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EDITORIAL

In the Final document of the recent Synod of Bishops on “Young People, Faith and Vocational discernment”, the Synod Fathers thanked and encouraged Consecrated women and men, along with lay men and women and the bishops¹. Gratitude, because they “with honesty and dedication commit themselves to the service of young people, and they have courageously denounced evil immediately They encouraged consecrated persons to persevere in their “honesty and dedication to service” and in the courageous immediate denunciation of evil. The Synod Fathers reiterate the prophetic value of Consecrated Life as a joyous witness of the gratuity of love. The conviction is that when the religious communities and new foundations authentically live fraternity they become school of communion, centres of prayer and contemplation, a place of witness of intergenerational and intercultural dialogue and a place of evangelization and charity. The value of consecrated life and its prophetic mission is clearly evidenced, moreover, when they are directly engaged in various forms of apostolate in the church and in the society. So, “the Church and the world cannot do without this vocational gift, which constitute a great resource for our time”². On their part, as Pope Francis reminds all, Consecrated Persons must look at their past with gratitude, live the present with passion, embrace the future with hope.

Looking mostly at the present time and the future, in this edition, the authors discuss some of the specific areas of apostolic mission in which Consecrated persons are or should be engaged today for the growth of the Church and the integral development of society. In particular, in the development and practice of the social teachings of the Church the Religious women and men play a vital role. Thus, in the present-day Nigeria, as Nkechiyerem Iwuoha, PHJC, points out, Religious men and women are called to take a more prophetic position in the face of the “growing new situation of injustice and exclusion” and “massive poverty”. Therefore, the formation of the religious, she argues, needs to be tailored to the understanding and critical analysis of an option for the poor. On her part, Chikere Ngozichukwuka, OLA, explores the theme of the vocational discernment and the relevance of mission in the contemporary world. She presents those who are called and why they are called, as well as the steps taken to ascertain the authenticity of one’s vocation. The consecrated life today is exposed to all sorts of attacks and temptations but, she argues, it has never lost its relevance in the Church and to the world. The call to follow Christ more closely and to bring His Gospel message to others demands a response which involves a process of exploration and a discernment of vocation.

¹ “Documento finale e Votazioni del Documento finale del Sinodo dei Vescovi al Santo Padre Francesco” (27 ottobre 2018), n.31 in: *Bolletino Sala Stampa della Santa Sede*, N.0789 (27 Ottobre 2018)

² “Documento finale e Votazioni del Documento finale del Sinodo dei Vescovi al Santo Padre Francesco” (27 ottobre 2018), n. 88, in: *Bolletino Sala Stampa della Santa Sede*, N.0789 (27 Ottobre 2018)

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Nigeria takes pride, as the nation's coat of arms suggests, in her determination to pursue unity, peace and progress for the development of the country and her peoples. However, it is unfortunate that this expected environment seems elusive and seriously threatened by an atmosphere of crisis, conflicts and obnoxious spilling of innocent blood. Most Nigerians in recent times have continue to live in fear and tensions. What can the consecrated persons do to forestall the eroding unity, peace and progress in Nigeria, which are inseparable from development? This is the crux of Clara Iwuoha's article. She observes that consecrated persons have, generally, been both proactive and active in using their pulpits and forums in spreading the messages of peace and tolerance but she warns that they might not be able to guarantee the elasticity of the patience exhibited so far by the people, especially Christians, as this patience and tolerance have continually been misconstrued as cowardice and weakness.

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

Young people are increasingly a focus of attention for the whole Church, but especially in Africa which enjoys a significant growth in the population of young people. In his article, Jean-Paul Tagheu, a young Dominican theologian from Cameroun, reflects on "The Church of the youth and the youth of the Church"; as its subtitle indicates, the article is a plea for the present and future of Christianity. His central question is: *How can the African youth be the present and the future of the Church?* This question is examined on the basis of the last two African Synods. The author, among other things, appeals for an African Council.

The family is essentially where almost all fundamental human experiences of life begin from or are first shaped, for better or for worse. It's no surprise therefore that the future of the church and of society themselves passes through the family³. As regard the vocation to consecrated life, Maria Regina Osondu, DMMM discusses the role of a Christian family particularly in the spiritual and social formation of a committed consecrated person. The call to total consecration is an additional call to a Christian that requires total submission to the will of God through the observation and practice of the

³ Cf. Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, n.31

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evangelical counsels – poverty, chastity and obedience. On the other hand, a consecrated person who did not understand or accept the implications of the religious commitment questions the rationality of the religious vows until such a person separates him or herself from the religious community. She attempts to respond to this question: What is or should be the attitude and contribution of the family in the consecrated person's following of Christ in the Religious Institute, and in the case of his/her eventual separation from the Religious Institute?

The subject of the inculturation of consecrated life is the theme of Kipoy-Pombo's insightful investigation. He wants to contribute to the current debate on the process of inculturation of consecrated life today in sub-Saharan Africa and to open further avenues for reflection. His article presents the current situation of consecrated life in Africa, and then situates the problem of the process of inculturation in the current context in relation to interculturality as a formative issue. The author, finally, discusses the real difficulties and chances of inculturation of consecrated life today in Africa before offering some concluding remarks. "Some religious communities consider the debate on interculturalism-inculturation as a past, a new museum: they are wrong. The answers may no longer be given, but they have to be built, even today and together. Our conviviality seems possible only if there is a strong and constant struggle against voluntary discrimination, against prejudice, hatred and irrationality".

Starting from concrete social happenings, the Dominican theologian and patristic scholar, Emeka Nwosuh, proposes a critical reflection on the necessity and worth "Of Words and Symbols". Coming in the wake of the violence and killings in Makurdi Diocese in Nigeria, the article attempts to contribute to the relevant question of how best should the Catholic Church in Nigeria respond to the frequent terrorist attacks and killings in the society? Nwosuh's reflection proposes a theological response to the Communiqué of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria on the recent killings in Catholic diocese of Makurdi (Nigeria). In the current general search for solutions -- amidst anxiety, fears and hope -- the author boldly offers some specific suggestions. Other readers remain may contribute their own opinion to the issue, keeping in mind that faith without works is dead (Cf. James 2:14-26). Most citizens and Christians seek the protection and respect of human rights and quest for social justice. Thus, in practical terms, what are the best ways for the Catholic Church (and one may specify: Consecrated life) in Nigeria to effectively respond to the persistent violence, terrorism, destruction of properties and killings of innocent people?. Have your say.

Enjoy reading! Spread the word!

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

CONSECRATED TO CATECHIZE PEOPLE FROM CRADLE TO GRAVE

Fr Prof. Bartholomew Chidili, OSA

Abstract

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

Introduction

It was the veteran American professor of religion, Gabriel Moran, who once suggested that religious education has chiefly two aims, namely: (1) to teach people to practice a religious way of life and (2) to teach people to understand religion⁴. These two aims obviously set pace for this essay. The first aim examines the teaching of religion from its basics. This investigates how a child begins religious journey right away from birth within the warm surrounding of the parents, siblings and caregivers. This stage includes the child's world within the primary and secondary schools. The second aim dovetails with the first in the sense that since this involves learning process, it has to begin from the early stage of human development. Hence, it appears that the two phases of religious education appear to be one process of learning with different sides of emphasis. While the first phase lays emphases on ways of developing religion as a way of life, the second phase emphasizes proper understanding of religion. This means in effect that the religion one learns as the only way to worship God from

⁴ Moran, 1998, p.30

infancy is explored in the second phase to include the awareness of other religions and other people who follow those ways to the same God. As the second stage must obviously start from infancy, emphases are increased as soon as the child enters the world wider than the family and community. This means that the child should be further introduced to wider world with samples of the people who are not from his/her family and community together with the differences in the idea of the ways they have to worship God which appear different from their way of worship, yet all the ways lead to one God.

The Role of Family in Religious Faith Formation

Family, both nuclear and extended has been naturally and globally accepted as the most fertile ground for the raising of religious faith. This is because the family environment offers the child the best suitable ground for growing up. Hence, in the field of faith formation, parents occupy the first place. The reason is that they are the closest 'significant others' in the life of the child. Developmental psychologists such as Piaget, Erikson, Kohlberg and of course James Fowler are of the opinion that the closest significant others in the life of a child should provide the necessary ingredients that enables a proper development and growth of a child. Other significant peoples in the life of the child are the siblings, friends, groups, models, and acquaintances. These are the significant others that provide emotional support, socialization as well as relationship with the transcendent. Perhaps that is why everything concerning basic up-bringing is mainly associated with the family. Thus, like language, community-etiquette and many other behaviors learned at infancy from the family, religion is acquired from the family right away from birth. In the words of Karen Springen, citing child psychiatrist Elizabeth Berger, author of "Raising Children with Character," the roots of morality first appear in the earliest months of an infant's life. "It begins the day they're born, and it's not complete until the day they die."⁵ This follows that the 'primal faith', which starts right away from infancy, is the foundation on which a person's faith is established. Such a foundation in the words of Fowler is "nurtured in the family."⁶ Within this period parents or the nearest significant others in the life of the child are required to provide the basic love that ensures trust. Berry Brazelton, a pediatrician and Stanley Greenspan, a child psychiatrist, together call this period "most critical and the most vulnerable" in child development. Citing both their own research and that of others, the duo insists that within this period "the ingredients for intellectual and moral growth" of any child must be laid or face the risk of setback "two or three steps behind, no matter how hard we try to help them catch up."⁷ This is why Fowler (1991) is correct when he calls the family "the incubator of human faith development."⁸ On this account

⁵ Newsweek, p. 72

⁶ Fowler, 1995, p.11

⁷ Ibid, p.34

⁸ Ibid

then, every family must do whatever it takes to provide the necessary ingredients for nurturing a child to term.

Such ingredients include “gestures and emotional cues (smiles, assertive glances, frowns, pointing, taking and giving back, negotiating and the like)” for infants who cannot speak yet. The reason for these early starts say Brazelton and Greenspan is to acquaint the infants with the human behaviors. Citing human voice as an example, the duo maintains that listening to human voice helps infants to learn to distinguish sounds and develop language. Furthermore, they explain that exchanging “emotional gestures help babies learn to perceive and respond to emotional cues and form a sense of self.”⁹ In the same way this paper believes that cues of faith will be learned from the caregivers when they are expressed often before the children right away from their infancy. As they distinguish sounds and form language so they will distinguish the emotional cues that form good morals and faith and then gradually form the community accepted good morals and faith eventually. Just as Brazelton and Greenspan discovered through many years of studies that family patterns that neglect the ongoing nurturing care lead infants to “significant cognitive and emotional problems,¹⁰” so infants, who grew up from the neglect of faith nurturing, grow faith imbalance later in life. These infants in their adolescence develop such crisis that lead some to atheism and some to one religion or the other like a rolling stone they never gather any moss in faith. Such individuals actually develop very chaos adult-faith-life without root or at best shallow root one might say.¹¹ But when properly guarded by the cogent family environment, the child comes out a robust, fervent child of God and solid member of the society.

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

Parents should provide an Islamic environment, and Islamic culture. It is hypocritical to do things differently and expect the child to have Islamic values. Parents set the best examples for their children to imbibe. Like parents the role of family has also been considered important in learning and upbringing the children.¹²

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

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Brazelton, T. B. & Greenspan, S. (2000, Fall/Winter), Our window to the future. In *Newsweek*, pp.34-36, 72.

¹¹ Chidili, 2005

¹² Syed, I. B. 2001. Education of Muslim Children—Challenges and Opportunities.
<http://www.uscharterschools.org/>

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created in early life.¹³ Citing Cantwell Smith, Fowler (1995), explains meaning as purposeful "quality of human living"¹⁴ He further explains this quality as the state of "serenity and courage and loyalty and service: a quiet confidence and joy which enables one to feel at home in the universe"¹⁵ Furthermore, he maintains that it is the same quality of serene purpose that helps one to find meaning in one's own life and by extension in the environment and people that help one to discover the ultimate, which roots us firmly in life. Fowler in the mouth of Smith insists that with such a profound foundation we can withstand any vagary of life event, come what may.¹⁶ This is to say then that a good family structure nurtures a complete cultured human person, suffused in religious faith and culture. This point is further stressed by Syed, when he insists that:

Every Muslim parent is advised to raise his or her children well and properly. A happy home, comfort, care and love, providing the necessities of life and a good education are some of the responsibilities that parents are required to fulfill. Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) said whoever is not kind to young people is not one of us and the best teaching that a parent can give a child is the teaching of good manners and character. The Muslim child absorbs the Islamic values from its parents, teachers, peers, friends and the environment, including the care-givers. Nip it in the bud is the best advice. Otherwise once the Muslim child develops undesirable habits and unethical values, it becomes extremely difficult to make the child into a good Muslim/Muslimah.¹⁷

Certainly, it is right to say that religion originates from family and cultural heritage. This is because "in all lands the social training of a child directs him to translate tribal ritual into personal habits."¹⁸ Though the child may be oblivious of what is happening in his life at a time, the fact that all it respects, such as parents, significant others, and indeed the elders are performing the act, enables the child to trustfully follow and assimilate whatever the adult society is doing. This is why M. N. Getui, rightly observes that the African traditional society incorporates religious training and instruction in the day-to-day activities of the people in such a way that any person participating in these activities of the people will eventually be molded spiritually.¹⁹ Hence Potvin and Sloane came to the conclusion that "adolescent Church membership within the major denominations is often a

¹³ Fowler, J. W. (1991). Stages of faith consciousness. In F. K. Oser & G. Scarlett (Eds.), Religious development in childhood and adolescence (pp.27-45). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

¹⁴ Fowler, J. W. (1995). Stages of faith. San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers.

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Syed, I. B. 2001. Education of Muslim Children—Challenges and Opportunities. <http://www.uscharterschools.org/>

¹⁸Allport, p. 26.

¹⁹ Getui, 1990

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simple extension of parental membership.”²⁰ This becomes very true when we consider the contention of the cultural anthropologists that human cultures all over the world are ready fertile ground for breeding ritual and myth. Inherent in these cultures also are some leadership qualities such as priesthood or the like to preserve the religious beliefs and practices.²¹ These religious personnel not only preserve the cultural beliefs of a people, they also participate in transferring it to the young. As a matter of fact in some religions, they are the main custodians and transferors of faith. Muslim scholar Syed, puts it this way:

As the children grow, the teachers, community elders, their friends exert deep influence on the character of the child. The parents should choose the right schools for their children. Audio-Visual media such as TV, Video, video games, Movies, peer pressure could play an effective role in raising the Islamic personality the parents are building and deeply influence the behavior of the children for years. It takes constant and continuous effort on the part of the parents and others to keep our youth on the path of Islamic values. Otherwise they will become an American statistic. Character education, promotion of order and discipline and ending the culture of guns and drugs from schools are the important steps of Islamic education.²²

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

²⁰ Cited in Chidili, 2005, p. 96

²¹ Chidili, 2006

²² Syed, I. B. 2001. Education of Muslim Children—Challenges and Opportunities.
<http://www.uscharterschools.org/>

within their ranks to deter them from poisoning the minds and behaviors of the young.²³

Developing a Balanced Human Personality

Moreover, child education aims at developing a balanced human personality through training of the human spirit, mental power, rational self, senses, and feelings. In other words, education frequently aims at developing human person physically, mentally and spiritually. Above all, educational policy should normally be directed to target enlightening the head and heart and illuminating the human consciousness for all round development of individual personality. This is why education enables a human being to attain the greatest possible harmony, internal and external, spiritual and material, for the fullest possible development of human potentialities and capacities. Along this line of thought, Ibrahim Syed suggests that Islamic education aims at among other things, the preparation of the young for leadership and building of character. He further points out that the final goal of Islamic education is the growth and development of an Islamic personality, which indeed is the pivot of Islamic values.²⁴ Citing the Recommendation of the Committee of the First World Conference on Muslim Education, he summarizes the aim of Islamic education as follows:

Education should aim at the balanced growth of the total personality of man through training of the human spirit, intellect, rational self, feelings and senses. The training imparted to a Muslim must be such that faith is infused into the whole of his/her personality and creates in him/her an emotional attachment to Islam and enables him to follow the Qur'an and Sunnah and be governed by Islamic system of values willingly and joyfully so that he/she may proceed to the realization of his/her status as Khalifatullah to whom God has promised the authority of the universe.²⁵

Certainly, all other religious faiths, Hinduism, Afrreligionism, Shintoism, Judaism, Christianity etc deeply shares in this basic aim of religious education. Obviously, this is the intention of all other religious faiths and this is what all of them understand very well and indeed raise their adherents accordingly, to the extent that any good member of any religion is soaked in their tenet to a blind point. In other words people are so awash with their own religious truth that no other religion seems to matter. This is why it appears as if all religions teach love and yet behaves hate to other people since they are closed to themselves. All their teachings are still very parochial and domesticated. Each religious

²³ Chidili, 2006

²⁴ Syed, I. B. 2001. Education of Muslim Children—Challenges and Opportunities.
<http://www.uscharterschools.org/>

²⁵ Ibid

community closes itself up, learns all that appertains to their religious faith, acts and behaves fully learned but relates inimically to others. Gabriel Moran puts this way, “every child acts out a religious way with a set of beliefs, symbols, and actions that relate the person to the enduring religious questions of wherefrom, whereto, and why. Every child takes up a stance toward the universe as a whole and toward the meaning of life and death, even if this way of life is not one of the traditional religions.”²⁶ Moran further observes that anyone who grows up in such an insulated religious world sees other religious faiths very strange. Each person is shocked to notice other people who behave differently from the way they behave. Foreign students know this experience very well, particularly on their first weeks of encounter with other students from other parts of the world.²⁷ “On their first encountering people who are seemingly intelligent and well-meaning,” says Moran, “see the individual elements within other people’s religion as strange and even bizarre.”²⁸ If there is nothing done to acquaint each other on one another’s religious behaviors, people will remain estranged and worlds apart. Without doubt this explains how all religious faiths bring their adherents up and indeed still live in that way. From cradle through youth to the grave as it were, all religious faiths still mold their adherent in such a straight-jacket fashion. It is even worse in schools of higher learning where religions are not only hemmed along the lines of individual religious faiths but also coached in languages foreign to the local people. Surely, this makes deep understanding of religious faith very difficult. Perhaps that is why there is sporadic yells and shouts at each other now and then out of fear of unknown, among the rank and files of different religious faiths. As all these religions are shouting at each other like people in the market place, no one hears the other, and thus, continues the strangeness among them.

The Application of More Self Critique to Reinvent our Religious Tenets

This is not to say that efforts have not been made toward bringing all religious faiths together for the sake of dialogue and acquaintance. Rather it is to say that enough is yet to be done in that regard. This means that more efforts must be made by all religions to achieve tolerance and fraternity among their rank and files. Jeff Astley suggests in this connection that Christian religious educational process should be “more self-critical of their religious beliefs, attitudes, values, emotions and actions.”²⁹ This, in my judgment, is the only way that religions should evolve self-understanding and self-growth. This is mainly because self-critique enables individuals to shape and reshape oneself for better. Perhaps, this is why Astley’s suggestion is the cogent proposal for all

²⁶ Moran, 1989, p. 31

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Astley, J. (1996). The role of the family in the formation and criticism of faith. In Stephen C. Barton (Ed.), The family in theological perspective. Edinburgh: T & T Clark.

religious faiths so as to shape themselves up to understand themselves and also be fully aware of other religions and their importance to various other people who worship God through them. Self-critique therefore is the hinge for all religions' meticulous self-understanding of itself as a unique religion and other religions as unique in their own ways. At the same time it facilitates people's proper understanding of other people who access other religions for worship. The knowledge acquired from self-critique obviously enhances constant growth and deep understanding of religion per se and its universal appeal in general. This obviously is the main thrust of the second aim of religious education. This is the area I think the tertiary level of religious education should explore properly with a view to evolving a modality that should flow down the ranks and files of all religious faiths from the grassroots to the noblest of the society.

Bridging the Gap through the Collation and Fraternization of all Religious Tenets

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

fully that Afrreligion, Islam or Christianity for that matter is “a religion,” utterly unique but comparable to every other religion.³⁰

New Understanding of Religious Tenets as a Game Changer

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

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

- (1). To enable learners to understand the nature of their traditional beliefs and practices and the beliefs and practices of other world faiths.
- (2). To teach tolerance and challenge prejudice towards people of different faiths through providing opportunities to develop an understanding of the value of living in a multicultural, multi-faith and multi-lingual society.
- (3). To help learners reflect upon their own needs, experiences and questions and to confront what are sometimes referred to as ‘ultimate questions’.
- (4). To encourage learners to develop open minds to new and different concepts and to form their own opinions based on evidence and argument.
- (5). To maintain close links with local churches and other religious communities.
- (6). To learn from religions in addition to gaining knowledge and understanding about religions.³¹

This will mean in the words of South African Educational Policy, that religious education will provide the pupils with the life orientation that develops their capacity to respect the right of others, appreciate the cultural diversity and different belief systems. It will therefore make it imperative on the parents and teachers to impart on their progeny, the virtues of acceptance of other religions as enshrined in their respective religions. A Muslim for instance will learn from the Holy Qur’an, to respect “those who believe in that which was revealed to thee and that which was revealed before thee” (2: 4). “Say, we believe in Allah and in that which has been revealed to us and in that which was revealed to Abraham and Ismail and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes in that which was given to Moses and Jesus and in that which was given to the prophets from their Lord and we do not make any distinction between any of them and to Him do we submit” (2: 179). They will also learn to respect people of other religions as stated in the Holy Qur’an: “And abuse not those whom they call upon besides Allah, lest exceeding the limits they abuse Allah through ignorance” (6: 108). The Christians will for instance imbibe such themes like, do

³⁰ Moran, G. (1998). The aims of religious education. In Harris, M and Moran, G. Reshaping Religious Education. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster Press, p. 31.

³¹ South African National Policy on Religion and Education (Web, 2007).

not mistreat an alien or oppress him, for you were aliens in Egypt (Ex 22:21). Show proper respect to everyone (1Peter, 2:17). Love one another as I have loved you. Love your enemies and do good to those who hate you (Lk 6: 27). Owe no one anything except the debt of love for one another (Rm 13: 8), etc.³²

Dialogue as a Basic Philosophy of Encounter in this Aspect of Knowledge

To realize this proposal, 'dialogue' as suggested by Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator should be applied as the medium of communication. In his "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" Freire, proposed 'dialogue' as a philosophy of knowledge. In this situation, dialogue is defined as an 'encounter between men mediated by the world, in order to name the world" (p. 88). This translates to mean that in the teaching and learning of this kind, the teacher and the learner must be the people who are curious to learn from one another, and at the same time teach one another based on the information arising from the world around them. The participants must have common purpose which must be to name the world. The world this time must be their problem within their environment. When the problem is named, each member of the discussants will have the opportunity to air his/her views without being coerced or intimidated. This means that the dialogue must be a free affair so as to be rewarding. In the process of the dialogue, there should be no imposition of any person's opinion; there should be no denigration of any person's opinion. All opinions are considered equal. All opinions are discussed with equal interest without fear or favor. This discussion must be inspired by the interest to acquire knowledge, new knowledge of what one does not know. The knowledge acquired in this discussion is meant to leverage the participants and impact on the society positively. Since the knowledge gained is intended to be used in daily life, every member of the community must be enthusiastically and genuinely concerned. The main purpose is to use the new knowledge to transform the society to become a friendly society instead of hostile community. In this case then, the knowledge gained in discussing words like 'tolerance' 'compassion' or the like, are aimed at transforming the multi-religious, multicultural or multilingual society like Nigeria to cohabit amicably.

As we pointed out earlier, the content of this new idea should be all the religious themes that speak of tolerance, peace and unity amongst people. These themes like love, compassion, tolerance have been earlier enumerated. Home and school as places of learning are very important as already hinted. But with this idea of broad based learning, Gabriel Moran suggests that while not subtracting home and school as places of learning, places of work and leisure should be added. He also suggests that the idea of religious learning being what 'women do to children, supervised by men' has become obsolete

³² Ibid

with this new idea. He then suggests that since religion is such an important theme in human life, it should be lifelong learning.³³ This means that religious learning should be spread to include the young and the old. The teachers now will expand to be every member of the community, at different stages of life. This means then that as the young takes religious teachings from the old, so the old should prepare to receive religious teachings from the young. That is to say, as birth, death or physically challenged child teaches the mystery of God to the adult so the adult exposes the child to the traditional genesis of their religious faith. In them all are mysteries only religion can teach the people of faith.

The Content of the Curriculum

At this point, children should start learning religious diversity by exploring the more tangible forms of the religion, right away from home and then continue with the observable aspects of religious diversity found in churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, shrines, and other places of gathering for religious activity. As children advance in age, other areas of religious diversity could be addressed. Thus, in the secondary schools for instance, students should begin to study the basic component phenomena of religion, such as stories, songs, sacred places, founders, rituals and festivals, with illustrations drawn from various religious traditions and communities in Nigeria and the world. In this connection, Oduyoye (1979) suggests that a learning of this type must necessarily include, "the meaning of everyday events, of festivals, the patterns of behavior, norms and taboos," as well as the community religious history and any other human activities occurring in the community as a part of the religious knowledge, every young person must know.³⁴ At senior secondary schools, integration of these component parts of religion could be introduced in preparation to further discussion on religious study themes in schools of higher learning. At tertiary level of education, religious studies should introduce learners to all sorts of critical thinking about significant issues of personal morality and social ethics that are often associated with religion. When religion is discussed in schools it must be positioned in such a way as to be examinable, so as to grade student's knowledge. Students should be also assessed through practical observation to know whether they can behave in reality what they learn in theory. But when these religious themes are discussed in work places and leisure places among adults, the assessment should be on the practical behavior of the people. Thus, if tolerance is discussed for instance, the measurement will be on how the participants tolerate one another starting from that moment of discussion to infinity, anywhere and everywhere.

³³ Moran, G. (1998). The aims of religious education. In Harris, M and Moran, G. Reshaping Religious Education. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster Press

³⁴ Oduyoye, M. A. (1979). The Value of African religious beliefs and practices for Christian theology. In K. Appiah-Kubi & S. Torres (Eds.). African theology en route. New York: Orbis Books, p. 94.

Since J. S. Mbiti in his “African Religions and Philosophy 1977” observed that Africa is profoundly religious³⁵, it follows that every activity in Africa is religiously laced. In that case then, every learning in African community must be understood as a religious knowledge. This is why Oduyoye’s suggestion that puberty rites and indeed other rites of passage should be extended to schools and other places of learning is proper. This is necessary as puberty in particular is the beginning of proper awareness of social integration and disintegration at the same time, in Africa. At this time both male and female integrate sexually by each sex developing its individuality. In other words, males are taught to be male by learning all that appertains to males and females learn what appertains to females. On the other hand, the obvious boundaries created by this arrangement disparage the community since males learn to lord it over the females and in this way the community muzzles the individuality of the females.³⁶ However, Oduyoye (1995) argues that the new education should include respect for individuality instead of subordination.³⁷ This will shape the thrust of the education to include teaching equality and respect of all human persons at home, at schools, the places of work and at leisure places.

Conclusion

In the end, this dialogical process of learning starting from the cradle to the grave driven by context and content; will usher in the desired objective. The knowledge acquired in this exercise as developed above will eventually dispel the ignorance and debilitating fear hindering the familiarization of divergent religions in Nigeria. The learning will then pave the way for tolerance and respect for other people and their religion. The tolerance and respect will then lead to peaceful coexistence and harmonious neighborhood. This will then, mean that religious literacy should include cultural literacy. Creativity in this regard will amount to developing capacities for expanding imagination, making connections, and dealing with cultural differences and diversity. Furthermore, religious literacy will understand critical reflection to include comparison, cultural analysis, ethical debate, and the formulation and clarification of values.³⁸ In this way religions will understand each other and thus entrench enduring peace and harmony in our society.

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³⁵ Mbiti, J. S. (1977). African religions and philosophy. New York: Anchor Books

³⁶ Oduyoye, M. A. (1979), p. 39

³⁷ Oduyoye, M. A. (1995). Daughters of Anowa. New York: Orbis Books, p.82

³⁸ South African National Policy on Religion and Education (Web, 2007).

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STUDIES AND PERSPECTIVES

THE INCULTURATION OF CONSECRATED LIFE TODAY
IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA¹

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ABSTRACT

The debate on the process of the inculturation of the consecrated life in Africa is and remains of great relevance for the religious Institutes because of the relevance of its theme and also for the solidity of the life of faith in the African cultural realities. In the milieu of Roman Catholicity, we all agree that inculturation theologically "*means an intimate transformation of authentic cultural values by their integration into Christianity, into various human cultures*"¹. Whatever the case may be, we cannot be spared, in order to be credible and less intellectualistic or academic, to face the problem of interculturality because, as we know, "*the Christian faith really opens up a mode of intercultural life, in that it connects people of different cultures in a "we" that is the fruit of the conversion of each to a reality different from its original culture?*"¹. Interculturality, in fact, clears the way for an explicit conversion that makes it possible to deal with the inculturation process with keenness for fear of being inconsistent and thus succumb to a sort of folklorism, ethnocentric fundamentalism and a return to the past without expected results. In this Africa thirsting for fecundity, Consecrated Life, deeply rooted in the example and teaching of Christ the Lord, is a gift of God the Father to His Church by the Spirit, has much to contribute to this great continent. Thanks to the profession of the evangelical counsels, *the characteristic traits of Jesus - chaste, poor and obedient - become "visible" in the middle of the world in an exemplary and permanent way* and the eyes of the African faithful are called to return to the mystery of the Kingdom of God who is already acting in history, but who is waiting to take his full dimension in the heavens (VC, 1).

INTRODUCTION

This is the topic of the article that I was requested to write on for this journal. The main objective is to make a contribution to the current debate on the process of inculturation of the consecrated life today in sub-Saharan Africa, and to open up alternative paths for further reflections. This article will articulate three points: in a first approach I will give my point of view on the current situation of consecrated life in Africa. Secondly, I will situate the problem of the process of inculturation (an urgency, a challenge and an imperative) in the present context in relation to the interculturality as a formative interplay. Finally, I will discuss the real difficulties and the opportunities of inculturation of Consecrated life today in Africa. And I will end with a conclusion.

I. THE CURRENT SITUATION OF CONSECRATED LIFE IN AFRICA

First of all, I observe, like everyone else, that consecrated life in Africa is in a situation of *crisis* but also of *vitality*. One of the most evident symptoms of this crisis is undoubtedly the significant hemorrhage many of the religious communities or institutes witnessed and continue to experience. At the beginning of this exodus, we easily reassured ourselves with reflections like: It was easily said and is still said, "it's a purification process going on in our place... all those who were not really called to this vocation are going away; life and things will be much better after that". If some quit because of lack of ideal or engagement, others do so because they believe that consecrated life as it exists in its present state is not capable of responding to their ideals and their need for engagement. It is therefore a crisis that is not peculiar to Consecrated life but affects the whole Church¹.

On the other hand, besides these departures, we observe a certain vitality which is manifested in the increasing number of young people that come from all over who embrace consecrated life. Besides, here and there is the erection of feminine indigenous congregations of diocesan rite, even though they do not always have a clear identity or charism.

That said, the current crisis of consecrated life in Africa is essentially a crisis of identity.¹ And the immediate causes are: on one hand, there is the weakness and imprecision of the charisms, the spirituality, the apostolate, I would say of the identity of the patrimony of the institute¹. On the other hand, it is due to the profound changes that African society has known in the course of the last few years, changes have brought about profound mutations in the way religious men and women are inserted into the society and into the apostolate of the Church.

Without a doubt, many factors have contributed to consolidate a peaceful diffusion of these mutations, including: the transfer of

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responsibilities from missionary religious men and women from the West to indigenous religious who are of a good number in these religious families; followed by the big problem of multiculturalism and interculturalism¹ which is always galloping in the lives of many indigenous as well as missionary religious communities. Finally, the problem of double belonging: how does one live as a consecrated Christian in the actual context of mundialization and globalization without “alienating oneself” or disowning oneself, and be able to find his or her true place, so that he/she is not a “counter witness” for others? In short, how do we inculturate this consecrated life in our religious Institutes?

As I said earlier, religious life was welcomed, certainly, with a certain reticence, but often with enthusiasm, thanks to certain traditional African values of references¹:

- *The sense of the sacred*: respect to what is related to God and to transcendence or all that brings us closer to him.
- *The communitarian sense*, the extended family and the enlarged fraternity, we would say, with all its consequences in terms of solidarity and sharing. This renders real religious fraternity easy in the eyes of Africans, when fraternity is based on relations of parity.
- *The sense of precarity of earthly things*. True happiness, even in the enjoyment of material things, comes from above, from the harmony with the One who brought these things into being.
- *Virginity* in view of marriage or a consecration, *and the meaning of life, of fecundity*, of a superior life to be transmitted to others. To be a “mother”, a “father” is not a banality. That is why religious people are regarded with great reverence.
- *The sense of authority* of leaders who are responsible for the community; one has to know how to obey and listen, which are indispensable conditions for a wise person. God has given us two ears and one mouth.
- The value of human being is found equally in the “given word” and in the signs and *symbols* which translate the fundamental alliances and decisive choices.

The acceptance of consecrated life in the African culture has helped to bring about a certain transformation provoked by the newness of Christ’s message, on mundialization and globalization.¹ In Africa, certain dimensions have been rightly challenged, as testified in the documents *Ecclesia in Africa* (1994) and *Africae munus* (2009):

- The image of God and sacredness, the newness of a God who is closer to us, an incarnated God, who becomes our brother and friend, without becoming banal or a sinner.
- The family extends to the dimensions of the Church, no longer in the name of tribal blood but in virtue of the blood shed by the Son of God; and so the Holy Spirit blows on the whole of humanity, breathing and expressing

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Himself in every woman and man, so as to transform us from the inside. In this way, the tribe expands.

- A new richness, a new treasure, that of the kingdom of God and of grace, which surpasses and permits us to surpass earthly goods.
- A new fecundity offered to married people as well as to virgins who, following the example of Christ can become fruitful, just like the seed that dies in order to bear fruits.
- Authority is now exercised as a disinterested service, and the one who is the first becomes last. Obedience does not consist anymore in having fears, nor of being interested or flattering to the leader, but it consists of entering freely into a dialogue in which we open ourselves up in discerning the will of God, with the mediation of the person in position of responsibility and of the entire family.

The discovery of a truly efficacious Word, that of God to man through his Son, his Word, and that of man who is capable of saying yes when he wants to say yes, and no when he wants to say no. For instance, there is the Word given through solemn vows, and which nourishes itself through the Word made flesh.

On the other hand, it will be right to say that, in the context of globalization of culture linked to liberalism which presents itself as specie of "new Catholicism" where good and services more and more are geared towards economic profit (returns), religious men and women in Africa are not exempted from this search of a hedonistic way of life, a culture which is generally characterized by a certain narcissistic individualism; the deficiency, sometimes very serious, with which they live their ecclesial experience¹. This situation only further undermines the *raison d'être* of religious life which is already losing its specific identity and can no longer play its specific role in the Church and in the world.

In this context that is evolving rapidly, it would seem that consecrated life in Africa will have to reflect and bring solutions to these urgent challenges mentioned below in order to reinvigorate its apostolic presence in this changing Continent that is made of many cultures, different cultural forms and of ethnic diversities:

- 1 - The challenge of formation: facing this world in effervescence of ideas, changing, modernism, what kind of formation is being given to future Consecrated men and women so that they do not lose their identity?
- 2 - The challenge of the evangelical counsels: How does one live the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience in a world that is more and more disarticulated and secularized?
- 3 -The religious community is a cell of the Church-as-family of God in dialogue: individualism, the means of social communication; are these not snares for these Consecrated persons?
- 4 - The challenge of inter-ethnic community life.

5- The challenge of inculturation: how can the international institutes inculturate their charism in a given country and live in the present, the ideal of life advocated in the past by their founder?

6 - The challenge of witness: how to be the voice of the voiceless?

II. THE PROBLEM OF INCULTURATION: AN EMERGENCY, A CHALLENGE, A DUTY

How can one be fully a religious and fully African? For me, at the beginning of the third millennium, where almost everywhere religious congregations are celebrating the centenary of their arrival to Africa, I can't but feel a certain worry about the future. The only serious problem evident is that of inculturation and interculturality: these congregations although international will either be African or will never become.

It is the future of these communities that is at stake especially as their members are more and more Africans and even Asians. We must help these members to live a life that is fully consecrated to the Lord and fully African, because if we do not succeed in doing this we risk having members whom part of their being and their lives remain on the margins of consecration, hence a duplicity in the way of living the gift to the Lord. "The religious life," affirmed St. John Paul II, "moreover, continues the mission of Christ with another feature specifically its own: fraternal life in community for the sake of the mission. Thus, men and women religious will be all the more committed to the apostolate the more personal their dedication to the Lord Jesus is, the more fraternal their community life"¹.

But how to live this fraternal life in community when our paths, our projects of life cannot meet? How do we move from a juxtaposed multiculturalism to a fruitful and fraternal interculturality? But how do we manage the conflict accentuated by cultural and social differences? How do we live with each other, in a fraternal relationship without masking the social inequalities existing between us? Not to question these relationships, these diffused and complex feelings, is to take the risk of idealizing interculturality and of not falling in a process of inculturation that would only produce ethnocentrism, withdrawal into oneself, exoticism, and the negation of other and his/her milieu.

Before facing this process of inculturation of consecrated life, I believe that we must first face the challenge of interculturality. This is because it invites us to rethink the way we live together in communities and the way we constitute community both at the local and international levels. Will we choose identity withdrawal and resistance in the face of the difference of the other person, or will we allow ourselves to be engendered by each other? It happens that we sometimes see religious who do certain things that disrupt the life of the community (e.g., very ambiguous relationship with the family ...) and all this, of course, in secret. This creates inner conflicts for the person concerned and problems for the community. How can we in this case begin

the process of inculturation if the challenge of interculturality has not yet found a solution?

However, the task of expressing the consecrated life in the culture and through the culture in which we live today is not the only one of the great challenges or the future of the consecrated life, in the face of the diversity of environments. This challenge is not optional, but it is a requirement of our faith itself. Without inculturation, faith will remain superficial with neither depth nor personal commitment and even risks becoming a counter-testimony. And without interculturality, our communities would run the risk of transforming the difference (*l'étrangeté*) of other into a threat and not into a promise of new fraternity¹. With this, and we will lose a chance of revisiting the meaning and missionary vocation of religious life in the world of today. Paul VI declared in this sense to the Bishops of Africa: "It is up to you to make alive and effective the meeting of Christianity with the ancient African tradition. [...] It is a question of creating or of deepening a new civilization, which is both African and Christian, and we affirm with you that this project is achievable, with the grace of God ..."

Frequently inculturation is poorly understood. According to some, inculturation is to bring culture to the fore; it is to overload Christian liturgies with local rites, it is the affirmation of one's own culture, it is the justification of let's say a certain "moral" to the Asian, the American, the European, the Oceanian or the African, depending on the environment in which one finds himself. It is not a simple exterior adaptation, because inculturation "means an intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration into Christianity, into the diverse human cultures"¹. This fertilization or fecundity will, of course, necessitate an effort of purification so that these cultural values conform to the requirements of the Gospel.

The permanent interactions between the local and the international, migrations and exchanges put cultures and identities in a position of withdrawal or openness. The question of living together rests today even more strongly than yesterday. The question of interculturality is eminently a social issue. I am convinced that it is difficult to have interculturality without social justice. Or it is difficult to talk about intercultural politics in a religious community where wealth and poverty coexist, where abundance and misery confront each other.

In this prospective, I am convinced that it is important to stay on the process of inculturation in order to confront with sharpness the question of interculturality before everything else in order not to succumb to a kind of folklorism, ethnocentric fundamentalism and a return to the past.¹

For this, the fact that many religious congregations today have become international and multicultural by their members, this reality offers them practical advantages. Its real value is the testimony it gives of universality and openness in terms of the diversity of the Kingdom of God. This testimony is particularly urgent in the context of globalization which

has the tendency, on the one hand, to exclude and, on the other hand, to eliminate all differences. This being so, there is a particular need today to testify to the fact that the Kingdom of God is a Kingdom of love that absolutely includes everyone and is at the same time open to the particularity of every person and of every people.

Evidently, the ideal is not only “internationality” (mere presence in the congregation or community of members of different nationalities or cultures). And it is also not simply “multicultural” (that is to say, the capacity for members of different nationalities and cultures to exist simply side by side or co-exist). The ideal is, rather, true “interculturality”, that is, a congregation or community that allows the different cultures of the members to interact between themselves and thereby enrich the members individually and the community as a whole. An authentic intercultural community is characterized by three things:

1) the recognition of other cultures (that is, giving minority cultures visibility in the community);

2) respect for cultural difference (by avoiding all attempts to level cultural differences by subsuming minority cultures into the dominant culture); and

3) The promotion of a healthy interaction between cultures (in other words, seeking to create a climate where every culture allows itself to be transformed or enriched by the other).

Thus, an authentically intercultural community is a community where members of different cultures truly have a sense of belonging. Such a community, however, does not arise by chance, or simply by putting together people of different culture and nation under the same roof. A veritable intercultural community needs rather to be consciously created, promoted intentionally, cared for and carefully educated. Such a community requires some basic personal attitudes, community structures and a spirituality of communion. Consequently, members need a specific program of formation, both initial and permanent, in order to prepare them to live in an effective way and in a way that makes sense in an intercultural community. It is very essential that members be convinced that interculturality is an ideal to be sought and a value to promote. It is after all that this community is ready to embark on a process of fruitful inculturation because all the members are persevering in the teaching of the Apostles, in the fraternal communion, in the breaking of the bread, and in the prayers (cf. Ac, 2, 42).

III. THE REAL DIFFICULTIES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF INCULTURATION OF CONSECRATED LIFE TODAY IN AFRICA

Before speaking about the real difficulties and opportunities of the inculturation of consecrated life in Africa experienced by our religious

communities, I would like to emphasize that it is not a question of claiming our cultural rights, nor is it a battle for the recognition of our identities, nor a struggle for reclaiming already outdated mental attitudes, but rather it is a question of the roles that these communities must continue to play in the face of the various historical contingencies in order to permit a constant and balanced relationship between God and the African in search of salvation¹. Let me ask myself these questions: Is the present theology of consecrated life adapted and pertinent to African religious? How must we understand the evangelical counsels in the context of both a secular globalized society and the emergence of non-Western cultures, particularly Africa? What are their new interpretations that emerge from today's crises - ecological, financial, political, crisis of sexual abuse, etc.¹? As Latin saying goes: "Here is the difficulty. Here we must engage".

In wanting to confront the process of inculturation, it must be said that it is never an absorption but an achievement. Jesus, in fact, did not come to abolish but to accomplish, to perfect. In this fulfilment, "it is what is of God that is to be preserved" (Mk. 7). But who is the legislator or guarantor, if not the same local religious community, which is the actor in this process of inculturation?¹ If our religious communities were effectively engaged in the process of inculturation, they would be continuously growing. We would no longer be Africans who are consecrated but consecrated Africans. A profound evangelization of our religious communities would become an urgent duty for everyone.

If the point of departure is effectively evangelical values¹, then the encounter with cultural ones is achieved through judicious discernment and with a great deal of success. Let's see them:

The first opportunity is that where African religious life is expressed in and through the resources of these transformed cultures. This involves aspects such as prayer, with the parameters of the language used, for example. It is not the same thing to pray in French, English or Spanish, as to pray in the language of the people where we are incarnated, whether you are born there or are from elsewhere. We know well that the excuses like "all books are in French" or "I learnt all prayers in Spanish only" are absolutely invalid. Ask any missionary if he or she has not noticed the sense of communion and the pride which he brought to life by just trying to say a *Good morning* or a *Thank you*, or in trying a local dance step with people of the village or neighbourhood. Who still preoccupies himself about mistakes when one feels the efforts to identify with them as "one"?

Second aspect, is that of traditional symbols, vestments, music and rites that can and should be valorized. This is an important and delicate dimension. This is important because faith is expressed in a necessarily cultural way. Delicate because inculturation begins with the conversion of customs and is celebrated through rites. Putting too much emphasis on rites, language and dances translates a certain superficiality that comes either from a nostalgia for ancestral times - which is no longer part of African

culture - or a search for an aestheticism close to a certain superficial religiosity but very far from the true faith that transfigures life and celebrates it in the liturgy.

The other opportunity is that of community life. Interpersonal relations in Africa have a flare which is not the same in the West. Greetings, looks, the way of communication, of working together, of supporting each other, to express one's positive and negative feelings, the notion of punctuality, or more broadly that of time and seasons, of history, of destiny, etc. It is true that everyone thinks according to the criteria of his/her culture and - if we are honest - we tend to attribute more positive values to the criteria of one's own culture. This is normal, as many researches in social psychology reveal, especially in relation to attributions of causes, prejudices and attitudes. But the experiences of the religious communities shows that it is precisely in this domain that interculturality is more spontaneous, probably thanks to the dialogue in the communities to better understand each other and attitudes undermine dialogue and growth, whether in consecrated life help each other in a spirit of exchange and enrichment. Experience equally proves that prejudices or close-minded attitudes compromise dialogue and growth, be it in religious life or in the process of evangelization.

A third and last opportunity that emerges from this encounter is that of material poverty. Some missionaries once thought that in a context of poverty, it was difficult for religious life to be perceived as a value. In the minds of certain people, religious life could be perceived as way of advancing socio-economically, since religious houses are rarely poor. On the contrary, experience has shown that coming from a rich context made it difficult, if not impossible, for some missionaries to understand from within what the poverty they had professed really meant. This permits us to go on the bases where all religious, regardless of their origins, are called to give a testimony of inner freedom and simplicity, without competing with the poor, because they would not understand that intelligent people try to lead a life that they (the poor) would like instead to be helped out of. Our mission and our witnessing therefore enable us to put our fingers on what true poverty is all about and to combat it through education and solidarity, through our initiatives and our fundamental option for the poor, while testifying to the evangelical freedom lived by Christ who enriches us through his poverty.

Other interesting aspects are available to us to live the religious life in Africa today. Some speak about dress, suggesting that it be inspired by local customs and materials; others talk about hospitality and welcome, taking into account the African sensibility in this regard. African religious attach great importance to it, but it is also necessary to reflect about it in order to understand the content that certain situations may have for community life. Until then, the debate revolves around acculturation and still interculturality. Now, let us try to speak specifically of the vows, such as

might be considered from the perspective of inculturation of consecrated life in the African context today.

Poverty and sharing

The difficulty and the beauty of the vow of poverty in Africa comes from the fact that, on the one hand, if we want to know what the word poverty means in material terms, many situations of our young people and our parishioners are quite eloquent and explicit about it. This makes it partially easy to understand the implications of our religious poverty. Partly because this vow signifies that we must configure ourselves to Christ (incarnated in every young person, in every family, in every need and every sharing too), a Christ whose cross is so easy enough to discern. But no biblical verse, no article of our constitutions, asks us to embrace a way of life devoid of what is necessary. It would be a comedy, and moreover, it is not religious poverty, evangelical testimony. Such an attitude can also reveal hypocrisy or a discomfort that often comes from a superiority complex based on a materialistic reading of the reality in which we live.

Voluntary poverty can never be like an endured, unjust, contextual poverty. It can simply render itself solidary, take care of love and, if such poverty is truly a gift of all our person, do everything to enrich the young, first evangelical values, human and professional, because the ideal of the consecrated life is not to make people rich but to make honest citizens and good Christians. In this sense, the vow of poverty is expressed in positive terms: contentment and thanksgiving, detachment from the heart, works well done, trust in providence, respect and solidarity with the poor.

In Africa, religious poverty must be conceived in connection with, on the one hand, the imitation of Jesus, hardworking and confident in providence, and on the other hand, the sensitivity to family solidarity. Moreover, a serious difficulty for consecrated Africans comes from the fact that their intellectual and professional formation, and their lifestyle are the fruit of an almost Western preparation, even though he/she does not always enjoy the autonomous use of the goods of his religious family, which his brothers, cousins and uncles do not always understand. "You make money, so you're rich. What are you doing because you are not married? For those studying abroad, the issue becomes more complicated. "Just bring us a car so we put it on the road as a taxi!", "find us benefactors there"...are common expressions one often hears.

History has made people to believe that living in the West means being rich, especially by hiding the many miseries we see every day. But the person who comes in as a missionary faces the same problem. For him or her, too, like the indigenous missionary, it is a miracle to live poverty in a credible way. Because we can have a little material goods or have power and continue to look from above and from outside, the people and the situation that we find in our new family. The African religious, according to his/her

motivations can be also really poor evangelically even if his/her community seems rich, or - if his/her motives were going in this direction - despise his/her brothers/sisters even when objectively, they lead a life which is easier than his. The worst of riches is that which prevents us from entering heaven, according to Jesus, and this is pride and the spirit of superiority.

On the other hand, we must encourage ourselves to continue to convert. As someone said, "We did not become consecrated persons in order to take care of our parents. But we did not become consecrated persons in order to get rid of them". Many times, the community being sensitive to the problems of the families of the brothers / sisters, (it is not the brother or the sister who makes the gesture but the community or the province), there was a very great solicitude when important needs emerged in the families (prompt help, death, marriage), and it is essential that someone from the community be given the responsibility of keeping contact with the families, the first benefactors of the congregation.

Furthermore, let us say that some excesses in management, because of incompetence or non-transparency, could be avoided if we educated young people to the good administration skills, namely to know how to manage the goods, and to cultivate the sense of the common good, to feel really close to our people. We cannot lock up novices or young people consecrated in religious palaces, far from the temptations which we see everywhere, and reproach them after 6 to 9 years of overprotection, and of being indifferent to their culture of origin. By demonizing money, sex and freedom, we prepare young people for an angelic life that has nothing to do with very concrete situations that will require of them a great maturity to the brother or the sister. Some of the consecrated persons say that their vocation is in danger, simply because they have found a young and beautiful student or a handsome gentleman.

The danger is not really the girl or the boy (otherwise we need to close all our schools or educational institutes) but they themselves. On the other hand, if we start with our prejudices, on phrases like "Africans", "Whites", we can be certain that we will be disrespectful to people, that we will not build anything, except a congregation divided into categories in the image of the capitalist world. Numerous strategies are developed in every community concerning help to beggars in order not to be manipulated, the reception of visitors, the travels and investments (construction and furnishing) of our houses, which preaches a message that is more eloquent than our many discourses on poverty.

Obedience and participation

Obedience appears to be a difficult practice in all cultures and religions. The aspirations for autonomy, the fact that religious commitment is mostly situated at an age whereby the person is full of legitimate ambitions and enjoys an exaggerated concept of his/her abilities - we can

even speak of the illusion of omnipotence - added to some familial and cultural conditionings, really complicate the disposition to this evangelical vow. Some persons have been used to obeying, unfortunately sometimes for fear of punishments or the harmful consequences of a rebellious attitude. Others obey because they want to flatter or to obtain favors, or because they want to present a good image of themselves. Other people grow up with a great thirst for autonomy and independence and, scarcely feel themselves "liberated" from the yoke of the formators through the "whew" or "relief" brought with the solemn profession of vow or ordination, refusing any superior and external authority to themselves, considered as an obstacle to their development and to the modern version of religious life.

But when one opposes "freedom" to "obedience", he/she ends up choosing one of the two, while in consecrated life, one obeys because one is adult and free, and the freedom in turn is a fruit of listening and inner availability. Most of the difficulties associated with this vow go back to poor education, human pride, or lack of delicacy in the management of human resources. It is almost impossible to find a religious man or woman who is deep in prayers and humble of heart, which is causing you problems in this domain. Susceptibility is a clear symptom of immaturity and disobedience, the non-acceptance of fraternal correction or of contradiction, the incapacity to see our demands and unmet needs.

Does anyone still believe that African cultures facilitate the vow of obedience? No culture is an evangelical emblem. Not even the Jewish culture. It is true that here children, young people and women are educated towards respect for parents and elders. But the difficulties are as great as elsewhere. In the consecrated life, the superior is not always an elder, an older person (by age of birth), or more intelligent, or one with more diplomas (qualifications). The criteria are elsewhere, and the poor superior is just trying to do his/her job well, in general. In addition, to continue to obey in order to please others, to flatter or to gain points is an infantile or immature habit, to which neither a superior nor the fellow brother or sister have the right to indulge. Every Christian knows that he/she is free from the slavery of threatening prohibitions.

Education promotes freedom, the will, in a context of the family, and of the Church. Through charity, we make the task and fidelity easy for us and for one another by our capacity to obey, to dialogue and to discern in a manner which is prompt, joyful, complete and adult.

Chastity and Fecundity

In certain cultures, like ours, African, there exist celibacy and virginity, but only for reasons of consecration to the deity, to the king, to the pharaoh, and to the spirits¹. But for ordinary people, since life was understood and transmitted as a gift of God and a guarantee of the clan's perpetuity, the person who deliberately refused to transmit it or who was

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incapable of transmitting life was considered as a useless link in the evolutionary chain. Many reflections today continue to show that this poses a problem for the chastity of African consecrated persons. In my opinion, it is a generalization that would be tantamount to saying that for a Westerner, given all the sexual and homosexual deviations that are legalized in Europe, therefore the Europeans are not capable of living chastity. It is absurd and astonishing as reasoning and conclusion.

Every culture gives people to a certain approach to fecundity or fruitfulness and we must recognize that there are still ethnic groups in which the commitment of a son or a daughter to the priesthood or the consecrated life poses enormous problems. It has been said in the economic sense, since children take care of their old parents in Africa, unlike the societies where pensions and old people's homes exist. Generalized statements of this kind sometimes seek to overshadow the sad reality that these African morals and values have been fatally attacked in the process of encounter between the West and Africa. Then, the few specific cases observed of religious who have been unfaithful to their commitments are generalized in a way to say that all consecrated African persons are like that (infidelity), which is intellectually dishonest and not charitable Christian wise.

To speak such a language to a young religious today, is to ignore his responsibility – which is almost total – in the religious response. This reasoning can also encourage infidelity because he says to the young African religious: “You can override your promise, because in your culture it is not a value. And yet we know that infidelity is such a horrible thing in the African traditions, because of the weight of the given word. In the olden days, a man tempted to be unfaithful had to take the “temptation” as a second wife, instead of having a wife and a mistress, as is permissible and common in cultures that dare not call it polygamy. Are the greatest dangers or the “best” temptations to chastity today found - as they would want us to believe - in the village or in our televisions, our internet sites, our complicities with the modern hedonistic mentality, our divisions in community, our spiritual superficiality, in our lack of affective maturity, especially towards our collaborators, and what about our search for benefactors / benefactresses? Let us strive to read the signs of the times, the treasures that the sower has planted in the reality where we work, a reality that is from now on with universal colors, so we need to have the courage to reformulate our charisms and our consecration.

Conclusion

Here, as in all my remarks since the beginning, I did not want to impose a model to follow in the process of inculturation, notwithstanding solutions towards responding to the eternal question: How can one be Christian religious and at the same time African? This is because I am

convinced that the question or debate around the inculturation of consecrated life in sub-Saharan Africa is primarily a complex challenge that involves different levels of reflection and action: biblical, Christological, theological, ecclesiological, anthropological, economic, and social. Beyond what I have just said, in many cases our reflections on this theme remain too academic, too idealistic and less practical.

That is the reason why I opted for a reflection that could bring about some clarifications on the subtle relationship between inculturation and interculturality, always in order to better understand the difficulties inherent in this relationship. In any case, it is evident that there is need to define and distinguish what is correlated to the anthropo-theological and the biblical dimensions, and intercultural communication in this relationship. This requires becoming conscious at the same time of the interplay of both our religious communities and the complexity of implementing this process. This practical-strategic approach is by no means easy: it involves self-reflection and requires the construction of new, particular paths within the actions of animation, accompaniment and formation.

Interculturality, in itself, involves the encounter with someone unknown, obliges us to creativity and demands equality¹ which does not exist without social justice. Together with the process of inculturation, interculturality makes the African religious a man or woman identified by his/her roots and his/her past having mental attitudes to be developed. I will cite three: 1) to be convinced that one can understand the other in his/her difference, 2) to open one's ears and awaken one's mind, 3) learn to strip oneself and open oneself to the other and then to imagine being together.

Some religious communities consider the debate on the relationship between interculturalism and inculturation as a thing of the past, a new museum, they are wrong. The answers may no longer be given, but they have to be constructed, even today and together. Our conviviality seems possible only if there is a strong and constant struggle against voluntary discrimination, against prejudice, hatred and irrationality. The future of consecrated life in Africa will be intercultural if we do not want to perish together, we do not want what has allowed the emergence of the human to be the tomb of humanity.

**THE CHURCH OF THE YOUTH AND THE YOUTH OF THE
CHURCH: A PLEA FOR THE PRESENT AND FUTURE OF
CHRISTIANITY**

Jean-Paul TAGHEU, OP¹

ABSTRACT

If we consider the average age ratio of the population, the Church of Africa is also a young Church with many young people. She can even be said to be the Church of the youth. But on the ecclesiological, pastoral, political, economic and social side, there can be some concerns and uncertainties to question and address, for the youth to be the present and future of Christianity in Africa. How can the African youth be the present and the future of the Church? This is the main question treated based on the two African synods held so far.

Keywords: Church, youth, education, transmission, future of Christianity, holiness and witness, African humanities and antiquities.

INTRODUCTION

If we consider the nineteenth century as the time frame of the modern age for the systematic Christian mission and evangelization all over Africa, it can be said that the African continent is entering its third century of Christianity. Comparing to Europe, which has two millennia Christianity, African Christianity is still very young. Besides, if we consider the average age ratio of the population, the Church of Africa is also a young Church with many young people. She can even be said to be the Church of the youth. For “Young people make up the majority of Africa’s population.”¹

According to the UN’s Population Commission Report, there is an immense population growth in Africa. As for the statistic of The World Bank, the population of people living in cities in Africa will double in the next 25 years reaching 1 billion in 2040, and tripling its current population by 2050. In 2017, for instance, 60% of the population in Africa was under 25 years of age. By an estimated projection, in 2100, Africa will be 4.2 billion people, representing around 80% of the global population.

Looking only at this African population rate, through the games of number and quantity, it is good news to have such a Church in Africa made up, in the majority, by youth. The match, in terms of the future, is then already won. But on the ecclesiological, pastoral, political, economic and social side, there can be some concerns and uncertainties to question and address. How are the youth of that African Church? Do young people really have the feeling of belonging to their Church? Are they fully integrated and participative in the life, action and mission of the Church? What does that mean to be young in the Church today? In the context of African political,

economic and social poverty, how can a Church be built for the youth and the youth for the Church?

Our aim is to propose some suggestions for the building of a Church for the youth or the youth for the Church as being the present and future of Christianity. It is not an easy task. In engaging this issue, our reflection consists mainly of re-reading the two African synods on the parts concerning the youth in the Church of Christ. It is to see the concern for and the call up of the youth in the teaching *magisterium* so far, so as to prospect new provisions and focuses for the betterment of the Church's young men and women in the twenty-first century.

In the first part, we shall speak of the two synods of the young African Church as way to state their contents regarding the youth. The second point shall address some worrisome problems of the youth today, in the socio-political and economic context. In other words, being a young Church and young people in the young African Church has some challenges. The question of the youth as the present and the future of the Church shall our concern in the third part. For the youth to be the present and the future of the Church, we need a certain theology of the youth, of their education in the Church and a good ecclesiological and pastoral program for the care of the youth. That is why, in the four parts, we speak of patrimony, transmission and reception. The last part of our reflection proposes an integral human education for our youth, with an attention to ecology, African history, antiquities and humanities.

TWO SYNODS FOR THE YOUNG AFRICAN CHURCH SINCE VATICAN II COUNCIL

The Youth in the Magisterium of the African Synods

Despite the fact that, Africa is said to be the future of the humanity,¹ since Vatican II Council (1962-1965), only two synods of Bishops were held in Africa. This is a sign of her neglect by the elder and mother Church. The first synod was held in 1994, on mission and inculturation. The outcome was this famous apostolic exhortation: "The Church in Africa and its Evangelizing Mission Towards 2000". The second synod took place 15 years later, in October 2009 under the theme justice, peace and reconciliation. The post-synodal exhortation outcome was: *Africae munus* or The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace. "You are the salt of the earth ...You are the light of the world" (Mt. 5: 13-14)".

Ecclesia in Africa, the very first post-synodal exhortation, given at Yaoundé on the 14th of September 1995, is made up of 144 paragraphs. It contains 21 times the word "young", among which 12 pertains to the youth.

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Seven times we have the words “youth”. Only number 93 is devoted to young people.

Africae munus: post-synodal exhortation given at Ouidah, in Benin Republic on the 19th of November 2011. Even though shorter in length compared to the first post-synodal exhortation, it is made up of 177 paragraphs. Of the whole book, 5 numbers are devoted to the youth (nos. 60-64). The exhortation counts 4 times the term youth and 27 times the term “young”, among which about 24 are related to the youth. This already shows, since then, less consideration for the young or the lack of a proper theology on the young, in the teaching magisterium of the Church. Added to this is the age rank of Cardinals. Though we are having more and younger bishops, it is not the case among the Cardinals, especially regarding African Cardinals.

In fact, after the consistory of 28th June 2018, the Church counts now 224 Cardinals among which 124 are electors and 100 non electors. Of these 124 electors, 16 are from Africa representing 13%. Fifty three from Europe representing 42%, 13 from North America representing about 10%, 16 from Asia representing about 13%, 22 from South, Central America and the Caribbean Islands representing 17%, and 4 from Oceania representing 3%¹. None of the 124 Cardinal electors is less than fifty. The youngest is Cardinal Dieudonné Zapalainga from Central Africa Republic, who is 51; followed by Konrad Krajewski (55 years of age), and Soane Patiti Paini Mafi from Tonga, Oceania, who is 57. The majority of them are above 70. This configuration does not really favour the youth in the Church, in terms of age, nor does it favour the ecclesiology of justice and communion, in terms of their apportionment per continent.

For an African Council

In fact, because of the Global South, that is, the global shift of the gravity's centre of Christianity from the Northern Hemisphere to the Southern Hemisphere,¹ Africa is not only the crib of humanity, but now also the present and future of Christianity. In regard to this, there is a need today for the universal Church, for Rome (the seat of the Roman Catholic institutions) to invest in the Church in Africa. This demands to cast a deep look into African political, social and economic predicaments for the sake of the universal Church. In the context of neoliberal capitalism, with the flames and smokes of secularism, de-Christianization and atheism, somehow fostered and carried out under the wind of globalization, the Church's survival and revival lies in the Global South, mainly in Africa, Latino-America and some parts of Asia. It is especially for young people of Africa that the horizon and zenith of the Church is shining, so as to rekindle the world of Christianity and the Churches of old Christendom, in Europe and North America, gravely marked by the post-Christian age of secularization.

On this, we address a new appeal not only for other significant African Synods, but especially for an African Council (Africa I Council), in order to respond to this sign of times in the universal Church; to listen to this new wind of Pentecost of which this global shift is about. This appeal for an African Council was already launched in the seventies by theologians like Eboussi-Boulaga¹, supported by Pierre Meinrad Hebga, and some other theologians following the dynamic of reflections inaugurated under the impulse of Alioune Diop.¹ This council, if accepted and held, will help us to re-organize the Church and the battle of survival and revival of the entire Church from the South. Pope Francis' papacy is under what he called: a poor Church for the poor, meaning a great new beginning of mission and evangelization, no more from the centre, but from the peripheries¹ or from the "underworld", the less privileged and the marginalized.

The world is turning the more and more its attention to Africa, often quoted as the continent of the future. It is one of the reasons why some rich countries' economic programs are organized considering human and natural opportunities found in Africa. What they are doing at the political and economic levels are also possible at the ecclesiological and Christian ones. The universal Church should also be involved.

YOUTH, POLITICS, ECONOMY AND SOCIETY: SOME WORRISOME PROBLEMS

African Youth: inheritances of debts, poverty, and misery

Since the year of independences in the sixties, the political and economic mismanagement of the African nations' affairs brought about discouragement of young people in political commitment, and a total despair in the future. Since the dawn of the years 2000, great are the numbers of African young people whose dream is to travel oversea, so as to flee from misery and poverty in their own nations and continent. Many of them landed in the Mediterranean Sea, where they died and were buried, as they could not cross. Between 2000 and 2015, about 23, 000 people died when trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea to Europe¹. Among them were about 3, 000 African young people, exiling from hunger and misery. Indeed,

The economic situation of poverty has a particularly negative impact on the young. They embark on adult life with very little enthusiasm for a present riddled with frustrations and they look with still less hope to a future which to them seems sad and somber. That is why they tend to flee the neglected rural areas and gather in cities which in fact do not have much more to offer them. Many of them go to foreign countries where, as if in exile, they live a precarious existence as economic refugees. With the Synod Fathers I feel the duty to plead their cause: it is urgently necessary to find a solution for their impatience to take part in the life of the nation and of the Church.¹

More than twenty years after the first African Synod, this situation has not changed. It has become even worse, with civil wars, wars of minerals,¹ wars of petroleum, of political and economic interests like those of South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Côte d'Ivoire, not to mention more others. Besides the secular trauma and the after-effects of the slave trade, imperialism, the apartheid, colonization and the post-colonial dictatorial regimes, there is a raise of new forms of political and social oppressions and enslavement all over Africa coming from the West and from within Africa itself. This is why the second African post-synodal exhortation stated: "Africa's memory is painfully scarred as a result of fratricidal conflicts between ethnic groups, the slave trade and colonization. Today too, the continent has to cope with rivalries and with new forms of enslavement and colonization."¹

Worthy of note, the African youth of today and tomorrow has, as their main inheritances: sorrows, worries, wars and their inherent consequences of exile, constant transhumance, historical wounds and memory's wounds, debts, etc. African political rulers have eaten their daily bread and stolen that of the future generation. They have stolen and kept for themselves alone the public goods and resources of their people. They have handed on as legacy to their youth debts to pay for years.

Being Young in an Impoverished and Very Indebted Continent

Somewhere else, young African people are the prey for religious fanaticism like Boko Haram, Al Shabab, Daesh or ISIS where they are often recruited for terrorist and kamikaze missions. Part of the reasons for this can be listed out as: the unemployment, the lack of good education, social integration and fittings for self-development; malnutrition, the lack of health care and social services, the widespread deterioration in the standard of living,¹ and some other settings for poverty and misery. Young African people are today also the easy prey for opportunism, careerism, and some cultic societies and cultic practices like homosexuality for which they are conditioned to get jobs and offices of little or great scopes.

There are still some other factors added; like: nepotism, non-respect of constitution, election rigging, corruption of politics and economy, neo-political and economic colonization of some western and now Asian countries. "Against the background of widespread poverty and inadequate medical services the Synod considered the tragic scourge of AIDS which is sowing suffering and death in many parts of Africa,"¹ especially among young people. As such, one can have some concerns. What is the political, economic and social future of the young people, when some African leaders and governors were born in power, gets hold of the power and do not want to release offices for the youth? What is the political, economic and social future of the young people in Africa, when many of their corrupt elders have misused and embezzled public funds and national resources? How

can they be youth in a Church living within so poor and very indebted countries?

With regard to this, *Ecclesia in Africa* stated some twenty three years ago: "In the present world order, the African nations are among the most disadvantaged."¹ She is one of the most disadvantaged continent and yet the most rich continent in the world, in terms of natural resources. Thus, it is wrong to consider Africa as a very poor and indebted continent. Rather it is good to say a continent impoverished and indebted by some inhumane agents of human destruction. Due to the world's political, economic and social injustices, Africa is still like a feast's cake enriching other nations and continents to her own detriment. At the first African Synod, Africa was compared to the young man whipped, robbed, stripped and abandoned half dead (cf. Lk. 10: 30-37).¹ Some rich countries of the West with the complicity of some African leaders maliciously support and favour Africa's underdevelopment rather than her real development.

In Africa many youth are not scholarised. Those who went to school and even graduated are unemployed. Those who are employed are not paid accordingly. It was against this background that the second African Synod for Bishops stressed on the questions of justice, reconciliation and peace. For the future of the young generation is sacrificed at the altar of injustices, wars, dictatorship, corruption, theft, embezzlement and similar predicaments. Hence, there is a need for a just order in African Nations, and between Africa and western Nations concerning the politics, economic relationships and social affairs.

"In the first place it involves working for improved socio-political relations among nations, ensuring greater justice and dignity for those countries."¹ Secondly, it involves a new generation of African leaders arising from the youth with a new way of politicizing, with a focus stretched on the pursuit of common good, social justice, equity, human dignity and integral human development. In this regard, we propose education and conversion of mind and life; a proper theology of the polis and of citizenship as one of the ways out of these challenges. Today, the hope and the restoration of hope for the future of this continent lies mainly on the African youth, if only they are well oriented, trained and empowered to carry out their responsibilities regarding challenges for which they are called to accept.

YOUTH: THE PRESENT AND FUTURE OF THE CHURCH

The Church of a Young Man: Christ

At the start of what would become the Church was a baby named Jesus, Emmanuel, Son of God and Son of man, born for the world from a young Virgin called Mary (cf. Lk. 1:26; Gal. 4:4). The Baby-Son-of-God and Son-of-Man grew up. He established the Church (cf. Mt 16: 16), loved her and gave himself for her as a spouse to his beloved (cf. Ep. 5: 23-30). Jesus was about thirty when He started his ministry (cf. Lk. 3:23). Companions He

chose to help out his mission were also mostly young, many of them still living with their parents (cf. Mk 1: 19-20; Mt 4: 21-22; Mt 20:20).

Being young, the years of his ministry were also very short: three years organized around three Jewish Pasch (cf. Jn. 2: 13; 6:4; 12: 1; 19: 28, 31). With this at hand, it is neither pretentious nor fallacious to state that the Church was founded by a young man of about 30-33 years old, who loved her and died young because of her. Being a young founder of the Church and to later on die for her is very significant to the youth of today, in terms of identification with the Church and commitment to her mission. The Church belongs to a young man, the eternally young man, ¹Christ, just as young people belong to Christ.

In this sense, Christ's exhortation and command that we should let the children come to Him (cf. Lk 18: 16) also connotes that we should allow the youth to come to Him. The fact that "young people make up the majority of Africa's population"¹ is, therefore, an important opportunity to seize, in terms of theology and ecclesiology of the youth, in the universal Church. "This youthfulness is a gift and a treasure from God for which the whole Church is grateful to the Lord of life. Young people should be loved, esteemed and respected."¹

We are accustomed with the saying that the youth are the future of the world and the society. In claiming this, it is as if, we are excluding and depriving them from the present. Yet they also belong to the present. Young people are not only the future of the Church and of the world. They are the present of the Church and of the world, insofar as the future starts with the present. "The Church in Africa knows well that youth are not only the present but above all the future of humanity."¹

Ecclesiology of the Youth and the Youth in Ecclesiology

Through the youth of the Church, the Church is, though old, forever young. If not for the youth, the Church would never have had any hope in history. With her youth, the Church is old or older regarding her past, yet like a baby in a crib, a young person regarding her present and future. Through and with her youth, the Church has a vocation of constant renewal. A "renewal within tradition"¹, that is, a renewal of continuity in the tradition she carries along with her.¹ Just like a tree which constantly renews its leaves and rejuvenates itself through them, so does the Church with her young people.

Our duty is to awake in young people the image of a Church that ensures, and shows them the way which gives meaning to their lives. The future of the Church and of Christianity should be prepared with the youth, insofar as they are to the Church like the spring's bud to the trees. They constitute the new leaves and leaven for the mission and growth of the Church in the world. Thus, we should not put them aside from the decision making of the Church as we usually do. They should be part of the decision

making of the Church at the lower and higher level, in their parishes and in their dioceses, in diocesan curia just as in the Roman curia. Thus, it is not an exaggeration to call that Rome should create a sacred congregation for the youth of the Church with a young cardinal as prefect. If it is impossible to have an entire congregation fully dedicated to the youth, we should at least create a pontifical council for youth.

The youth of the Church are in view to rejuvenate her and her institutions. That is why we speak of the ecclesiology of the youth and the youth in ecclesiology. For if the youth is the future of the Church, the Church also is the future of the youth because of her enduring patrimony; and because of Christ her Head, who "is the same yesterday and today and forever." (Heb 13:8).

PATRIMONY, TRANSMISSION AND RECEPTION: FROM ONE AGE TO ANOTHER

Patrimony and Transmission

The Church's Crypt: The past of the Church is not obsolete or out of use. The Church's crypt contains an enduring treasury for an everlasting age, because Christ is an ever ancient, an ever new and an eternal treasury in the Patrimony of the Church He transmitted to the Apostles. This treasury has been handed on through ages. That is why, at the inaugural Mass of his pontificate, Pope Benedict XVI called upon the youth to have the courage of accepting Christ and to give up everything to Christ. He said: "Dear young people: Do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away, and he gives you everything. When we give ourselves to him, we receive a hundredfold in return. Yes, open, open wide the doors to Christ - and you will find true life."¹ Christ gives everything, because He Himself is everything good a human being can need and long for; He gave all because He is all.

With this regard, rejuvenate the Church does not mean changing or destroying her root and source. The leaves rejuvenate a tree without cutting off its roots. Thus, what we need, is to have the wisdom of the past, the realism of the present and the intelligence for the future. In short, being the present and the future of the Church means renewal within tradition, renewal in continuity and permanence of the Source. It is an arm against the spirit of *tabula rasa* of modernity and of the denial of all that was before hand.

In fact, modern people have the temptation to start everything fresh, as if the world just began with them. Yet, according to Alfred de Musset, we came and were born later in a so old world.¹ In other words, the Church did not begin with us and shall not cease after us either. She has a very long and furnished *curriculum vitae* (life's profile) throughout the ages and human history. She has an everlasting history, which can trace back to God Himself through Christ, her alpha and omega, her beginning and ending (cf. Rev 1: 8;

21:6; 22:13). The present youth of the Church have to write their own history after the footsteps of all the saints of the Church counted in thousands of thousands. Thus, being young in the Church does not mean ignoring the root and source of the Church; the root and source we all come from as Christians.

However, young people cannot transmit what they do not receive, nor forward very well what they have not been well forwarded. That is why there should be an intergenerational policy, both in the Church and in society. Some African countries and some African dioceses fall into crises after the passing away of their heads of state or the retirements of their bishops respectively, just because the succession was not well prepared.

As noted by Ela, "the future belongs to those who shall know to hand on to the present generations the reasons to live and to hope."¹The youth of the Church can properly effect this only with a life of witnesses and witnessing of Christ's life and Gospel, as the Saints did. Christ, the Owner and Founder of the Church, was very young. He was and is "the companion and friend of youth."¹Following and imitating Him in His apostolic life and holiness, young people can make changes and transformations in the Church and the world. That will be the youth's own way to renew and refresh the Church from within.

With regard to this, the recent papal exhortation is calling to holiness as way of happiness and freedom.¹ Preaching the Gospel in its radicality, today, means to join holiness to our words. Holiness has authority and power in the preaching and transmitting process. We cannot be a preaching man and women of God if we are not ready to sign up our preaching with holiness. Being ready for holiness, in today's context of terrorism and Christian persecution, also means to face and suffer martyrdom, individualism, secularism, indifference, relativism, refusal to social commitment and some other plagues mutilating the heart of the Gospel proclaimed.¹

As the Church, we cannot be, or claim to be, cantors of tradition and transmission, but being absent from the web's world of digital communication and information. Young people are a great opportunity to mark the Church's presence in this new world's media of digital technology, which constitute another means for transmission and education.

AN INTEGRAL HUMAN EDUCATION OF THE YOUTH

To Prepare the Present and Future: Teaching the Youth

In the address to the youth at the closing of Vatican II Council, it was said:

It is you who are to receive the torch from the hands of your elders and to live in the world at the period of the most gigantic transformations ever realized in its history. It is you who, receiving the best of the example of

the teaching of your parents and your teachers are to form the society of tomorrow. You will either save yourselves or you will perish with it.¹

Preparing the present and future of the Church means teaching the Youth. If we teach the youth today, we are preparing their future and ours. We are preparing the future of the Church. Even when they are still delinquent and prodigal, we still need to implore God's mercy upon them and strive for their education. They are hardened of heart and wasteful today, just as tomorrow they might become blessed heralds of the Gospel and heroes Church.

The question of education was boldly highlighted in the two African synods. Education is the key to the present and future of each human institution and society. If you teach your child, s/he will teach the future. But if he or she remains uneducated, similarly his/her future too will remain uneducated. He or she will make the future analphabetic.

In a great number, the poor of the future will mostly be counted among those who did not go to school, to the true school of integral humanism. Many of them are found in Africa. Yet, it is through education that we hand over patrimony received. Hence, there is a link between education and transmission, education and tradition. In other words, without the education of young people, the Church cannot pass on the treasure of revelation received from Christ to the coming generation.

To succeed in this, "young people need witnesses and teachers who can walk with them, teaching them to love the Gospel and to share it, especially with their peers, and thus to become authentic and credible messengers."¹Hence, the famous statement of blessed Paul VI is still current. "Modern man [or woman] listens more willingly to witnesses than to the teachers, and if he [or she] does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses."¹

Catholic schools and education should be at the fore-front of education as proposed by *Ecclesia in Africa*.¹Many of the first African leaders were trained by the missionaries. In training them, missionaries did not only transmit intellectual and moral education, but also that of spirituality and theology, a certain integral human formation. But today, missionary schools are among the most expensive schools in Africa. The poor cannot afford tuition in Catholic schools today, whether at the primary, secondary or higher levels. If, for example, the very first batches of African leaders freely benefited from Catholic education in the sixties and seventies, today, with neoliberal capitalism, it becomes difficult, especially for the Catholic schools, to train for free as it was formerly. The Church is challenged by a growing materialistic society, with its dictatorship of money that makes the cost and standard of life beyond the reach of the poor. Catholic schools of or for charity become less and less possible, and the poor are the first victims.

An Integral Human Education of the Youth

The education of the youth has to be holistic and integral. It should be considered according to a wholly human dimension. It should be an integral human education bringing together the intellectual, moral, technical, economic, social and spiritual aspects of education. In fact, the youth of today are living in a cosmopolitical environment. The Nations of this global world are more and more interdependent. The destinies and problems, concerns and joys of different people are also interconnected.¹

In this regard, the youth should be taught human ecology, in which the dignity of the human person is rediscovered and valued in the image of God. They should be taught interreligious and ecumenical dialogue. They are called to the culture of political, religious and cultural differences, especially within the context of tribal and ethnic groups which, sometimes, bring about tribal and ethnic violence in some parts of Africa. For about three decades now, there has been an escalating growth of wars and violence. As such one may call the youth of these decades the generation of war and terrorism. But the culture of diversity and complementarity, in a global and multipolar world, might arm them against religious intolerance, fanaticism, and terrorism, not without shaping in them the spirit of human pacific coexistence. In fact, given the prevalence of violence and barbarity of their time, some young people praise more a warrior's victor than a peace-doer. Therefore,

The *pastoral care of youth* must clearly be a part of the overall pastoral plan of Dioceses and parishes, so that young people will be enabled to discover very early on the value of the gift of self, an essential means for the person to reach maturity. In this regard, the celebration of World Youth Day is a privileged instrument for the pastoral care of youth, which favours their formation through prayer, study and reflection.¹

In his "seven necessary wisdoms for educating the future", Edgar Morin speaks of teaching the human condition which is complex, multiplex or multidimensional.¹ For him, integral human education also underlines the question of teaching human earthly identity,¹ which demands to take into consideration the question and planetary destiny of the human being, so that it should have a global and planetary consciousness. Human earthly citizenship signifies to study and comprehend humanity as planetary destiny.¹ Indeed, ecological and planetary crises gush forth from a certain lack of sufficient understanding of the human global and earthly identity.

The youth of today is or has to be concerned with the questions of climate change and ecological challenges. It is to echo this that Pope Francis speaks of "ecological education and spirituality."¹ This education has in view an alliance or connectivity between humanity and natural environment.¹ This earth is humanity's first fatherland or motherland. It is part of human condition, because of what it provides. Human global and planetary consciousness would help us to avoid some predicaments related to racism, ethnicism, xenophobia, contempt, hatred and many other discriminatory acts in human relations and interrelationship.¹ What is at the

root of these plagues is human incomprehension. So, in fostering and teaching human mutual comprehension, humanity as body would live and trek towards a true pacific coexistence.

Rediscovering and Teaching African History, Humanities and Antiquities

As much as possible, African humanities and antiquities should be rediscovered and taught to young African people, so as to build and boost African and national patriotism; to help them love and value their numerous and rich cultures.¹ Gustavo Gutiérrez calls it a liberation by faith, in order to drink from one's well.¹ In fact, it is a holistic liberation, which will rise up from a deep African conscientiousness intake or undertaking, that our future and destiny is not in the past, present, values and culture of other people,¹ no matter how beautiful and better they might be.

Apart from the poor political, social and economic contexts in Africa, the tragic flux of African youth to Europe and for ventures of fortune and hazard, all over the world, are also due to cultural alienation and a certain lack of African self-esteem. *Ecclesia in Africa* has already made an appeal in that direction to the youth: "Dear young people, the Synod asks you to take in hand the development of your countries, to love the culture of your people, and to work for its renewal with fidelity to your cultural heritage, through a sharpening of your scientific and technical expertise, and above all through the witness of your Christianity."¹

CONCLUSION

The Church is the Church of the youth. She belongs to them as their mother, as the house for the Kingdom of God in which young men and maidens together, old men and women, children are called to praise and worship (cf. Ps 148:12). The youth are the youth of the Church. They belong to the Church as her children, the bud for her present and future. The Church cannot survive without the youth, nor the youth without the Church.

To build a Church with the youth means to look into some worrisome problems at political, economic and social levels, such as corruption, bad governance, dictatorship, war, social justice, unemployment, etc. African leaders should not transform the political office as their sick bed and grave, to the detriment of the young generation. This is why there is a need for justice, in politics, economy and society; and the politics, the economy and society of justice with common good, human dignity and human divine vocation as its focal point.

Finally, for youth to be the present and future of the Church and of the world, integral human education should be fostered and implemented in the formation of the youth. This presupposes rediscovering and teaching

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African history, humanities and antiquities. As such, if the youth is the present and the future of the Church, the Church also is the present and the future of the youth.

**IMPERATIVENESS OF UNITY, PEACE AND PROGRESS IN THE
INTEGRAL DEVELOPMENT OF NIGERIA: THE ROLE OF
CONSECRATED PERSONS**

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ABSTRACT

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

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

INTRODUCTION

Transformation of societies into united, peaceful and progressive social orders, and the development of an enabling environment capable of maintaining this arrangement, requires a continuum of building of bridge activity across ethnic and religious divides. It is critical to explore both current and potential capacity for consecrated persons in these regard with respect to the whole range of activities and potential impact. Past efforts by the community of consecrated persons around Nigeria aimed at

engendering change will be illustrated and other potential approaches required to serve as a catalyst in the sustenance of unity, peace and progress will also be highlighted. This is aimed at ensuring integral development of Nigeria.

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

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

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

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

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

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

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Consecrated

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

Consecrated life

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

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

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

Peace: Peace means a lot of things to different folks. To the philosophers, peace is seen as a natural, original, God-given state of human existence. Peace from this view point is the pre-corruption state of man in a society, as God established it. Thus St. Augustine distinguished between two cities namely the city of God which is founded on perfect heavenly peace and spiritual salvation; and the earthly city of man which is founded appetitive and possessive impulse, is corrupt and torn by strife. To

Rousseau, he conceptualises a peaceful original state of existence of man in which there are no desires. In that state man existed as a free, gentle savage. In this state, men were naturally good as they were born free. In contrast though, Hobbes argues that in the state of nature was rampant with conflict and violence. Life to him was solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short hence the need for a social contract where all men will surrender their defence to a leviathan.⁴

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

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

What is Development?

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

For this study, Development in agreement with Olatunbosun will mean addressing material imperatives of the people i.e. ensuring the basic needs of the people such that facilitates their wellbeing and shows improvement is realized. These materials include quality education, primary health care, clean environment, decent shelter, etc. The Second is freedom from misery or servitude and lastly development entails enjoying respect and self worth as a result of mastering our destiny and environment as conceptualized by him. But despite this assertion, the rural areas in Nigeria are grossly neglected as far as development projects and infrastructures such as hospitals, roads, schools, markets, etc are concerned. For instance, in terms of level of economic development, quality of life, access to opportunities, facilities and amenities, standard of living and general viability, there is ample evidence to underscore the level of under-development.⁸

UNITY, PEACE AND PROGRESS: FOUNDATIONAL TO DEVELOPMENT

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

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

God, and is related to God's blessing and God's graciousness therefore, the consecrated persons as the mouthpiece of God should rise up to the challenges threatening the unity, peace and progress of Nigeria.

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

Nigeria is today faced with an ever increasing level of multifaceted socio-economic, political and security challenges. A wide array of problems is precipitating in Nigerian societies, causing threat to peace, unity and lack of progress. Armed conflicts and violence, bombings, increasing poverty, inadequate health care, economic exploitation, environmental degradation and over militarization of the society, killer herdsmen rampages, ethnic and religious conflicts, communal violence, and political unrest, suppression of opposition and muzzling of people's legitimate right to self-determination; lack of rule of law and democratic governance are part of a series of issues affecting Nigeria's quest for unity, peace and progress. There is no doubt that these factors are seriously hampering development in Nigeria.

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

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

The central theme of the Christian faith is *"love for one another"* and this is often seen in the regular teachings of the church aimed at promoting co-existence, peace building, unity in ethnic-diversity, tolerance, generosity, hospitality, forgiveness and justice. The Christian faith is built on the message of unconditional love for one another and even love for one's

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

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

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

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

Consecrate persons are divinely called to be watchmen to warn people of the dangers of wickedness. Obviously, most of them they have consistently done this while a good number of others are drawn away by materialism thereby neglecting their God given mandate. "*Son of man, I have made you a watchman... give them warning from me*" (Ezek. 3:17; 33:3). The danger inherent in this mandate is that failure to heed and abide by this divine role attracts punishment from God. "*... and thou giveth him not*

warning, nor speakest to warn ... but his blood will I require at thine hand" (Ezek. 3:18). The implication therefore is that consecrated persons have a critical role to play in ensuring that there is peace, unity and progress in a given society. Although they cannot do this alone without the government at all levels, it is the believe of this researcher that government synergising with the consecrated persons, civil societies and non faith-based organisations such as NGOs will help in ensuring unity, peace and progress which are the springboards to propel integral development of Nigeria.

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

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

The project of unity, peace and progress cannot be a one show but a united action by both the clergy and the laity. It is obvious that majority of the Nigerian population (politicians inclusive) form the bulk of laity either belonging to one church or mosque. Therefore it beholds on all hand being on deck to assiduously strive towards ensuring unity, peace and progress for the development of the country.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

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

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

Consecrated persons should undertake the role of observer mission as Christian Peacemaker especially in crisis environments. The observer

mission role can equally extend to election observing and collations of election results as this will reduce incidences of result manipulations. No doubt this will ensure election result credibility and acceptance.

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

Another pertinent recommendation is that consecrated persons should be actively involved in area of peace-building especially a crisis devastated communities. The peace activity of the Christian Council of Mozambique, an ecumenical body of Protestant churches, illustrates an educational approach in the context of a very violent situation. In 1991, toward the end of close to thirty years of civil war, they launched a "Preparing People for Peace Program." In this program, the churches designed training courses related to political issues, such as nonviolence, human rights, disarmament, amnesty, repatriation, land distribution and healing a war-damaged environment. Social issues like public health, trauma treatment, child development and the family were also addressed. In addition, they led seminars on biblical peacemaking, reconciliation and practical conflict resolution skills. The program was organized in two phases: a five week seminar held in Maputu for representatives from all Protestant and Catholic churches; followed by a two week follow-up seminar held in each province for district representatives. Future programs, planned as of June 1994, included a nationwide meeting of reconciliation designed to bring together the whole Mozambican family in celebration and worship.¹⁰ Consecrated persons in Nigeria can borrow a leaf from this and replicate same in the crisis environment in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

The research illustrates that although consecrated persons may be better prepared for certain peace-building roles, peace, unity and progress by definition requires an integral approach. This represents an enormous

challenge. Its effectiveness involves bringing different constituencies and different dynamics together: multiple spiritual and secular perspectives, civil society and governmental bodies, leaders and leadership, and strategy, and services/interventions and advocacy.

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

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

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

- Universal human rights
- Social and economic development
- Solidarity with the entire human family
- A world order based on nonviolent response to conflict

ENDNOTES

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4. S.B. Gaya *Introduction to Peace and Conflict Studies in West Africa* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited 2006), 5.
5. Christopher Miller *A Glossary of Terms and Concepts in Peace and Conflict Studies*. (Geneva: University for Peace no date), 29.

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RELIGIOUS LIFE: A CALL TO TAKE A PROPHETIC STANCE

Nkechinyerem Iwuoha PHJC³⁹

ABSTRACT

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

INTRODUCTION

A society such as Nigeria that has to address social problems such as corruption, unemployment, poverty, inequality, poor education and labor unrest is in desperate need of prophets. In this article, it is suggested that the clear prophetic voice of men and women religious could change the society in which the people we are called to serve belong. The problem is that this prophetic voice seems to have either lost momentum or has disappeared. As part of the solution to the growing problem in Nigeria, formation of religious men and women at the initial and on-going formation should make them more authentic Christians with passion for social justice and courageously committed to using their prophetic voice. Jesus who calls us has showed an example of taking a prophetic stance by addressing boldly the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, Sadducees and tax collectors of his day. You hold the key of the kingdom, not going in yourself and not allowing anyone else. God invited prophets to announce: Go and proclaim these words toward the north and say, 'Return, faithless Israel,' declares the LORD; 'I will

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not look upon you in anger. For I am gracious,' declares the LORD; 'I will not be angry forever. 'Only acknowledge your iniquity, that you have transgressed against the LORD your God, and have scattered your favors to the strangers under every green tree, and you have not obeyed My voice,' declares the LORD. Jeremiah 35:15. When David arose in the morning, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying, "Go and speak to David, 'Thus the LORD says, "I am offering you three things; choose for yourself one of them, which I will do to you." 2 Samuel 24:11-12. These are some of the scriptural foundations of an invitation by the Lord for us to be prophets given the mandate to call society to order. In the thirteenth century there was a significant movement from hermitage to mendicancy. This movement was a significant event in the history of religious life that highlighted the socio-political implications of religious life as a prophetic witnessing to the gospel. This transition was both symbolical and practical, as it marked the beginning of many current religious institutes. The entrance of these holy men and women into society replicates in a way the appointment of the prophets and the inauguration of the prophecy of old.⁴⁰ Against this backdrop, therefore, religious men and women like Jesus are called to use their prophetic voice to effect positive social change especially in the Nigerian society.

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

METHODOLOGY

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

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

⁴⁰Obiezu, E. C., & Szura, J. (2004). *Journey's to renewed consecration: Religious life after Fifty years of Vatican II*

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courage and conviction what he believes that God has put into his heart to proclaim to the people of Israel.

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

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

Lest anyone think that prophets are only males called to witness to the salvific mission of God; women are also invited to be prophets. The label "prophetess" or "woman prophet" (*nēbī'āh*) is attributed to five women in the Old Testament: Miriam (Exod. 15:20), Deborah (Judg. 4:4), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14; 2 Chron. 34:22), Noadiah (Neh. 6:14), and "the prophetess" (Isa. 8:3). Its significance is clear. Miriam claims the Lord "has spoken" through her (Num. 12:2). Deborah says to Barak: "Look, the Lord, the God of Israel, has commanded" (Judg. 4:6). Huldah similarly uses the prophetic introductory formula: "Thus says the Lord God of Israel..." (2 Kings 22:15)⁴¹. Scripture, then, describes a woman prophet as someone through whom God speaks to his people. In this regard, a "prophetess" is no different than her male counterpart prophet.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁴¹Del Housaye, J. (2009). Who are the women Prophets in the Bible. *Journal of CBE International* Vol. 16 No. 2

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

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

Jesus's stance on his prophetic call affirms the sense of prophecy (1Corinthians 14) which is not to forecast future things, but to interpret scripture concretely and to apply the interpretation in consoling and admonishing the congregation and society⁴². Prophecy is above all the gift to understand and express what the will of God is in a concrete, given situation.

The prophetic character of the consecrated life was strongly emphasized by the Synod Fathers. It takes the shape of a special form of sharing in Christ's prophetic office, which the Holy Spirit communicates to the whole People of God. There is a prophetic dimension which belongs to the consecrated life as such, resulting from the radical nature of the following of Christ and of the subsequent dedication to the mission characteristic of the consecrated life⁴³. The sign value, which the Second Vatican Council acknowledges in the consecrated life, is expressed in prophetic witness to the primacy which God and the truths of the Gospel have in the Christian life.

John Paul II, in *Vita Consecrata* crystallized this characterization by succinctly stating that prophetic witnessing is inseparably linked to religious vocation both intrinsically and teleologically. Intrinsically refers to religious life and its radical nature to the call of the Father to follow Christ and theologically implies to the core of the mission men and women religious are called to embrace.⁴⁴ Prophets, such as Bishop Oscar Romero of San Salvador, believe in creating and preparing for a brighter future not his own. Thus, our task is to call the people as a community to accountability and responsibility in their relationship with God as lived in their various social milieus. As mediators of the covenant of God with his people, prophets needed to identify with what was expected of them in that relationship. In doing so, they often interpreted history, the flow of events, in light of relationship with God. Like the prophets of old and like Christ, not even the threat of death would deter their commitment, so marked was their life by utter self-giving. This way of life was instituted through the charisms and prophetic witnessing of Founders/Foundresses of Religious Congregations that we

⁴²De Klerk, B. J. (2013). Service to the South African society through prophetic testimony as a liturgical act. *HTS Theological Studies* vol.69 n.2 Pretoria Jan. 2013 Retrieved from http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0259-94222013000200015

⁴³Vatican Council II (1975). *The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*. Dublin, Ireland Costello Publishing Company, Inc., and Reverend Austin Flannery, O.P.(Ed.)

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* i

belong to. That all founders and foundresses witnessed to the love of the communitarian God, was not an abstract mission but one with strong implication for the social reality of his/her time.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

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

Religious life has embarked on a changing, painful, challenging, life giving journey. The doors of once sheltered religious men and women have flung open creating all sorts of vulnerabilities through the new age realities, challenging the status quo and questions the credibility and role of religious life in our present day. This reality is gradually settling in the church in Nigeria. It is a common practice in Nigeria to see young children, especially in the Northern part of Nigeria, actively engaged in begging. In Northern Nigeria, many families send children known as "Almajiri" to Koranic schools.⁴⁵ Abiodun, George, Amadi, Oladipo, and Iluno (2017) described the challenges faced by Nigeria as law enforcement from other nations apprehend many trafficked women and girl-children. The findings revealed that traffickers take their victims to Europe, some parts of Africa and the Middle East.⁴⁶ Kelly (2017) states that in 2014, 1,450 Nigerian women were registered at the landing port in Italy, in 2015, 5,600 women were registered by the International Organization for Migrants (IOM) and in 2016, out of 180,000 migrants arriving in Italy by sea, 37,500 were trafficked Nigerian women, and children.⁴⁷ Eze (2017) explained the trend of deportation of trafficked Nigerian women and girls for sex. Her research findings proved that in 2003, Spain deported 160 women and girls, 59 from the Netherlands, four from the United States, 13 from South Africa, six from Ireland, others from Cote d'Ivoire, Niger Republic and 104 from Mali.⁴⁸ The insurgence of Boko haram activities threatens national/regional security and stability.⁴⁹ The economic contraction in 2016 led to a projected increase in poverty by

⁴⁵Ekong, S. (2016). Nigerian Policy on Child Labor: An Evaluation of the Education Sector Preparedness for Effective Policy Implementation Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/pqdtlocal1005747/docview/1758252321/abstract/98BC2B3E83D4DCEPQ/>

⁴⁶Abiodun, A.K., George, A, Amadi, C.C., Oladipo, G. & Iluno, L.U. (2017). Human trafficking: A global challenge reflection on the challenges in Nigeria. *Journal of Law, Policy, and Globalization*. Vol. 61 2017 Retrieved from <http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/jawpglob61&id=193&div=&collection=ile>

⁴⁷Kelly, A. (2017). Number of Nigerian women trafficked to Italy for sex almost doubled in 2016 *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/jan/12/nigerian-women-trafficked-to-italy-for-sex-doubled-2016>

⁴⁸Eze, M. D. (2017). *Human Trafficking and Prostitution Among Women and Girls of Edo State, Nigeria Possibility of Rehabilitation Through Education and Prevention*. Xlibris Publishing Corporation, UK

⁴⁹Ogbonnya, E.M., Ogujiuba, K. & Stiegler, N. (2014). *Terrorism in Nigeria: Implications of Boko Haram's movement for security and stability in the ECOWAS sub-region* DOI 10.1080/10246029.2014.903378 <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10246029.2014.903378>

close to 2 percentage points and reached 48.4 percent. Poverty in Nigeria, as per the projections based on NLSS 2009/10, is estimated to have increased along with negative economic growth in all four quarters of 2016 and the first quarters of 2017. The economic recession, insecurity and displacement in North Eastern Nigeria led to low agricultural production, substantial disruption of basic services and damage to infrastructure, depleted household's food stocks, and reduced purchasing power, with several millions of people facing food security crisis. The conflict between the herdsmen and farmers in the North Central, Nigeria also posed similar threats in the region, especially food security.⁵⁰ In the face of a troubled nation such as Nigeria, where kidnapping has become the in-thing, political instability forms the wake of our day, preventable diseases plague our land, unemployment renders our youths to self-inflicted slavery within and across the world, we could go on and on. The problem of refugees due to Boko haram's deadly campaign and Northern children parade our streets as "Alamajiris" while politicians fold their arms, watch and engage in partisan wrangling and embezzlement of public funds. The litany of pain and suffering tells the story of the ever-widening gap between the poor and rich in Nigeria.

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

⁵⁰World Bank, (2017). *Country poverty brief: Sub-Saharan Africa Nigeria* 2107. Retrieved from http://databank.worldbank.org/data/download/poverty/33EF03BB-9722-4AE2-ABC7-AA2972D68AFE/Archives-2017/Global_POV_SP_CPB_NGA.pdf

We are called to be the one who walk with God's people in the corridors of death, who sing in the hallways of terror, who return as the rising of hope.⁵¹We are called to take the road less traveled and uncommon. To go against the grain, not to settle; to be restless. We are called to address the problems in our Nation and the polarity in citizens' thinking. To be the voice of the marginalized poors' call in a supposedly richest nation in Black Africa. To engage with courage the tribal divide that threaten the message of Christ; "that they may be one" (Jn 17:22).

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

What sort of religious men and women are needed to address these contemporary national; but global issues? This question is crucial because religious life in Nigeria is facing similar narrative/challenges that plague Nigerian society: Materialism, tribal tension in communities, love of power rather than the power of love, lack of accountability of communal property, cliques or what I refer to as "Religious Gang". The gradual move by religious men and women towards secularism was voiced in Vita Consecrata(the outcome document of the synod issued by Pope John Paul II). Pope Benedict XVI, (2011) posited that consecrated life, like other aspects of Church life, is trapped in the wave of worldliness that challenges us today. According to Pope Benedict XVI, consecrated life has become too settled in this world, adapting itself to worldly standards. Its vocation to prophetic openness has been abandoned in favor of greater weight and attention paid to self- preoccupation, self-centeredness and self-preservation rather than total self-giving to God, love for Christ the teacher, Lord and bridegroom of the Church who is intimately followed and served above everything and decision to live according to the Spirit.⁵² Institutes of Consecrated Life are thus invited to courageously propose anew the enterprising initiative, creativity and holiness of their founders and foundresses in response to the signs of the times emerging in today's world. This invitation is first of all a call to perseverance on the path of holiness in the midst of the material and spiritual difficulties⁵³.

The Synod Assembly paid special attention in the discussion of the formation of those who wish to consecrate themselves to the Lord and recognize its decisive importance. The primary objective of the formation

⁵¹ Richardson, J. (2000). In wisdom path: Discovering the Sacred in Every season. Pilgrim Pr.

⁵² Apostolic Exhortation, (1996). Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation VITA CONSECRATA of the Holy Father John Paul II Libreria Editrice Vaticana

Retrieved from

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

⁵³ ibid iv

process is to prepare people for the total consecration of themselves to God in the following of Christ, at the service of the Church's mission.⁵⁴ To say "yes" to the Lord's call by taking personal responsibility for maturing in one's vocation is the inescapable duty of all who have been called. According to Vatican II decree on the up-to-date of religious renewal, *Perfectae Caritatis* published in 1965, the Church Fathers emphasized the need for initial and ongoing formation for Christian growth.

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

The Vatican Council II, Decree on Religious life; *Perfectae Caritatis* also affirmed that continuing formation, whether in Institutes of Apostolic or Contemplative Life, is an intrinsic requirement of religious consecration. As mentioned above, the formation process is not limited to the initial phase. Due to human limitations, the consecrated person can never claim to have completely brought to life the "new creature" who, in every circumstance of life, reflects the very mind of Christ. *Initial* formation, then, should be closely connected with *continuing* formation, thereby creating a readiness on everyone's part to let themselves be formed every day of their lives.⁵⁵ Community, they stressed nurtures this process.

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

- *Formation in contemplative prayer,
- * Formation authentically rooted in detachment,
- *Formation in awareness of social justice /involvement,
- * Formation in Contemplative dialogue,

⁵⁴ Ibid iv

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

⁸² Ibid iv

- * Formation in cultural competence,
- * Formation in the spirituality of servant-leadership style and
- * Formation in the knowledge of self.

Formation in contemplative prayer

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

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

Formation authentically rooted in detachment

In every age there have been men and women who, obedient to the Father's call and to the prompting of the Spirit, have chosen this special way of following Christ, in order to devote themselves to him with an "undivided" heart (cf. *1 Cor* 7:34). Like the Apostles, they too have left everything behind in order to be with Christ and to put themselves, as he did, at the service of God and their brothers and sisters.⁵⁶ In this way, through the many charisms of spiritual and apostolic life bestowed on them by the Holy Spirit, they have helped to make the mystery and mission of the Church shine forth, and in doing so, have contributed to the renewal of society. The three disciples caught up in ecstasy hear the Father's call to

⁵⁶ Ibid xiii

listen to Christ, to place all their trust in him, to make him the center of their lives. The words from on high give new depth to the invitation by which Jesus himself, at the beginning of his public life, called them to follow him, to leave their ordinary lives behind and to enter into a close relationship to him. It is precisely this special grace of intimacy which, in the consecrated life, makes possible and even demands the total gift of self in the profession of the evangelical counsels.

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

Formation in awareness of social justice issues/involvement

The prophets of today also need to interrupt the status quo by unmasking and deconstructing the structures of today. The regular Sunday liturgy needs also to be seen as an opportunity for the gathering of the faith community to be nurtured and revitalized for prophetic action in and for the world.⁵⁷ Our lives are continuing acts of worship. When the members of the prophetic community of faith gather around God's Word, they find grace to articulate their mission in harmony with the gospel of Christ they preach. Prophetic mission is directly connected with the praxis of justice. Liturgy expresses and fosters faith that does justice in missionary praxis. No prophetic mission is isolated from efforts to restructure the social-political-economic order. The justice Christians proclaim in their mission must recognize that the struggle for a just social-political-economic order parallels the struggle for the dignity of the whole human being. The theological foundation for a Christian praxis of justice is God's saving work through grace.

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

God who continues to call men and women who will be able to adapt themselves to the changing times. Men and women who are fearless, courageous, selfless, committed and prayerfully listening to the promptings of the spirit to embrace the struggle for justice. As men and women called to be prophets if we do not understand, know, able to evaluate and critically analyze what national and international politics and policies are, if we are not aware of the laws that are promulgated in our land that impact us and

⁵⁷ iii

the people we serve, if we do not listen to news, how can we understand the obstacles militating against our efforts to announce the reign of God. Then religious men and women would be like the kid who came to school but fell asleep. When the teacher asked. Junior, what is the answer to the question I just asked. Junior replied: Sorry Teacher, in the first place, I did not hear the question.

Formation in Contemplative dialogue

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

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

The challenge however is, sometimes in relationship; metaphorically we run a movie in our minds called Reality which is construed from our perception of what is. Tipping (2009) describes this scenario as the Projector. Once we understand that our reality is just our projections, instead of blaming others we can begin to take responsibility for what we have created with our thoughts. When we change our perception and drop our illusion and attachments to our belief that what appears on the screen represents reality, we experience Radical Forgiveness.⁵⁸ Radical forgiveness sets our hearts ready for mission, with no stress, no baggage, no chip on our shoulders; we can go with great enthusiasm to be authentic prophets.

Formation in cultural competence

In a country such as Nigeria, religious men and women are called to minister among people from other ethnic and tribal groups. It will be incorrect to think that since we are Nigerians, we share same culture and

⁵⁸ Tipping, C. (2009). *Radical forgiveness*. Boulder, CO. Sounds True Inc. Publishers.

tradition. In the way our languages are different so are some cultural and social ways of life. Nigeria is not a homogenous country and thus men and women in initial and on-going formation need to learn to take off their sandals when they meet each other or are missioned in other areas other than theirs; as where they are sent to is a Holy ground. For its part, the consecrated life itself is the bearer of Gospel values and, where it is authentically lived, it can make an innovative contribution in meeting the challenges of inculturation. As a sign of the primacy of God and his Kingdom, it can, through dialogue, elicit a positive reaction in people's consciences. If the consecrated life maintains its prophetic impact, it serves as a Gospel leaven within a culture, purifying and perfecting it.⁵⁹ In present day circumstances, special importance must be given to the interior freedom of consecrated persons, their affective maturity, their ability to communicate with others, especially in their serenity of spirit, their compassion for those who are suffering, their love for the truth, and a correspondence between their actions and their words. *The apostolic dimension* opens the hearts and minds of consecrated persons and prepares them for constant effort in the apostolate, as the sign that it is the love of Christ which urges them on (cf. 2 Cor 5:14). In practice, this will involve updating the methods and objectives of apostolic works in fidelity to the spirit and aims of the founder or foundress and to subsequently emerging traditions, with continuous attention to changing historical and cultural conditions, at the general and local levels where the apostolate is carried out.

Formation in the spirituality of servant-leadership style

A call to servant leadership is a call to invite people and educate them on how to engage themselves at the table of dialogue, peace, justice, fairness, brother/sisterhood. At this table there is mutual accountability and freedom to be who you are created to be while mutually seeking transformation of the soul of the leader and the one being led. ⁶⁰A call to be a companion on the journey, a call to offer “the power of love and not love of power”.

As religious we are called to model servant leadership; that liberates and affirms the giftedness of community members and people we are called to serve as companions on the journey. The spirituality of leadership means service, so it is absurd and un-Christlike to use it as a position of power over others to humiliate, intimidate, and strip them of their dignity and deprive them of a just hearing. It is not to be used against those who are not in the clique which I refer to as “Religious gangs.” When such abuse of leadership takes place in religious community, it becomes unhealthy. Formation of new and old religious should emphasize the need to reverence and respect brothers and sisters who wholeheartedly gave themselves voluntarily,

⁵⁹ Ibid xiii

⁶⁰Arnold, J.H. (1994). *Discipleship*. Walden, New York, Plough Publishing House

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

Religious - both those in the initial or on-going formation - can learn not only from Jesus, but also from outstanding leaders who have modeled servant-leadership; who led their people through the path into the light of day. Leaders such as Moses, Joseph son of Jacob, and Mary the Mother of God who have led the world to new ground, a fertile ground with the soil of forgiveness and tilled with a desire for truth, reconciliation, and restoration. Mandela, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Mohandas Gandhi are the forerunners of today’s leaders who lived and worked based on the principles of servant-leadership.⁶¹ Pope Francis models this type of leadership and is accessible and approachable, though he may not agree with people on all fronts. Such leaders are the modern-day expression of a long line of visionaries; leaders with foresight, able to hear the voice of others, and capable of leading in a way that provides others with light, life and maturity needed for prophetic ministry. Religious men and women may learn from what Mandela had to say: As a leader, I have always led from behind. I would listen to what each person had to say in a discussion before venturing my own opinion. Oftentimes my opinion is simply represented in a consensus of what I heard in the discussion.⁶²

Formation in the knowledge of self

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

⁶¹Ferch, S. R. & Spears, L.C. (2010). *Spirit of Servant-leadership*. Mahwah, New Jersey U.S.A. Paulist Press/Orbis Books Inc.

⁶²Mandela, N. (1994). *Long walk to freedom: The autobiography of Nelson Mandela*. London. Little, Brown and Company

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

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

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

One way to explore self-knowledge is through the scripture and enneagram. The nine ennea-types point to different compulsions and obsessions; different forms of self-centeredness. The enneagram summarizes the different strengths of various personality types. In recent types, people in ministry have begun to use these tools to unlock who they are which has helped them to begin the journey to self-knowledge. Enneagram explains why we behave the way we do and helps to point out specific directions for individual and spiritual growth thus improving relationships with other companions on the journey.⁶³ Self-knowledge is therefore the growing awareness of our ego and all its work; without judging or blaming or making excuses for ourselves. We need to form religious men and women to begin to observe their behavior in different circumstances, of recognizing obsessions and compulsions; in this way we can become effective prophets and are able to gain more freedom in the knowledge that we are not wearing the mask of perfection and projection.

Conclusion

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

⁶³Baron, R. & Wagele, E. (1994). *The enneagram made easy: Discover the Nine types of People*. New York. HarperCollins Publishers.

life.⁶⁴ That's key to the whole question of the prophetic voice in any society. It comes out of the experience and history of the time. When you look at the situation you're in, prophets are not people who sit around theologizing out of some kind of airy-fairy transcendent overview of somebody else's idea of what the world is. These are people who, out of immersion in the mind of God, speak about what the society is now and what the society should be. The prophetic movement in any society looks, first of all, at what is the Word of God for humanity. And then uses that as a measure for the way humanity itself is acting at this moment.

Men and women religious are chosen by God to raise questions, to disturb the peace, to rock the boat of political leaders. In a country such as Nigeria, the attempt right now is to silence the questions. "You may not discuss, you may not think, you may not do." Also, if we can suppress the questions, we'll have the time, we hope, to build up a young generation in the old answers. The way you empower is religious men and women to refuse to be silent. If consecrated people are silent now, if they fail to articulate the real questions now, it will take another fifty years just to legitimate the questions again. Hence, it is crucial to know the naked position of the Gospel, "I live no longer with my own life" (Galatians 2:20). In that place, as Jesus warned, "the whole world will hate you" (John 15:19). Chittister (2009) poses the question: Why anyone would choose or want to be a prophet.⁶⁵

Jesus explains that prophetic stance is not so that we can isolate ourselves in order to be in the world but not of it. It is essential to understand that we are not of the world only in the sense of separating ourselves from the evil root of self-interest, greed, and injustice. We need to separate ourselves from all that is loveless in the present world order. In the midst of the political instability, corruption, nepotism, man-made unemployment, reckless administration of the Nigerian political elite, ethnic division, juvenile delinquency, violent crime, quest to gain and control power, mental illness, hijacking of the wealth of Nigerians by a few, God calls each prophet. Religious are called out of this world order not to complacency and to maintain culture of silence, to glory in the status of being religious and to walk the streets in dazzling religious regalia, attaining final vows and obtaining a ring (while this is a good outward sign), it is not what makes us authentic religious and clearly not what makes us consecrated people. The essence of our commitment to vocation to religious life and our vows is to build the city of God where the Spirit alone rules, to build the city on the hilltop which cannot be hidden but shines into the world. It is our deeds that will shine out for others to have life and life to the fullest.⁶⁶

⁶⁴Chittister, J. (2009). *The cry of the prophet: A call to fullness of life*. PA. U.S.A. BenetVision Publishers

⁶⁵Ibid xxvi

⁶⁶Ibid xx

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Prophetic stance ultimately calls for risk taking in daring to expand the kingdom and reign of God for the hopeless. Hence, call to prophetic living invites us to take strength in Jesus who dared to rock the boat of the Pharisees and Sadducees, those who turned his father's temple into a market place. It is also important for prophets to know that for Jesus to risk bumping into an unknown became challenging and cost him his life. It is also imperative to remember that sometimes the road will be foggy, the thunderstorm storm scares us as heavy rain blurs our vision. The rivers and oceans may overflow their banks. Dead bodies will be found in prisons and on street sidewalks.⁶⁷Those who dare to speak up against injustice can be

⁶⁷Iwuoha, N. (2012). *Walking in the wisdom of the "Worn Out" shoes of Blessed Catherine Kasper: A symbol of transformation*. Donaldson, Indiana U.S.A. Poor Handmaids of Jesus of Christ Publications.

PUBLIC SQUARE FORUM

**OF WORDS AND SYMBOLS:
A THEOLOGICAL RESPONSE TO THE CBCN COMMUNIQUE ON THE
KILLINGS IN MAKURDI DIOCESE**

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(NB: The following reflections, here systematically formulated, were originally presented by the author during debates with some of his confreres and friends in a group social media chat. Their conversations followed the timely strongly worded Communiqué of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) which expressed the Church's grave concern over the spate of violence in Nigeria, not excluding the murder of 02 priests and 17 parishioners in Benue State on 24 April 2018 and, then, the massacre of many innocent Nigerians in Plateau State . The Bishops "are devastated by these acts of insensitivity and disrespect for the dignity of human life". The Communiqué provoked widespread and, at times passionate, comments, debates and reflections in the Church and society in Nigeria. Besides the Communiqué, an historic nationwide peaceful protest by Christians, supported by Catholics Bishops, was being planned. Editor's Note)

The intellectual faculty is said to be one of the most distinguishing qualities that separates the human community from the rest of the animal kingdom. It is not only that human beings possess the rational faculty but are conscious that they possess it. But another most distinguishing faculty in man/woman is the faculty of speech. Though distinct from the faculty of the intellect, it is intrinsically connected to the intellectual faculty. Hence, speech is more than an articulation of sounds. It is an intelligent articulation of intelligible sounds. These intelligible sounds are called words which are nothing but vehicles of thoughts. Words are carriers of thoughts, ideas, and meanings.

Though completely non-tactile and imperceptible, words are nonetheless very powerful. They can set off a series of chain reaction of unimaginable proportion of which the effects or consequence, either beneficial or harmful, often outlive the author of those words. The power of words not only lie in the one who utters them, but sometimes even more in the very ideas or thoughts they convey. To understand the Greek concept of *logos* and the Hebrew concept of *dabar*, is to grasp the power of words or speech. It is, therefore, of little wonder that the concept of Logos was employed by early Christians and Patristic writers to capture the mystery of Christ Jesus. And so, no one with sound theological education can underrate the power of speech or word either in its ordinary day to day usage or its theological context or usage.

Although powerful, words are at the same time limited. As a vehicle of human thoughts, ideas and meanings, words sometimes fall far short of being able to convey these "passengers". It is like attempting to use a supersonic airplane to convey astronauts to space, yet we know that supersonic airplanes are indeed very powerful and

superfast. And so, words, for all their power, don't always succeed in conveying the ideas, thoughts, meaning, emotions, values etc. we may wish to transmit.

But man is not left hopeless and helpless in the face of the limitations of words. Where words fail or what words cannot convey, symbols become a much more suitable vehicle. If words are powerful, symbols are even much more powerful. What can be said in a thousand words can be captured by a single symbol. And so, symbols like words, are also conveyors or vehicles. But they are more economical, more effective and more efficient than words because they synthesize in a single expression what is expressed by thousands of words. Symbols travel faster and remain longer even after the sound or echo of a word has long ceased. In fact, the words of the Psalmist readily come to mind in understanding the nature of a symbol. Speaking about the heavens and the skies, the psalmist says: no words are used no sound is heard, yet their voice (message) goes out to all the earth, their message to the outmost ends of the earth (Ps.19: 3,4). Such is the nature of symbols. They do not utter a sound, yet their message is powerfully etched in the hearts and minds of their "hearers". And so, while words speak to the exterior ears of man, symbols speak to the interior ears of man such that one whose auditory sense is defective can clearly hear and understand the sounds of symbols. This is wittingly expressed in an Igbo proverb: *anaghiagwaochintina agha esu*. This means that: "You don't tell a deaf man that war has broken out." S/he may not hear the booming sounds of the heavy guns but s/he certainly will see and feel the anarchy around him/her.

As we do know, the entire structure of our Christian liturgy and spirituality is firmly built on the framework of words and symbols. It is not built only on either words or symbols alone but on both. And so, we must not dismiss or minimize the importance of words. In spite of its inherent limitation, it remains a valid and important vehicle for communicating ideas, thoughts and meanings. They remain important especially as symbols also have their own limitation. Symbols can be misunderstood especially when used inappropriately or in a wrong context. This is why words and symbols must often go together. Symbols help to capture what words are unable to capture and words help to clarify what symbols intend to say. In this mutual relationship, symbols offer words the vocabulary it lacks and words offer symbols the voice and clarity it lacks. Commenting on this mutual relationship between word and deed (symbol), the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council notes that, "the plan of Revelation is realized by deeds and words having an inner unity: the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them" (Dei Verbum #2). It is in this mutual interchange that the intended message is communicated in a very powerful and enduring manner. In fact, this union of words and symbols gives rise to a new reality called sacrament. Words alone do not make a sacrament neither do symbols alone make a sacrament, both must come together to make a sacrament. And our basic catechism teaches us that the power and effects of sacraments are transcendental, that is, they are able to effect changes or transformations that go beyond the natural realm. How else can we explain Baptism, Holy Eucharist, Holy Orders, Reconciliation, etc. And so, when words and symbols unite together as sacrament, a synergy of energies and powers is created, which is capable of transcendental effects. Whereas, such transcendental effects cannot be possible if only either of the two is used. Certainly, some effect will be possible when used separately but that effect cannot be of a transcendental quality or character. The union of word *and* symbol is best encapsulated and exemplified in the

Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Sublime Sacrament insofar as he is both the Word and Symbol of God.

What has the above got to do with anything? A lot! The killing of two priests: Frs. Joseph Gor and Felix Tyolaha, along with their parishioners in the diocese of Makurdi has raised the angst among Catholics and non-Catholics. But it has also raised the expectations of the flock of Christ who look up to their shepherds not only for words of consolation and reassurance but more importantly for direction. As members of the flock of Christ—both those in the church and the other flocks outside the church—are continually mowed down by terrorists, the sheep have been looking up to their shepherds for an effective and determined course of action. After the initial silence, the college of shepherds issued a very powerful statement not only condemning the atrocities but even pointedly asking President Buhari to resign. There is no doubt, the statement of the bishops is powerful and unprecedented. And as we are wont to say, it speaks truth to authority, as they have always done. Indeed, their Communiqué did state that for two years they have been speaking to Buhari concerning the configuration of the security apparatus which leaves the entire security of the country in the hands of an ethnoreligious section of the country. And so, the bishops have been speaking. Their latest “speech” is one in a series of “speeches” and I suppose the most powerful of all them all.

But it is the opinion of ordinary sheep like me that words, powerful as they may be, are no longer sufficient. It is absurd if not ludicrous to continue to multiply words on a man or woman who has lost his auditory faculty. And so, when the sounds of words are no longer meaningful to a deaf man, one must employ a different set of sounds to convey the pains, anxiety, anguish and disappointment of the people. When words fail, symbols come to the rescue just as faith comes to the aid of the senses which are unable to grasp the full reality of things. Our shepherds may have spoken powerfully but they have not spoken sufficiently. And for this, ordinary *christfaithful* like me remain rather disappointed and disillusioned.

Our shepherds must move beyond words to symbols, or rather employ both words and symbols. In short, our bishops must be *sacramental* in their approach to the current crisis in Nigeria. The church is a sacrament, and the ministry of which they—the bishops—are both recipients and custodians is a sacrament. Therefore, their approach and response to issues and problems must be *sacramental* in character. Recall, what was said earlier on, viz., a sacrament consists of both words and symbols.

One may ask what sort of symbol(s) is/are required of our bishops? There are quite a number of them. (a) *Peaceful Public Protest*. Take for instance, the symbol of a peaceful protest. Imagine for a second if all the bishops in Nigeria are to lead, contemporaneously, the priests, consecrated persons, and members of the lay faithful of their respective dioceses in a peaceful silent prayerful sit-down protest in front of the government house of their respective States for an entire week, what will likely be the effect? At the risk of being labelled unreasonably optimistic, I think such an action (symbol) will send a powerful message that cannot be easily ignored by the Federal and State Governments. In fact, one can point to a recent and related action as a precedent. Rochas Okorochoa of Imo State in his usual arbitrary and provocative manner renamed Assumpta Avenue—originally named after the Assumpta Cathedral which is located in that Avenue—to Buhari Avenue. Irked by this affront, the Catholic community in Owerri began rallying round to hold a peaceful protest in the metropolis. Without

waiting for that to happen the governor hurriedly did a backtrack. Yes, symbols are powerful and effective.

Sometimes, strong reservations and even oppositions are raised, particularly by members of the clergy and consecrated persons, against holding peaceful protests as a possible course of action. One of the usual arguments is that peaceful protests can easily become violent and bloody because of the likelihood of being hijacked by hoodlums thus provoking possible backlash from security forces and pro-government supporters. The multiethnic and multireligious character of the country are further adduced as added reasons why such protests, even when peaceful, should never be adopted as a possible course of action. These arguments, which more or less bother on fear, are often presented as advocating a more prudential approach since the logic is that it is preferable to avoid a course of action that may provoke more violence.

While granting that we do have a volatile ethnoreligious mix in Nigeria yet, one can confidently say that in reality, there is very little likelihood of mobs of Muslims youths attacking peaceful protesting Christians in places like Lagos, Oyo, Enugu, Benue, Abeokuta, Owerri, Port Harcourt, Abuja, etc. and even in the so-called Muslim dominated States. It is even much less likely to have the police shooting at bishops, priests and religious who should be at the vanguard of the peaceful protests. Even the most ruthless dictator knows where to draw the line. And so, the argument that a peaceful protest might turn violent and bloody may seem plausible yet it is very misleading. And let us even grant that possibility, would it be the first time a bishop or priest will be shot in public? Why fear being shot on the streets while protesting against injustice when you can as well be hacked down while lying in your bed or sitting inside the church as happened to the two priests in Benue? And so, the same death we think we are avoiding by refusing to take up a *sacramental* action will certainly catch up with us while engaged in perhaps a less noble activity.

It is very instructive that the brutal murder of Frs. Joseph and Felix took place after the Good Shepherd Sunday. In the Gospel reading of that Sunday, Christ the Good Shepherd assures us that he will rather lay down his life for his sheep than allow the wolves to harm his sheep. And here we are debating whether it is prudent to go beyond mere words for fear that one or more persons might be shot. Yes, no one should recklessly expose his life to danger, but one must not mistake cowardice for prudence. In the name of prudence some theologians, priests and religious are feeding the flock on a diet of fear: fear that a peaceful protest might turn violent. This diet of fear is transforming Christians into helpless and hopeless people who simply throw up their arms resignedly to fatalism mistaken for faith. While these theologians quote Aquinas and church documents, lives are being lost daily in Benue, Plateau, Kaduna, Taraba, and other parts of Nigeria. I guess the lives of those commoners are nothing in comparison with the lives of our bishops, theologians, priests and religious. I consider it a very grave sin to feed the flock of Christ on a diet of fear. And yet, the first words of the Risen Lord are: "Do Not Be Afraid", "Fear Not Little Flock".

I acknowledge that our bishops are human. They are no different from any of us in terms of their humanity. I believe that they, too, can be overcome by fear and the dread of being brutalized and even killed. Like every responsible and prudent person, they too can be overwhelmed by the thought that an attempt to express their displeasure in a symbolic gesture of peaceful protest can set off a chain of events of undeterminable consequences, hence their reticence in taking that course of action. I believe that they love their flock even more than some vociferous priests like us. I believe that whatever

be the case, they are not acting in bad faith but rather out of genuine or what they believe to be genuine prudence. Yet, the fact remains that there must come a time when they have to fold the sleeves of their episcopal robes, replace their shoes with a pair of sandal, and descend from their cathedrae into the streets for a peaceful but frontal confrontation with the evil going on in our country. The life of Oscar Romero of El Salvador exemplifies this. After several hesitations, he realized that words were no longer sufficient. He had to complement words with symbols. He paid the full price with his life and became a “sacrament” for the Church in Latin America. He understood that when you confront evil, evil will leave you bruised and even dead. Christ confronted the evil of sin, and evil left him not only bruised and humiliated but left him hanging on a cross. In fact, he had to show his disciples the marks of his bruises to let them know he’s the same Jesus. To expect that we will go on a peaceful prayerful protest and return home with our habits and cassocks still immaculate and unruffled is being unrealistic. We may come back disheveled, harassed, brutalized and even killed, but we like our Risen Lord will triumph over evil. Like Christ we must pray intensely in the garden of Gethsemane but we must be prepared to step into the streets and courtyards of the Chief highpriest and Pilate and be ridiculed by the jeering crowd as they hurry us to Golgotha.

It is without say that the Hierarchy of the Church in Nigeria cannot keep silent or stand aloof in the face of the ongoing mass massacre of families and other forms of anomalies in our national polity. Indeed, they have an obligation to actively resist every form of evil in the society. This pertains to their prophetic ministry. There’s no question that their resistance must be non-violent, but they must strenuously resist evil even when such resistance provokes violence on them. Peaceful prayerful public protest can be considered as one among several forms of non-violent protest against the present evil in our society.

(b) Undertake *diplomatic initiatives*. Another important non-violent method could be the use of diplomatic pressure. The CBCN, as a matter of urgency, must create a unit within the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), that will be responsible for high level diplomatic engagements within and outside Nigeria. Part of its task is to help create a network of local and foreign, governmental and non-governmental pressure groups that will force the Nigerian government to take the needed steps that will bring to resolve the ongoing crises in the Country. The Catholic bishops in Nigeria must leverage on its universal status in employing diplomatic pressure as a powerful tool for protesting and resisting government endorsed injustice in the society. Needless to say, a high level of professionalism will be required to make such a unit effective.

In addition to the possible courses of actions proposed above, there are several other *symbolic* gestures that the CBCN can undertake in reinforcing its message against the unrelenting violence that has enveloped Nigeria. We shall to articulate some of them in the following paragraphs.

1. The ministry of the episcopacy is a *ministry of memory*. As custodians of the apostolic tradition, they are custodians of the memory of not just the past but of the present tradition. Thus, part of their ministry is to ensure that the church never forgets. This is why the CBCN must ensure that the local church does not forget—especially witnesses of the Christian faith. As part of fulfilling the mnemonic dimension of the episcopal ministry, the CBCN, but particularly the respective bishops of the dioceses in the Middlebelt, should establish the identity (names and faces) of all those who have died in religious violence and build a mausoleum in

which their names and possibly their faces can be engraved. It becomes a perpetual memory for successive generations of Christians to keep in view the price their forebears paid for their faith in Christ Jesus. This symbol is not merely mnemonic but catechetical. It becomes a symbol that reminds successive generations the price one may be required to pay for embracing the Christian faith.

2. While not everyone who died in religious violence can be strictly declared a martyr, The CBCN should undertake to identify specific individuals whose death qualifies them to be declared *martyrs*. I want to believe that among so many of our murdered brothers and sisters, some of them can be declared martyrs or confessors. Leah Sharibu, though not a Catholic is nonetheless a confessor, indeed, an ecumenical confessor of faith. She chose to renounce her freedom rather than renounce her faith in Christ Jesus. She therefore is a model of Christian faith for men and women of our epoch and of our local context. Her testimony confirms the Gospel message that to follow Christ and stand for truth may require the renunciation of one's property, freedom and even life. Her witness represents a very powerful critique against the false gospel of materialism and spiritual hedonism that has infected hundreds of thousands of Christians in our day.
3. Every authentic Christian ministry and action, especially sacramental actions, flow from the church's *life of prayer*. Therefore, the above proposed *sacramental actions*, that is, the peaceful prayerful public protest and other forms of non-violent resistance cannot be detached from prayer. Consequently, the CBCN should establish in our local church's liturgical calendar a day to commemorate all victims of ethnoreligious violence. Just as the experience of the early martyrs became inscribed in the universal calendar of the Church, so too must the bishops of Nigeria and of Africa in general also inscribe in our local liturgical calendar the painful experience of individuals, families and communities that have lost their lives to ethnoreligious violence. It is, indeed, a greater violence to continue to pass in silence the painful memories of thousands of victims of ethnoreligious violence.
4. In addition to the annual liturgical celebration of victims of ethnoreligious violence, a specific day and hour of the week, e.g. Fridays, should be set aside as a day of *public devotion* in all parishes, rectories, chaplaincies, seminaries, and religious houses throughout the country. This public devotion would include recitation of the holy rosary, meditation on the word of God and Eucharistic adoration. This spiritual devotion will provide the vital force that will inspire all other forms of public actions that express the church's disapproval of the current political situation. This national day and hour of public devotion should not be a one-off event but a continuous one until the country overcomes its present crisis. We recall how the CBCN rose up to the challenge by composing the Prayer for Nigeria in Distress during the dark and dreary days of the Sani Abacha dictatorship. The country appears to be in an even dire situation and hence the need for all to unite our spirits in prayer.

Some may wish to interpret this short essay as an indictment of our bishops, but my intent is far from that. Any Christian, especially priest or consecrated person, who understands the nature of the church and the dignity of the episcopal ministry must give due deference and honor to the shepherds appointed by Christ to watch over his flock whatever may be their shortcomings. And so, this short essay is not intended in any way to ridicule or castigate our bishops. I dare not commit such opprobrium even if I may not entirely agree with or appreciate their course of action. More so, the deep consciousness that I live in a very brittle glass house has taught me to be circumspect of

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silenced or killed. Sometimes culture of silence and pessimism sets in our souls and dominate our weary and hopeless hearts as we watch the malnourished waste away, the sick given fake drugs, children are either brainwashed or forced to fight as terrorists. We watch new forms of slavery emerge as our youths pay their way, coerced and trafficked within and outside the shores of Nigeria, youths take to drug addiction with no hope for a future. Let us not give up. Let us always remember the words of Isaiah: Do not be afraid, ...should you pass through the raging waters, you shall not drown (Isaiah 41:10).

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pointing to the shortcomings of others. It must, however, be clearly understood, that refraining from pointing out the shortcomings or failures of others, whether moral or otherwise, is not the same as critiquing the positions, policies, principles or opinions of others.

Thus, this essay is purely a theological task arising from a strong conviction that theology must be at the service of the magisterium in all circumstances. A theologian, must be capable of rising above the din of uncritical and emotive debates and articulate theological principles that will inspire meaningful course of actions for the church of God. This short theological treatise is, therefore, geared towards offering a theological foundation for non-violent resistance in the form a peaceful prayerful public protest (the 4 Ps) as a legitimate course of action for the church especially when confronted with grave dangers. From our theological analysis, it is obvious that far more than just a duty or an obligation that derives from a socio-ethical or political right as citizens, peaceful prayerful public protest has solid and sound theological foundation. It is rooted in the church's theology of sacraments. When the church, therefore, engages in public protest, it is not merely a social action, it is sort of a *sacramental* action which flows from the very nature and life of the church which is herself a sacrament. In fact, this is what distinguishes the public protest of the church from all other forms of social or public protests. Since sacraments are not to be trivialized, peaceful prayerful public protests by the church are not to be trivialized. And since sacraments are important and even necessary means of salvation, peaceful prayerful public protests and other forms of non-violent protest are not only important but are sometimes necessary especially in very grave situations. They can become *saving means* of transforming a society. And so, when such necessity arises, the custodians of the mysteries (sacraments) of God has a moral and spiritual obligation to lead the flock of Christ to *celebrate* this *sacrament* even if it means having to lay down one's life. Sacraments, as we have seen have transcendental transformative power and effects. The Church in Nigeria and in Africa as a whole can through a series of sustained sacramental gestures bring about effective and enduring change in our land that has suffered enormously. We must, therefore, rise up to this challenge and expectation.

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

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ABSTRACT

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

INTRODUCTION

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

God calls persons to the consecrated life by way of special invitation to His service through purely human situations. He sets apart such individuals for the emulation of the gospel values and for the salvation of His people. They are set apart for a life of witness. Although the consecrated life is as old as the Church and has suffered a lot of changes, challenges and losses in vocation, it has never lost its relevance in the Church and to the world. Men and women have lived and still live the religious life style, to deepen their relationship with God, their love and devotion in a continued striving in the imitation of the Virgin, Poor and Obedient Christ of the Gospels. Yet, no one takes this honour upon her or himself(Heb. 5: 4).

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

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

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

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

CONSECRATED

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

The word "consecration" connotes setting something or someone apart for some holy or sacred responsibilities. It is the act of declaring a person, or an object, for sacred use by a deity. Consecration is the noun of the verb, to consecrate and is mostly employed in Christian / Catholic religious circles and ceremonies to denote dedication of persons, places and things to the service of God. Etymologically, its origin is the Latin "*consecrationem*"¹ and the Anglo-French word "*consecratiōn*", its past tense "consecrated", which is our concern in this presentation. We wish to explore the reason for which God calls, why He calls these persons. In the same vein, discuss the procedure of discerning this call as well as its missionary relevance in the contemporary post modern society.

Consecration therefore is the solemn religious profession of vows or priestly ordination, the dedication of persons, places; for instance, churches, shrines, Grottos and or things such as altars, vessels, etc to and for the service of God. Thus for God's work or mission, persons give voluntarily themselves in response to God's invitation for consecration. One is consecrated therefore for a life of dedication and service after the exemplary

life of Christ in the Gospels. In the light of this topic, we limit ourselves to the “Individual” consecrated to the service of God through His people. To be consecrated then is to respond to the Divine invitation of being set apart in particular to be in the service of God, after the example of Christ according to the definitions above. This call which transcends all forms of considerations, traditions and cultures, old as it were, yet never ages. It is a gift, a treasure, inspiration, hope and support of the Church which accompanies the spread of evangelisation in different parts of the world.

The apostles affirm that they hadn't received any commandment concerning virginity; nevertheless, they left it to the power of those that are willing to take it¹. Thus attesting to the understanding that, the consecrated life is not given to all. It is an invitation to those who have been chosen to live the audacity of Christ's life. In corroboration with the apostles, the fathers of the church opine that following the example of Christ, the apostles offered their lives in self commitment to be consecrated. To them, vocation to the consecrated life is a gift, a call given only to those who ask. This explains Origen when he said: “Ask and it shall be given to you (...) God therefore will give good gifts, perfect purity in celibacy and chastity, to those who ask with their whole soul (...)”¹. That virginity will be given to the one who asks is the view of St Jerome. And John Chrysostom in corroboration states that: “He that is able to receive it let him receive”¹. Indeed, the fathers of the church believed strongly that the consecrated life is a gift, an invitation from God to those who can, to share in the life of His incarnate Son. It is given only to those who can live it. To this end, Pope John Paul II explains that: “In the consecrated life, individuals commit themselves to the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience. Their lives testify to the values of the Kingdom of God. The profession of chastity, poverty and obedience rejects the idolatry of anything created and points to God as the absolute good”¹. By way of explanation, the phrase individuals commit themselves to the evangelical counsels connotes that the consecrated persons are driven as it were by some invincible force to stay faithfully engaged to the life of Sacred solitude for the sake or the kingdom. Certainly, based on personal reflection and spiritual experiences, the fathers in their wisdom made a categorical observation; that the consecrated life is not open to all rather only to those God has called to this way life. The question often asked today is; why are people consecrated? Why waste so much time and human resources when there is a lot of charity work to do? In fact some go so far to ask, what for? To what avail?

CONSECRATED FOR WHAT?

Already, God created us to know Him, love Him, serve Him in this world and to live happily with Him forever in the next. The purpose of this particular call in which one is consecrated is to respond to practically Christ and to live fully the gospel values in loving and dedicated service to God

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through His people. Consecrated to serve and bound by the evangelical councils of: obedience, poverty and chastity, every consecrated person is bound to live and to follow Christ's example by living faithfully these vows they freely made.

It is worthy of note that the consecrated life is as old as the church, because right from the earliest generation of Christians, particularly in the *judeo-christian* churches there were virgins, ascetics or the coenobites who lived consecrated lives without an institutionalised form. They lived lives of asceticism and celibacy without renouncing their normal social situation¹. This does not deny the fact that there were those who lived already the life of the gospels in groups and under rigorous observation as virgins¹ and strict asceticism, both men and women. Indeed, one is consecrated in response to the motivation of the spirit of Jesus Christ to imitate His life as seen in the Gospels and to the glory of God, popularly designated as the evangelical councils. And this is a radical departure from the habitual norm of amassing wealth, giving in to marriage and authority. One is consecrated to image Him the Christ, as the ideal model of perfect charity by living as he lived, showing love and compassion to those in different kinds of needs. One is consecrated to follow Christ "*in answer to his call to be a living and radical witness to his love on earth (...)*"¹, and to keep these vows so as to be ennobled to live perfect charity and fraternal love in the manner that Christ lived them. The person is consecrated to a radical self challenge by way of living out practical love "*agapae*", reconciliation and forgiveness lived in community, mercy, and in constant loving communion with the Lord in prayer. Thus corroborating the new code of the canon law which states that:

The consecrated life is the form of a stable life by which the faithful (...) give themselves totally to God loved above all else (...) for the construction of the church and the salvation of the world "in order to achieve" the perfection of charity in the service of the kingdom of God and, having been made an outstanding sign in the church, foretell the heavenly glory¹.

Consecrated therefore to a total self - offering to God and to love this God consciously and contentiously over and above all else, in a total self abnegation. One Consecrated to be different in a radical manner that refuses the world's style but tells the happy story of the glory of the children of God in the authentic witnessing to true love. The individual is consecrated not just to live mechanically the religious life. Rather to live a life that adapts to the changes and the challenges of the world and the church. A person consecrated to enunciate a new paradigm, born of obedience, humility, care and compassion, positively influencing a confused, harassed and lost planet that is our world today. In our contemporary world at the moment, everybody is an authority and so it becomes very difficult to exercise or expect the virtues of obedience and humility¹. To the world, obedience kills, it humiliates! But by this vow, the consecrated not only offer themselves, but they offer themselves as burnt offering in a mysteriously positive/spiritual

manner, making atonement for everyone else's sin of pride, just as Christ did from the *crèche* to the cross. "Unless the tree is pruned, it will bear no fruit in due season" said my mother to me. That is the work of obedience in the life of the consecrated person. Obedience prunes the consecrated of all the vices namely; pride, negative self esteem, narcissism, ambition, temper and all the vices associated with that which is not humble. This pruning engenders newness of life in all its ramifications; piety and honesty, joy and self control, availability and generosity, humility and charity, sacrifice and joy, fraternal love in community life etc. Indeed, obedience is the mortal enemy of pride in the life and spiritual battle of the consecrated person. Consecrated at baptism as children of God, why does one have to be consecrated again and why are we called? Why the choice of an individual?

WHY ARE THE INDIVIDUALS CHOSEN?

There is a common saying that runs thus, I was looking for somebody to do something, till I realised I was somebody¹. Isn't it typical of all of us? We would wish it were someone else but, not me. Is it that God has not gifted me as much as those others, to be challenged too?

Am not sure God chose one from the midst of one's family, siblings, friends or kindred for his or her outstanding qualities, nor for his or her goodness, least of all, not even for his or her fidelity to God! No, God chose you and consecrated you gratuitously to make you holy for He our God is holy¹. It is you that God wants to have offered as a living and fitting sacrifice, dedicated and acceptable for His service¹. Consecrated to give up all claims on one's life but rather put oneself completely in His hands. He picked you, purified and consecrated you because He wants you to bring His name to the remotest parts of the earth and to those who have never heard His name¹. He desired that you be the one to bear witness to His unconditional love through enduring pain, persecution, suffering and even death¹. That through your endurance many will come to know, believe in Him and be saved. One is consecrated that through the profession of the evangelical councils, the wounds inflicted by the original sin may receive some care and perhaps healing. These vows governed by obedience as it were, are in opposition with the sin of Adam and Eve which was their rejection of God's authority over theirs. For John Paul II, the wounds inflicted by disobedience receive therapy through the continued attempt and committed efforts of the consecrated persons¹. They, by the application of a contrary force, contradict the arrogance of the enemy of our humanity and thus bring hope and soothing to an otherwise broken humanity. He consecrated you above all, to be the sign of a radical contradiction to the world. To this end, Akinwale in defining the religious /consecrated life explains that: "*the religious is a sign of contradiction, one who believes in God, one who believes that God is love and who freely and prophetically detaches himself or herself from things most valued in this world in order to be free to bear witness to*

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the fact that God is love"¹. A sign of contradiction; living contrary to the post-modern world, its life styles and expectations. Called to live a radical sign, an expression and a foretaste of the eschatological kingdom of Christ where conjugal life does not exist¹. It is choosing a life of poverty in place of riches, pleasure, and money at all costs. One is called to a life of chastity instead of a life of promiscuity, of debauchery, of lust and orgies. The individual is chosen for a life of obedience instead of disobedient pride; insisting on my way, on my will and on my decision as the absolute. The consecrated person is offered the life of humility, meekness and of opprobrium, instead of a life of arrogance and power, pride and dissension. The person called is consecrated to follow the Gospel Jesus Christ in His choice of the cross and of all that it represents. Called to an active participation in the life of his Son Jesus the chaste, poor and obedient one (Mtt.8:20; Phil. 2:8) and that the immeasurable reaches of his mystery may be present in our world and possibly draw everyone towards the kingdom of God. It is worth noting that the cross of Christ stands not only for pain and passion, it also stands for joy and victory over evil beginning with the repentant thief¹ whose response to the taunts of his non-God fearing companion must have put a smile on Jesus' blood stained face. As such, one is consecrated to help the people of God, "*the men and women of this present time to recognise the traces of God in the beauty of their existence*"¹. In effect, one is consecrated to bear witness to the truth of the Resurrection, singing the *Alleluia* in honour of the Risen Christ, through their communal fraternal life. And like the Samaritan woman of John chapter 4, and the two to Emmaus, announce their joy at their reception of the good news and at the breaking of bread while bringing the same good news to those in the shadows. In this way, they live out their vocation as missionaries, constantly discerning and re-discerning their missionary vocation in the light of what the Lord desires of those whom He has consecrated. The consecrated life without the Eucharist is empty. To buttress this, Pope John Paul II opines that:

The secret of this spiritual ardour is the Eucharist, it is the inexhaustible source of fidelity to the Gospel, for in this sacrament, the heart of ecclesial life, the deep identification and total conformation with Christ to which consecrated persons are called, is completely fulfilled. In the Eucharist all forms of prayer come together, the Word of God is proclaimed and received; relationships with God, with brothers and sisters, with all men and women are challenged. It is the Sacrament of filiation, of communion and of mission¹.

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

VOCATIONAL DISCERNMENT

Christians in general are called initially by baptism to become perfect and holy children of God. Our prime vocation in this regard is God's call to us to be holy for "I, Yahweh, am holy"¹, what Lumen Gentium (LG) called the "Universal call to Holiness"¹. This initial call to holiness extended to all God's children is deepened by the choice we make to remain celibates for the glory of God, for the service of the Church in perfect charity and for the salvation of our eternal souls. This we could name our secondary vocation which is an avenue to live practically a life in consonance with who we are made to be, "holy" as we indicated above. Vocation then is a call, "vocare". A call from God your creator, the Father who loves you and traces a way for you, a plan for your eternal happiness which is hidden in the service of others as Christ did. For Cleary believes that; the fullness of the human being is realised in one's availability and total self-giving¹. This could be realised through self-giving in an audacious and a radical replicate of the life of Christ, who emptied Himself for the love and life of His creatures; (*notre model par excellence de la vie caritative*) our model of perfect charity par excellence. Vocation is not therefore simply an ordinary invitation to a life other than that which we are used to, it is rather an invitation received from God and at the same time a response to collaborate with God (who initiates the call) for the furtherance of his kingdom here on earth and for the salvation of our eternal souls. Suffice it to say that the Divine needs the collaboration of the mortal to reach and save the mortal. This Divine call is therefore a reality which affects the whole Church¹. We have been called, each to a particular way of life pattern or particular vocation. It is to this way of life that one after discernment orients one's gifts and talents for a higher good.

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

Does one truly have a calling, an invitation, or a vocation to the consecrated life? It is a question to be pondered over a period of time. Vocational discernment to the consecrated life is not a day's journey. When one senses the tingling or sensations or strange emotions at the sight of a consecrated person, a liking to approach, be noticed; be with, etc, it is not to be glossed over. For many invitations, vocations and calls engendered from such emotions and should be explored and tested¹. The love of God and the love of God's business are the driving forces or factors in these feelings enumerated above. And since God speaks through pure human media, the church advocates and admonishes that these interior sensations, feelings or movements mustn't be treated with kids' gloves, but rather be examined,

questioned, dialogued with, explored or discerned. How then can we describe vocational discernment?

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

DISCERNMENT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The consecrated person today is urged not to be contented with being just an apostle; her /his mission today is to actively and eloquently challenge her/his world with the combined audacity of the apostle and of the prophet of old. In a world bedevilled by the whirlwind of change, where does the mission of the consecrated person find its place?

MISSION TODAY

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

In the face of these challenges, the consecrated person has the responsibility to lead the people of God as the prophets of the day, not permitting her or himself to be swept off the ground by the whirl wind of change. The evangelical councils through which they are apostles, stand them out and firmly rooted to rise up to any challenges. Thus modeling their lives on their masters' example, they respond to the needs of the time. Convinced as the charismatic leaders they are by the Gospel values which is already their way of life, they rebuke the storm and bring calm to the troubled and uncertain soul¹.

Religion today is tending towards becoming a private affair as predicted by Weber over a century ago as cited by Bell¹, God has a fifty/fifty place in what most people do and or engage in. It is almost as though he were dead as Nietzsche claimed¹. The gospel of relativism is preached in every nook and cranny, nothing is good or bad, only thinking matters since “*God is dead*”. Man therefore tries to replace God; he is the “superman, spider man, cat woman, axe men” etc, who brings the offender to book and reward or vengeance to the just and oppressed. In the same vane, he justifies all age long anomalies contrary to moral, ethical and natural laws and values like legalisation of same sex marriage, conception outside the uterus, abortion, assisted suicide, euthanasia, harvesting of human organs, organised prostitution, sale of arms etc. In the face of such attack, the mission of the consecrated person is to stand up as the conscience of the world. Drawing strength spiritually from the community, offering her resources of spiritual and mystical dimensions deeply rooted in the human heart by the Creator; as stated in Jr. 31: 33.

It behoves the consecrated person to intensify efforts in the mission through their apostolate to teach and act godly, honestly living like open bibles in charity, respect for human life, fear of God, practical love (*agapae*), continence, all for the glory of God and for the evangelisation of his people and their eternal salvation. Sanctity is reinstated via teaching the children, the young and the innocent and this is done better by example. To this end therefore, it is imperative that the holistic education of these cadre must not be minimised. All natural, moral, societal as well as the Christian values must be inculcated through the education apostolate. The values of recognising the Supreme Being; God and the creator of the universe, prayer the means of communicating with Him, respect for God and all that He made, respect for human life, love, generosity, justice, selflessness and others must continue to be proclaimed without compromise. These Gospel values are never out modeled nor are they to be relativised nor compromised.

Though the world and its ideologies are fast changing and largely in a manner that ruins, the gospel moral values that Christ taught will never change and Christ’s (*paroussia*), the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ is real. “*He will come again in glory, to judge the living and the dead (...)*” as we pray in the Apostles’ Creed. In today’s mission, the consecrated persons must act as practical custodians of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Thus as custodians of Christian values, they have the mission to protect and to preserve the world in their milieu from destruction via corruption, violation of human life, dishonesty and all forms of vices contrary to the spirit of the Gospels bedevilling the world today. They are a reflection of the light of Christ and the salt of the earth¹ and are to influence their community, their world unobtrusively, quietly creating positive changes in every sphere of life they encounter on daily basis. The mission of religious life is to live in the world as a fundamental sign of the reign of God’s kingdom which Jesus

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Christ initiated; they have the responsibility to cooperate with Grace to bring it to fruition.

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

CONCLUSION

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

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

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

Irrespective of the fact that the consecrated life is confronted by a lot of challenges in the mission today, the changes in the world today have no

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

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

**THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY IN THE FORMATION
OF A COMMITTED CHRISTIAN IN THE SOCIETY**

Sr. Maria Regina Osondu, DMMM¹

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of a Christian family in the spiritual and social formation of a committed consecrated person. It addresses the family as central in the life of a child and the inalienable right of the child as a member of the family. The family, therefore, serves as the child's first domestic Church and micro-society. As a result, the child's family should respect and uphold the rights of the child. It also discusses the role of the family as the first Local Church and the evangelizer of the child. As primary evangelizers, parents initiate the primary growth in the spirituality of their child in words and practice. Pope Francis calls the parent-children evangelization Kerygma, "the most beautiful, most excellent, most appealing, and at the same time most necessary." Such gestures of faith in action nurture the spiritual growth of the children kindle the child's desire to embrace a higher commitment to a life of total self-giving in the service of the Lord and the Church. The call to total consecration, therefore, is an additional call to a Christian that requires total submission to the will of God through the observation and practice of the publicly or privately professed Evangelical Counsels: Obedience, Poverty, and Chastity in a stable state of life recognized by the Church. As some of the disciples of Jesus Christ withdrew when they could not embrace Christ's teaching on the Eucharist, so would a consecrated person who did not understand or accept the implications of the religious commitment question the rationality of the vows until such a person separates him or herself from the religious community. When the consecrated person decides to withdraw his/her religious obligations and returns to his or her former way of life, parents ought to respect such decision and strive to reintegrate him or her with the full rights of the member of the family and society.

INTRODUCTION

The role of the family in the formation of a committed consecrated person is dominant in God's creative work. At creation, God made them male and female and gave them the mandate to increase and multiply. When man disobeyed God his creator, God, in his infinite love and mercy wishing to restore man to his original glory of paradise, chose the human family. A committed consecrated person is likely to originate from a stable family where a man and a woman are lawfully united by the sacrament of matrimony and raise their children according to the mind of Christ. The Church and other authors teach that the family is the first Local Church and spiritual formator of the child. Through such stable families, God call and form an authentic and committed consecrated person. A consecrated person, according to the teaching of the Church, is one that hears and

answers God's call to live a stable form of life in an institution approved by the Church.

THE ROLE OF PARENTS

The parental obligation in the formation of a Christian cannot be overstated. The role of parents toward the overall development of the child begins at the child's conception. The paternal concern, love, and care commence from the moment of conception and grow with the birth of the child. Because of the cares and concerns, parents invoke God's blessings and protection of their child. They begin to have extensive dreams about the education, moral, and perhaps the spiritual development of the child. They become the child's first natural and religious and the child's first Domestic Church. As parents endeavour to understand the material and health needs of the child they trace the sign of the cross on the forehead of the infant prior¹to baptism; thus, parents claim their child for God and informally make the child a Christian. Thus, *David, M. T.* referencing Pope John Paul II and St. John Chrysostom states that the role of parents as the first evangelizers of their children is to embody the gospel love in all their daily words and actions.¹ Steven Meyer, S.T.D. refers the family as the Micro-church that is comprised of the communion of the baptized, father, mother, and the children. He also states that the family, for Chrysostom, is like the Church as the family is a communion of baptized persons living in unity under the Headship of Jesus Christ that has visible and invisible dimensions.² Two types of activities make homes as Churches, he says, prayer and the centrality of Scripture.¹ Similarly, S. J. Pope states that the practices shared in Christian households provide a necessary foundation for family members' emotional health, moral and spiritual growth, social commitment, and ecclesial identity.³

In his Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, the Holy Father Francis believes and teaches that parents should provide the initial growth in spirituality to their children. Francis encourages parents to become the first evangelizers of their household. He states in an unequivocal way the importance of the contribution of parents in the evangelical mission of Jesus Christ. Francis writes that catechizing the children by the family and in the family is paramount in the formation of Christian families. He calls family evangelization Kerygma, "the most beautiful, most excellent, most appealing, and at the same time most necessary" that the Gospel message should resound in and among families.⁴

The universal Church that has been called to cooperate with parents through pastoral initiatives to achieve the mission of educating their children is deeply joyful, grateful, and comforted when families embrace the Church's pastoral ministry and continue faithful to the Gospel teaching. The Church also encourages such families to remain steadfast in the testimony they give as Domestic Church. Families should be glad and consoled when they realize that they are partners with the Church to enter upon an ecclesial

experience of communion among persons, which reflects, through grace, the mystery of the Holy Trinity from which they learn endurance, the joy of work, fraternal love, generosity, continuous forgiveness, and divine worship in prayer.⁵ This aspect of steadfastness in the spiritual and moral education of their children bears witness to the centrality of the family in the development of a solid and authentic Christian and a consecrated person.

Meyer, Steven writes that when a family becomes the Local Church, Christ is the visible and invisible head who presides in their midst when they gather in prayer, read the scriptures, and share their meals.⁶ This is an undeniable truth because the Lord says, "where two or three are gathered in my name, I am in their midst, (Matt.18: 20).⁷ From the Micro-church germinates the child's seed of faith, love, and stability; and God could choose a person to the consecrated life as Samuel, the son of Elkanah and David, the son of Jesse, were chosen for a specific purpose. (Sam. 3: 1-11, 17: 13).⁸ *David* writes that John Paul II affirms the parental role especially during the early stages of the development of the life of the child. He states that parents symbolize God for their children and that "Within the 'people of life and the people for life,' the family has a decisive responsibility."⁹ Part of this responsibility is to nurture stable children who would become reliable and committed Christians and or Consecrated persons in the service of God and his Church or in the society.

Parental responsibility to their children as a Micro- church is not limited to reading and oral encouragement and taking them to weekly or daily masses. It requires that parents send their children to catechism classes, take them to regular Sunday Masses (and Church for people that live far from the parish Church), and receive the sacraments especially the sacrament of reconciliation. Parents are to encourage their children to join pious societies and perform spiritual and corporal works of mercy. These aspects of parental responsibilities were what I received from my parents who were poor and semi-illiterate. They did not have the money, they had the faith and the authority that helped my siblings and me to embrace the Catholic faith, and in my case, a religious.

THE FAMILY

Although the modern society had developed various units called family, such as single-parent family, family through civil union, heterogeneous, and homogeneous member-families, an original family could be defined as a group of people knitted together through the union of lawfully married male and female who bear children and live together in a household. In the African context, the family encompasses both the nuclei and distant blood relatives, (the extended family system). The natural family, therefore, is critical and the only appropriate environment for developing and nurturing of a whole person for the Church and the society. This is true as most of the parents of first candidates that received the call to the priesthood or the religious life were persons that were properly united

according to the marriage customs and tradition before the advent of Christianity in Igbo Land. Some of these parents became converts to Catholicity at or after the ordination of their child

The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace states that God plans that Adam and Eve, the first created persons should begin a family. Therefore, God gave them the authority to procreate when he commanded them to “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, (Gen 1:28).”¹⁰ Thus, in God’s plan, the family is to be “the primary place of ‘humanization’ for the person and society.” It is also the “cradle of life and love” where children learn the love and faithfulness of the Lord, and the need to respond to God’s faithfulness and love in return.¹¹ It is in the family that children learn their first and most important lessons of practical wisdom that are inter-connected with Christian virtues. Because God regards the human family at creation, Jesus was born and lived in a concrete family and accepted all its characteristic features. God conferred to man the highest dignity on the institution of marriage, making it a sacrament of the new covenant. The family, therefore, can be defined as a divinely instituted organization born of the intimate communion of life and love founded on the marriage between one man and one woman. Being a divine and human institution the family has its own specific and original social dimension of interpersonal relationships that is a primary and vital cell of society.¹²

THE CONSECRATED PERSON

A consecrated person is one who God called from a family to embrace a life whose ultimate end is to build up the Church of God through love for the salvation of souls. The Code of the Canon Law of the Catholic Church,¹³ refers to a consecrated person as one who strives to live a life of perfect charity in the service of the kingdom of God thus, serving as an outstanding sign in the Church of the heavenly glory. The consecrated life, therefore, is an additional call to a Christian that requires a complete submission to the divine will through the observation and practice of the publicly professed Evangelical Counsels: Obedience, Poverty, and Chastity in a stable state of life recognized by the Church. Through their authentic Christian life, a family participates through prayer in nurturing the spiritual growth and stability of the one taken from its midst and who has accepted this additional positive step to co-operate with the grace of God to embrace the life of holiness and total surrender to the will of God. Consecration sets a person apart. He or she is synonymous with the Igbo Land sacrificial animals offered to the gods (*Iheagorola Arusi*) the untouchables abandoned in the wilds. Thieves would not steal, nor would a poor man sell them. The animals find themselves befitting environment for their abode and progeny. The family and the community that understand this aspect of the life of a consecrated person would redesign their expectation from *Aturu ha jichuola Chineke Aja*, (the lamb they have offered to God). Realizing that he or she is a

sacrificial animal that is set apart for the glory of God, the consecrated person is to understand and uphold the dignity befitting his or her consecration.

THE HOME OF A CONSECRATED PERSON

The consecrated person belongs perpetually to the family of the universal Church, the Domestic Church, and nuclei family. Because of this trinitarian belonging, the universal Church, the Domestic Church, and the nuclei family are obliged to support candidates to and consecrated persons with supplications to God to enable them to remain faithful and bear fruitful witness to God through the Church. With prayers like this, the family becomes like the Blessed Virgin Mary who hears the prophecy of the old Simeon, meets her only son viciously tortured and carrying the heavy cross on the way to Calvary yet encourages him to accomplish his mission for the redemption of humanity, (Luke: 35).¹⁴ She does this because she is convinced that the cross of her son is for the liberation of humanity bound by the chains of godlessness. The family that understands the mission and the elevated state of their child as the building up of the kingdom of God rejoices in both the poverty and riches their child, (when the child comes home, and requests for Garry and other edibles or comes home with a loaf of bread). Such resignation to the will of God for their child is an expression of the utmost conviction that the life of consecration is beyond the glamour, pomp, and jubilation of the day of ordination to the priesthood or religious consecration. It is a life of supreme sacrifice that the poverty of the family should not destroy.

Bishop Michael Burbidge stresses the importance of the family in raising people for the consecrated life. He writes that the family should be the foundation from which seeds vocations are received, planted, and the nurtured. Although parents nurture the seed of vocation with the help of God's grace, parents might not grasp the full demands of the life of Consecration. Therefore, Burbidge reiterates the responsibility of the consecrated persons to assist parents and family members to understand the responsibilities associated with their call. A fair understanding and knowledge of being set apart for the service of God in the Church, parents and family's perspectives might change. They would consider encouraging their consecrate child to fully embrace and adhere to the obligation of the life of consecration which include obedience and docility to the will of God.¹⁵ When families understand the essence of the life of consecration as the perfection of the love of God, they have understood that they offered to God an acceptable oblation that would begin on earth to yield its benefits. Because of this deep conviction, their view of the benefits of the priestly and religious life deviates from the natural gain to spiritual benefits. Christ doubtlessly would fulfill his promise that abundant gift, pressed down, shaken together, and running over that would be poured into their laps,

(Luke 6: 38)..¹⁶If Christ guaranteed a heavenly reward for anyone who gives these little ones a glass of cold water because they belong, Christ,(Matt. 10:42; Mark 9:41).¹⁷ how much more blessings would Christ bestow on the family that offers their child to God through the Church as a perpetual victim?

A Consecrated life is, therefore, according to the Code of the Canon law of the Catholic Church, a stable form of Christian living by those faithful who are called to follow Jesus Christ in a more exacting way recognized by the Church. The Catechism of the Catholic Church also states that the consecrated life is a life consecrated to God and it is characterized by the public profession of the Evangelical Counsels of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience, in a stable state of life recognized by the Church.¹⁸Through their authentic Christian life, families participate in nurturing a person that cooperates with the grace of God to embrace the life of sanctification. Thus, the Code of the Canon Law refers to consecrated persons as people whose ultimate life- end is to build up the Church of God for the salvation of souls through striving for the perfection of charity in the service of the kingdom of God and, having been made an outstanding sign in the Church, for the heavenly glory.

The role of the development of a stable and consecrated person begins from the family - the Micro-church and the first evangelizer of the consecrated person. As the embodiment of the treasures of the Christian faith, parents, through their practical Christian life become the model for their children.¹⁹Thus, a stable family supports the spiritual journey of the child till Christ is fully formed in the child and a song of thanksgiving and praise resounds from the whole Church for the consecrated person that has become the sign of the eschatology.

THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE CONSECRATED PERSON

The light of faith, love, and stability that a family kindled which produced a consecrated person or an authentic Christian contribute to the growth of Christ's body the Church and kingdom of heaven. However, the authentic Christian- family- belief plays a little role in the eternal commitment of a consecrated person. During his earthly ministry, many became the disciple of our Lord Jesus. Discipleship was interesting, and many followed the Master. Their faith failed when the Lord Jesus preached the Eucharist. Many of his disciples withdrew because of Christ's teaching that his Flesh was real food and his Blood true drink for all who would enter the kingdom of God. The Lord turned to the twelve and asked them if they were to go. The fruit of this question is the unparalleled profession of faith that Peter made for himself and on behalf of the rest of the Apostles, "Lord to whom shall we go? You have the word of eternal life"²⁰. As many of the disciples of Jesus withdrew their discipleship due to the Lord's teaching they found difficult to accept, so do many who zealously embraced the life

of Consecration turn back when they encounter the responsibilities and obligations of consecrated life they did not comprehend. Moreover, in the modern world, the prevailing culture of materialism and hedonism conflict with religious practices. When a religious begins to experience such internal conflicts, the effect would be to start to rationalize and compromise the call to complete self-giving to the service of God and the Church. Such rationalization could result in disobedience as such religious would perform a task that his mind deems observable.

A disobedient religious is less likely to keep the other two vows, Poverty and Chastity. The Consecrated Life and its Role in the Church and the World state the difficulty to respond to the vocation to the life of Consecration is the idea of total surrender of oneself that some who felt they are called encounter. The inability to understand and make a total commitment to God and the Church prevent some people to make the fundamental and lasting commitment. What will the family do when their son or daughter had made a contrary decision? Does he or she no longer belong to the family? The child still belongs to the family and parents should embrace and reintegrate him or her into the family and society. The Compendium of the Church's Social Doctrine based on the biblical viewpoint teaches that the family is central in the life of the child and that the rights and dignity of the child as a member of the family are inalienable rights. As the first natural society of the child, the Church places the family at the center of the child's social life without compromising the rights of the child.²¹ As parents fulfill their role as the first nuclei and Local Church for and the first evangelizers of their children, the dimension of the perseverance of their consecrated child moves from their parental care. The candidate or the consecrated person becomes an adult. As an adult, his choices and decisions can no longer be questioned since his faith in and love for God no longer depend on the faith of his parents.

CONCLUSION

The role of the Christian family, therefore, is indispensable in the growth of the seed of a committed consecrated person. Parents are to view their role as the role of a Domestic Church and first evangelizers of their children through which the seed of vocation of their child to a life of consecration is propagated. They are to understand as the blessed Virgin Mary understood the vocation of Jesus and supported him to accomplish the redemption of humanity. Hannah also offered Samuel to God before Samuel heard and answered the voice of God. Similarly, God called David. All those that God called, he entrusted them with a specific mission. Parents and families are to persevere with the sacrifice they have offered to God, not letting poverty or riches distract and destroy the grace God has bestowed on them through the call of their child. Nonetheless, the perseverance of the consecrated person relies on God's will and Mercy. And the family should

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accept the will of God and reinstate their child should he or she make decision short of perseverance in a religious community.

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CONSECRATED PERSONS AND COLLABORATIVE MINISTRY

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Introduction

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

In the building of Christ’s body there is engaged a diversity of members and functions. There is only one spirit, who, according to his own riches and the needs of the ministries, gives his different gifts for the welfare of the church⁶⁸.

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

Where relations with female religious are concerned, the problem has been mainly one of a servant-master relationship. For some priests, it seems that religious should only be seen and not heard. They should wait on the priest to tell them what to and do only what they have been told⁶⁹.

With the indices of clericalism, parochialism and individualism making their appearance, it has become important to reflect on collaborative ministry in the church, and this year being the Year of Consecrated Life, this chapter would focus more on collaboration in relation to Consecrated Persons as pastoral agents with a unique and specific role to play.

Understanding Consecrated Persons

⁶⁸ Lumen Gentium, 7

⁶⁹ John Aniagwu, *Collaborative ministry in the Church*. A paper presented during the Mutual Relations between Bishops and Religious in Nigeria. 2014, 9.

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Consecrated persons are members of the Religious Institutes and Societies of Apostolic Life⁷⁰. 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 church⁷¹. 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"⁷². These counsels are referred to as evangelical because the religious vows are central to the life of Jesus and message and also because religious consecration is founded on baptismal consecration⁷³. 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 Christ⁷⁴. 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 Church⁷⁵.

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'⁷⁶. 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 superiority⁷⁷, or complete severance from those the consecrated are called to serve⁷⁸. 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"⁷⁹. The document continues, "The holiness of the Church is fostered in a special way by the observance of the

⁷⁰ Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony, *Africae Munus and Consecrated Persons*, In *The Catholic Voyage: A Publication of the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria*. Vol. 11. January 2015. P.4.

⁷¹ canon 573.2

⁷² Lumen Gentium 43

⁷³ Fleming, D. L., *Understanding a theology of Religious Life*. In G. A. Arburckle and D. L. Fleming (Eds.). *Religious Life: Rebirth through Conversion*. New York: Alba House, 1990, p. 22

⁷⁴ ⁷⁴ Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony, *Africae Munus and Consecrated Persons*, In *The Catholic Voyage: A Publication of the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria*. Vol. 11. January 2015. P.4.

⁷⁵ Mary-Sylvia Nwachukwu, *Consecrated: A Vision of Religious Life from the Point of View of the Sacred*. Lagos: Change Publications, 2010, pp. 34-35.

⁷⁶ Leviticus 15:31; Ezekiel 14:7

⁷⁷ Myers, A. C. *Holiness*. The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1987, p. 493.

⁷⁸ Myers, A. C. *Sanctify, Consecrate*. The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1987, p. 493.

⁷⁹ Lumen Gentium 44

counsels proposed in the gospel by the Lord to his disciples. An eminent position among these is held by virginity or the celibate state⁸⁰. 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 sin⁸¹ 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”⁸².

The Meaning of collaboration

Collaboration in the contention of Echema is the “coming together of two people or groups that are different, but who for a common purpose, must put aside their differences in order to achieve a common goal”⁸³. This definition presents what could be understood as a general understanding of collaboration, which also indicates its necessity in virtually every sphere of human endeavour, be it civil or ecclesiastical. In the ecclesiastical circles, it is often used with the addition of the word *ministry*, giving to birth the nomenclature: Collaborative ministry. It is employed to imply the identification, release and union of all baptized persons⁸⁴. This union is aimed at all the baptized making their contributions, in terms of gifts, towards the good of the Church. Collaborative ministry must involve the clergy, religious and the laity. Words that could describe the phenomenon of collaborative ministry include team ministry, group ministry, partnership, co-responsibility, co-discipleship, collegiality, shared ministry and mutual ministry.

The Theological foundations of Collaboration

In the Old Testament, precisely, the book of Genesis, the idea of collaboration is seen in the Trinity itself. When God wanted to create man he said: “Let us make man in our own image and likeness”⁸⁵. When human beings prided themselves in the building of the Tower of Babel, God said, “Let us go down and mix up their language so that they would not understand themselves again”⁸⁶. In the Trinity, we find the absolutely one, undivided and indivisible, although distinct, they are united in carrying out the eternal plan of God. Again, when Moses sat as judge over Israel, to avoid working himself to death, he appointed men of integrity to be in charge of tens, fifties, hundreds and thousands of people. This he did that they might be able to deal with minor cases that may

⁸⁰ Lumen Gentium 42

⁸¹ Romance 6:11

⁸² Perfectae Caritatis 5

⁸³ Austin Echema, *Priests and laity collaboration in the postmodern church*, Assumpta Press, Owerri, p. 25

⁸⁴ Loughlan Sofield and Carrol Juliano, *Collaborative ministry: Skills and guidelines*. Notre Dame: Ave Marie Press, 1987, p.11.

⁸⁵ Genesis 1:26

⁸⁶ Genesis 11:7

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not necessarily require his attention. Beyond these texts in the Old Testament, little attention has been paid to the delegation of authority and power⁸⁷.

In the New Testament, the ministry of Jesus was highly collaborative. After the twelve disciples had been with him for some time, Jesus sent them out in pairs, giving them authority over unclean spirits. Jesus empowered them with the authority to teach, heal the sick and cast out demons in his name⁸⁸. When Jesus sent out the 72 to towns that he would eventually visit, he made it clear to them that anyone who listens to them listens to him and that anyone who rejects them rejects him⁸⁹. In the Acts of the Apostles, the Apostles selected from among the people seven men who were of good reputation, filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom for the distribution of food⁹⁰. These are great examples of collaboration in the ministry from the Old and New Testaments.

In the wake of Greek neo-Platonism, the Church was seen as 'the school of truth and the fellowship of adepts'⁹¹. To Roman Stoicism, the Church is principally seen as 'a well ordered community governed by laws'. In the early Church, they were referred to as 'the people of God' or 'the Church of God'. St Paul speaks of the Church as "the fullness of Christ and of fellowship"⁹². He also speaks of the Church as "a mystery and sacrament of salvation"⁹³. The Second Vatican Council speaks of the Church variously, as 'the people of God', "Bearer of the message of salvation"⁹⁴, "Mystical Body of Christ"⁹⁵ etc. These notwithstanding, the African Synod of 1994 brought out and shared with the universal Church the richness of the African cultural concept of family when it defined the Church as the family of God. This is significant because as Cecil observes, in African culture, the family is the cradle of culture, the fundamental base of humanity and society and the sacred place where all the riches of our tradition converge⁹⁶. These images of the church emphasizes the circular or communo image of the church and de-emphasizes the pyramidal or hierarchical image of the church⁹⁷. If the church is a communion, a fellowship and a body, it can only be healthy and efficient when each part functions perfectly as interdependent dimensions.

⁸⁷ Exodus 18:13-27

⁸⁸ Mark 6:7-13

⁸⁹ Luke 10:16

⁹⁰ Acts 6:1-6

⁹¹ Kung H. (1981). *The Church*. New York: Image Books.

⁹² Ephesians 3:19

⁹³ Ephesians 3:4

⁹⁴ *Gaudium et Spes* (1965). In A. Flannery (Ed.). *Documents of the Second Vatican Council* (pp.903-1001). Dublin: Dominican.

⁹⁵ *Indulgentiarum Doctrina* (1967). In A. Flannery (Ed.). *Documents of the Second Vatican Council* (pp.62-79). Dublin: Dominican Publications.

⁹⁶ Cecil, M. (ed) (1995). *What Happened at the African Synod*, Nairobi: Pauline.

⁹⁷ John Aniagwu, *Collaborative Ministry: Priests, sisters and brothers*. Abuja: Gaudium et Spes Institute, 2001, 14.

Collaboration between Religious and the Diocesan Clergy

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

Efforts should be made to renew the bonds of fraternity and cooperation between diocesan clergy and communities of religious... Great importance should therefore be placed on all those means, even though simple and informal, which serve the increase of mutual trust, apostolic solidarity and fraternal harmony⁹⁸.

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

In order that the diocesan presbyterium express due unity and that the various ministries be better fostered, the bishop should with all solicitude exhort the diocesan priests to recognize gratefully the fruitful contribution made by religious to their church and to approve willingly their nomination to positions of greater responsibility, which are consonant with their vocation and competency⁹⁹.

During any kind of collaboration between the religious and diocesan clergy, it is necessary that due respect be given to the character and purpose of each Religious Institute and the laws of foundations¹⁰⁰, this is to help them remain faithful to the grace of their vocation¹⁰¹. However, for this to be realized, diocesan priests and the religious must learn to dialogue together for "Openness to dialogue is the Christian attitude inside the community as well as with other believers and with men and women of good will. Dialogue is to be practiced first of all within the family of the Church at all levels"¹⁰². From the teaching of *Ecclesia in Africa*, collaborative in evangelization, catechesis, policy formation and decision making in the diocese and parish, therefore, becomes a kind of dialogue. And for dialogue to bear fruit, there is need for knowledge. The diocesan priest needs to know the religious and the religious needs to understand the diocesan priest. As such, *Ecclesia in Africa* teaches that "better reciprocal knowledge will result if the theology and spirituality of consecrated life are made part of the theological preparation of diocesan priests, and if adequate attention to the theology of the particular church and to the

⁹⁸ *Mutuae Relationes*, no. 37.

⁹⁹ *Mutuae Relationes*, 38.

¹⁰⁰ Code of Canon Law, No. 680

¹⁰¹ Code of Canon Law, No. 676

¹⁰² *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 65

spirituality of the diocesan clergy is included in the formation of consecrated persons”¹⁰³.

While the diocesan clergy has a role to play in collaboration, consecrated persons “For their own part... will not fail to cooperate generously with the particular churches as much as they can and with respect for their own charism, working in full communion with the bishop”¹⁰⁴. They need to understand that they are not strangers of birds of passage in the diocese.

Collaboration among Religious Men and Women

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

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

Collaboration between Religious and the Laity

Consecrated persons cannot do everything for themselves and by themselves. Following the nature of the apostolates they engage in. The laity are indispensable agents in the missionary activity of the church, thus, the church teaches that “the church is not truly established and does not fully live, nor is it a perfect sign of Christ unless there is a genuine laity existing and working alongside the hierarchy”¹⁰⁵. Moreover, the laity constitutes the majority among the people of God with about 99% while the clergy and religious constitute

¹⁰³ *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 50

¹⁰⁴ *Vita Consacrata*, no. 49

¹⁰⁵ *Ad Gentes* No. 21

about 1%¹⁰⁶. In the various ministries of consecrated persons, ranging from schools, hospitals, houses for the care of the aged, businesses, accommodations, pastoral centers etc., if the laity are kept out of it would be isolated from the creative currents of the times. They are the link or the point of intersection between the church and the world. They are at the front line¹⁰⁷ and therefore need to have a clear consciousness of their being the Church¹⁰⁸. Without the laity, the contributions of the consecrated persons would remain in the convents and rectories without reaching the world.

Conclusion

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

¹⁰⁶ Echema, A. *Autonomy of the local churches of Africa and the question of foreign aid*. In JIT 9, 2007, 61.

¹⁰⁷ Peter Schineller, *The role of the laity in moral transformation of Nigeria*. In Lucerna 6, January-June, 1986, 12.

¹⁰⁸ Pius XII, Adress to the college of Cardinals, 20 February 1946