopia, "Family and Priestly Vocations", in: *The African Enchiridion*, vol.III, Doc.742, p.1840.

⁶⁹ Anselme Titianma Sanon, "Condition de la Femme et de la Religieuse Africaines", in: *The African Enchiridion*, vol. IV, Doc.997, pg.2705.

⁷⁰ Cfr. Anselme Titianma Sanon, "Condition de la Femme et de la Religieuse Africaines", in: *The African Enchiridion*, vol. IV, Doc.997, pg.2705.

⁷¹ Episcopal Conference of Burundi, "L'Eglise du Burundi et sa mission évangélistrice", in: *The African Enchiridion*, vol.III, Doc.809, p.2043, n. 1.1.4C.

⁷² First African Synod (1994), Message of the Synod, n.58, in: *The African Enchiridion*, vol.IV, Doc.995, p.2700.

⁷³ First African Synod, *Propositions*, 16

⁷⁴ Cfr. First African Synod, *Propositions*, 22

⁷⁵ Congregation for the Religious and Secular Institutes and Congregation for Bishops, Directives for Mutual Relations between Bishops and Religious in the Church, *Mutuae Relationes* (14 May 1978)

⁷⁶ First African Synod, *Propositions*, 22

⁷⁷ *The Africae Munus*, n.69

⁷⁸ *The Africae Munus*, n.70

⁷⁹ Cf. 2nd African Synod, *Propositions*, 53

⁸⁰ Cf. 2nd African Synod, *Propositions*, 52

⁸¹ *The Africae Munus*, n.72

⁸² 2nd African Synod, *Final Message*, n.31; Benedict XVI, *The Africae Munus*, n.73

⁸³ *The Africae Munus*, n.74

⁸⁴ *The Africae Munus*, n.76

⁸⁵ *The Africae Munus*, n.77

⁸⁶ *The Africae Munus*, n.78

⁸⁷ *The Africae Munus*, n.117

⁸⁸ *The Africae Munus*, n.118

⁸⁹ *The Africae Munus*, n.119

⁹⁰ *The Africae Munus*, n.120

⁹¹ John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, n.76.

⁹² John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, n.77.

⁹³ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, n.79

⁹⁴ Jean Baptiste Somé, "L'obéissance et le concept Africain de Famille," in: *The African Enchiridion*, vol.IV, Doc.1014, p.2747-2748.

⁹⁵ Basile Mvé Engone, "Le Defi de la Pauvreté Consacrée", in: *The African Enchiridion*, vol.IV, Doc.1015, p.2748.

The Catholic Voyage: African Journal of Consecrated Life

Vol. 11, 2015. ISSN: 2659-0301 (Online) 1597 6610 (Print)

137

-
- ⁹⁶ Episcopal Conference of Tanzania, "Celibacy and the Family Catechesis", in: *The African Enchiridion*, vol.III, Doc.766, p.1895.
- ⁹⁷ Episcopal Conference of Tanzania, "Celibacy and the Family Catechesis", in: *The African Enchiridion*, vol.III, Doc.766, p.1895.
- ⁹⁸ Episcopal Conference of Tanzania, "Celibacy and the Family Catechesis", in: *The African Enchiridion*, vol.III, Doc.766, p.1896.
- ⁹⁹ Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, n.44
- ¹⁰⁰ Francis Arinze, "Virginity and Marriage: Vocational Choices in purity", in: *The African Enchiridion*, vol. II, Doc. 571, pg. 1291.
- ¹⁰¹ Cited in John Paul II, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio*, n.16
- ¹⁰² Synod Report ("Relatio Synodi") of the III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops: "Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization" (5-19 October 2014), 18.10.2014, n.29
- ¹⁰³ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, n.76.
- ¹⁰⁴ Synod Report ("Relatio Synodi") of the III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops: "Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization" (5-19 October 2014), 18.10.2014, n.28
- ¹⁰⁵ Synod Report ("Relatio Synodi") of the III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops: "Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization" (5-19 October 2014), 18.10.2014, n.29
- ¹⁰⁶ Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, *Message to Religious Men and Women of Africa (October 1976; published 3/6/1978)*, n.2.
- ¹⁰⁷ Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, *Message to Religious Men and Women of Africa (October 1976; published 3/6/1978)*, n.2; Cfr. Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Mutuae Relationes*, 1978.
- ¹⁰⁸ Synod Report ("Relatio Synodi") of the III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops: "Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization" (5-19 October 2014), 18.10.2014, n.36.
- ¹⁰⁹ Synod Report ("Relatio Synodi") of the III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops: "Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization" (5-19 October 2014), 18.10.2014, n.32.
- ¹¹⁰ Synod Report ("Relatio Synodi") of the III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops: "Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization" (5-19 October 2014), 18.10.2014, n.33.
- ¹¹¹ Synod Report ("Relatio Synodi") of the III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops: "Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization" (5-19 October 2014), 18.10.2014, n.34.
- ¹¹² Synod Report ("Relatio Synodi") of the III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops: "Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization" (5-19 October 2014), 18.10.2014, n.35.
- ¹¹³ Cfr. Chidi Denis Isizoh, *Attitude of the Catholic Church towards Culture and African Traditional Religion*.
- ¹¹⁴ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, n.94.
- ¹¹⁵ Cfr. John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, nn.79-80
- ¹¹⁶ Chidi Denis Isizoh (Editor), *Attitude of the Catholic Church Toward Culture and African Traditional Religion*, pp.197-198
- ¹¹⁷ John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, n. 74
- ¹¹⁸ Vatican Council II, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 12
- ¹¹⁹ John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, n. 74
- ¹²⁰ Catholic Bishops of Uganda, "With a new heart and a new spirit", in: *The African Enchiridion*, vol. II, Doc. 639, n.83.
- ¹²¹ Cardinal Joseph Malula, "Directoire de la Pastorale du Mariage et la Famille," in: *The African Enchiridion*, vol. II, Doc. 579, pg.1377, n.2.
- ¹²² XIV Ordinary General Assembly *The Vocation And Mission Of The Family In The Church And Contemporary World. Lineamenta*, Vatican City 2014. This Outline essentially repropose, intentionally, the Report of the 3rd Extraordinary Synod of Bishops.

¹²³ *Address Of His Holiness Pope Francis For The Conclusion Of The Third Extraordinary General Assembly Of The Synod Of Bishops*. Synod Hall, Vatican City, Saturday, 18 October 2014

¹²⁴ *Address Of His Holiness Pope Francis For The Conclusion Of The Third Extraordinary General Assembly Of The Synod Of Bishops*. Synod Hall, Vatican City, Saturday, 18 October 2014

¹²⁵ At the national level, the interventions of the *Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria* (men and women) through her Communiqués are voices that deserve being heard. See, else were in this volume, the article on “The Family in the Messages of the CMSN to Consecrated persons and the society”

¹²⁶ XIV Ordinary General Assembly the Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and Contemporary World. *Lineamenta*, Vatican City (2014), n.10

¹²⁷ XIV Ordinary General Assembly the Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and Contemporary World. *Lineamenta*, Vatican City (2014), n.61

* *Rev. Fr Paul Ubebe, is a priest of the Congregation of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary. He is the project manager of the Catholic Television of Nigeria in Abuja. Specialized in Social Communications, he obtained his degree from the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome.*

¹²⁸ http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2014/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20140109_love-soap-opera.html - (POPE FRANCIS’ MORNING MEDITATION “Love is not a soap opera” Thursday, 9 January 2014).

¹²⁹ Jacob Srampickal, (2009), *Communications can Renew the Church*, Karunikan Books, Kochi. p127.

¹³⁰ Adele J Gonzalez, (2009), *The Spirituality of Community*, Pauline Publications, Mumbai. p97.

¹³¹ http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2014/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20140124_create-dialogue.html - (Pope Francis’ Morning Meditation on “How to create dialogue” Friday, 24 January 2014).

¹³² Adele J Gonzalez, (2009), *The Spirituality of Community*, Pauline Publications, Mumbai. p98-99.

¹³³ *Gaudium et Spes* 26.

¹³⁴ *Vita Consacrata* #42.

¹³⁵ *Gaudium et Spes* 43. see also CCC 1905 - 1912).

¹³⁶ *Communio et Progressio* #11.

¹³⁷ Adele J Gonzalez, (2009), *The Spirituality of Community*, Pauline Publications, Mumbai. p97.

¹³⁸ *Vita Consacrata* #50.

¹³⁹ George Kaitholil, (2012), *Communion in Community: A Renewal Programme for Religious*, Pauline Publications, Mumbai. Pg.14-15.

¹⁴⁰ Congregation for Institute of Consecrated Life and Society of Apostolic Life and the Congregation for the Evangelization of People as, *Message to Religious Men and Women of Africa*, n.3, October 1976, published 3 June 1978

¹⁴¹ Paul VI, *Africae Terrarum*, #14.

¹⁴² Vatican Council II, *Ad Gentes*, # 18; Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, # 40.

¹⁴³ *Ad Gentes*, #20; Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, #69.

¹⁴⁴ Congregation for Institute of Consecrated Life and Society of Apostolic Life and the Congregation for the Evangelization of People as, *Message to Religious Men and Women of Africa*, n.3, October 1976, published 3 June 1978

¹⁴⁵ Cf. John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, #79-80; *Ecclesia in Africa*, #59, ## 62-63.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Cencini, Amedeo. *Spiritual and Emotional Maturity: Guiding Young People in Religious and Priestly Formation*. Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa, 2006.

Congar, J.M. Yves. *Lay People in the Church*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Co Ltd, 1957.

De Cea, Emeterio. Translated & Adapted by Aumann, Jordan. *Compendium of Spirituality Vol. II*. New York: Society of St. Paul, 2001.

Forster, Richard. *Money, Sex, & Power*. Great Britain: Clays Ltd, St. Ives Plc, 2000.

Garijo-Guembe, M. Miguel. *Communion of the Saints: Foundation, Nature, and structure of the Church*. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1994.

Nwagwu, Mary Gerard. *Consecrated Life in the Church: Discipline and Praxis*. Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt Press, 2008.

Ojo, Afolabi Gabriel. *Catholic Laity in Nigeria: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*. Ibadan: Daily Graphics Nigeria Limited, 2004.

Orobator, A. E. *The Church as Family. African Ecclesiology in its social context*. Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa, 2000.

Prusak, P. Bernard. *The Church Unfinished Ecclesiology Through the Centuries*. New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2004.

St. Augustine of Hippo, *Catechizandis Rudibus*. Joseph P. Christopher (Transl.). New York: Newman Press, 1946.

St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province

Whitehead, D. James. & Whitehead, Eaton Evelyn. *The Emerging Laity: Returning leadership to the Community of Faith*. USA: Doubleday Publishing Group, 1988.

CHURCH DOCUMENTS

Canon Law Society Trust, *Code of Canon Law in English Translation*. India: Collins Liturgical Publications, 1994.

Catechism of the Catholic Church. Ibadan: St. Pauls, 1994.

Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. *Starting A fresh From Christ: A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium*. http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccsclife/documents/rc_con_ccsclife_d20020614_ripartire-da-cristo_en.html.

John Paul II, Pope. Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*.

Vatican Council II: *Conciliar Documents* Vol. 1, ed. Austin Flannery. Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1988.

¹⁴⁶ The CMSN, as used here, refers to the two conferences of representing all male and female Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life in Nigeria, namely, *Nigeria Conference of Women Religious* (NCWR) and the *Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria (Men)*; normally, both Conferences hold a General Assemblies annually, in January, to deliberate on issues of common interest. At the end of the Assembly the joint Conference (CMSN) issue a pondered *Communique* - addressed to all consecrated persons, to members of the Church and to the society especially in Nigeria - concerning the theme chosen for the given year's Assembly.

¹⁴⁷ *Echoes of Hope: The Stand of the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria on Issues of Faith and Life*, Edited by Kanu Ikechukwu Anthony, OSA. This important and beautiful collection includes all the *Communiqués* of the CMSN from 1998 to 2014.

¹⁴⁸ *Echoes of Hope*, pg.5

¹⁴⁹ *Echoes of Hope*, pg.2.

¹⁵⁰ *Echoes of Hope*, pg.3

¹⁵¹ *Echoes of Hope*, pg.11

¹⁵² For reflections on this point (religious poverty) by some scholars, see: Vicente Carlos Kiaziku, *Consecrated Life in Bantu Africa* (Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa, 2007), especially chapter 5; Aylward Shorter, *Religious Poverty in Africa* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa 1999); Otene Matungulu: *Pour Inculturer accueil et pauvreté en Afrique* (Kinshasa: Éditions St. Paul Afrique, 1988); Otene Matungulu, *Estar com Cristo Casto, Pobre e Obediente: ensaio de uman espiriualidade banto dos votos* (Maputo: Paulinas, 1996); Ketele-Matondo-Tshibola Kalembo, "Pauvreté religieuse in Afrique", in: *Vie Concrete* XL/2(1977) 108-112.

¹⁵³ *Echoes of Hope*, pg.11

¹⁵⁴ *Echoes of Hope*, pp.21-22

¹⁵⁵ *Echoes of Hope*, pg.22

¹⁵⁶ *Echoes of Hope*, pg.22

¹⁵⁷ *Echoes of Hope*, pg.27

¹⁵⁸ *Echoes of Hope*, pg.27

¹⁵⁹ *Echoes of Hope*, pg.27

¹⁶⁰ *Echoes of Hope*, pg.28

¹⁶¹ *Echoes of Hope*, pg.52

¹⁶² *Echoes of Hope*, pg.50

¹⁶³ *Echoes of Hope*, pg.53

¹⁶⁴ *Echoes of Hope*, pg.59

¹⁶⁵ *Echoes of Hope*, pg.60

¹⁶⁶ *Echoes of Hope*, pg.61-62

¹⁶⁷ *Echoes of Hope*, pg.66

¹⁶⁸ *Echoes of Hope*, pg.29

¹⁶⁹ *Echoes of Hope*, pg.29

¹⁷⁰ Aquinas, 1947, 57: 1

¹⁷¹ Slater, 1910:1.

¹⁷² Slater. 1910:1.

¹⁷³ Kelso, 2013.

¹⁷⁴ Peschke, 2004.

175 Aquinas, 1947, 81: 1.

176 Aquinas, 1947, 81: 1.

177 Peschke, 2004:235.

178 Peschke, 2004:235.

179 Jackson 1985; Peschke, 2004.

180 Jackson, 1985.

181 Lanari, 2011:2

182 Ibid.

183 Jn. 15:11-17.

184 Eph. 2:19-22.

185 Col 3: 15.

186 Jackson,1985.

187 Jackson, 1985: 310.

188 Peschke, 2004: 239.

189 Ibid.

190 Peschke, 2004:239.

191 Rm. 13: 1ff.

192 Jackson, 1985.

193 Act, 2:42, 4:32.

194 Oduyoye, 2001: 71

195 Ibid

196 Ackermann,1991: 100.

197 Mark, 12:31.

198 Minuchin. 1974:6.

199 Oduyoye, 2001:71.

200 Canon 1256.

201 Canon 634: no.1.

202 Peschke, 2004:235.

203 Ibid.

204 Jackson, 1985.