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## THE RELIGIOUS SUPERIOR AS THE VISIBLE SIGN OF UNITY IN THE INSTITUTE

*Rev. Sr. Mary Ijchukwu Ihembu, DMMM<sup>1</sup>*

### **Abstract**

*The religious superior is a physical person appointed or elected from other members to preside over a community or an institute. He or she represents the community/institute in legal matters, and as well governs the community according to the universal law and proper law of the institute (cf. Can. 617). He or she is also the representative of God, the father or mother of the religious family in which he or she presides. The religious superior is truly the visible sign of the unity in the community/institute. This is because he or she has it as an ultimate goal to establish unity in his or her community/institute. As the leader in the midst of others, it is his or her responsibility to*

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*see that things work out and also ensure that peace always reigns in the community/ institute. The religious superior, as the father or mother of a religious family, should accommodate every member of his or her family, embrace them with joy and love, always see them happy, know when things are not right and give correction when necessary.*

## **Introduction**

One may accept the office of the religious superior without knowing what it entails. Some think that it is an office of honour or recognition or an office of intimidation or a position to show off. Anyone who accepts this office makes him or herself a servant to others. He or she has chosen to wash the hands and feet of the subjects entrusted in his or her care, to serve and not to be served. The person is called not to waste his or her time in redundancy but called to suffer and work for the common good of the members, the community/institute and the church. Therefore, the religious superior as a representative of God, the guardian of the members is the mirror through which the members of the community or institute witness. The members look at the superior's behaviour to measure up theirs to his or her own. He or she is the visible sign of unity in the community or institute entrusted to him or her. As a result, he or she should do everything possible to keep the community/institute moving.

### *1. The Concept of the Religious Superior*

A religious superior is a person who presides over a religious community. Even though the code does not provide its definition, it does speak generally of superior(s). The term "superior" is not applied only to the

superiors of the religious institutes. In a hierarchy, or an organization of any kind, the title “superior” is situated as one at a higher rank, that is, one who has a position of authority over others. It is used to refer to those who are administrators or those who are higher in command. The 1983 Code of Canon law uses the term “superior” to refer to a number of different figures in the Church. A significant number of these usages refer to the leaders in religious institutes.

The superiors to whom the 1983 code refers are public ecclesiastical persons in the Church. They are qualified as, the Roman pontiff<sup>2</sup> or Supreme pontiff<sup>3</sup>, Supreme ecclesiastical authority<sup>4</sup>, Highest Superior<sup>5</sup>, Supreme authority<sup>6</sup>, Supreme administrator<sup>7</sup>, College of Bishops<sup>8</sup>, Synod of Bishops<sup>9</sup>, College of Cardinals<sup>10</sup>, Holy See<sup>11</sup>,

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Cann. 64; 134 § 1; 245 § 2; 279 § 1; 291; 332; 333; 334; 337 §§ 2-3; 338; 341; 342; 343; 346 §§ 1-2; 347 § 1; 348; 349; 350 §§ 1-2; 351; 352 §§ 2-3; 353 § 1; 354; 355; 356; 358; 361; 362; 363 § 1; 367; 400 § 1; 435; 436 § 1, n. 1; 437 § 1; 705; 756 § 1; 782 § 1; 967 § 1; 995; 1196; 1242; 1256; 1273; 1371, n. 1; 1405 §§ 1, 2, 3, n. 3; 1417 § 1; 1442; 1443; 1444 § 2; 1445 § 2; 1698 § 2 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Cann. 340; 350 § 5; 360; 371; 377 § 1; 381 § 1; 399 § 1; 401 § 1; 590 § 2; 591; 749 § 1; 751; 752; 1629, n. 1 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Cann. 87 § 1; 242 § 1; 339 § 2; 372 § 2; 373; 381 § 1; 431 § 3; 449 § 1; 590 § 1; 755 § 2; 823 § 2; 841; 995 § 1; 1075 §§ 1-2; 1077 § 2; 1244 § 1 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Can. 590 § 2 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Cann. 135 § 2; 339 § 2; 372 § 2; 373; 381 § 1; 431 § 3; 449 § 1; 590 § 1; 631 § 1; 755 § 2; 823 § 2; 841; 995 § 1; 1075; 1077 § 2; 1253; 1256 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Can. 1273 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Cann. 336; 337 §§ 1, 3; 339 § 1; 341 § 2 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Cann. 342; 343; 344; 345; 346; 347 § 1; 348 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Cann. 350 §§ 1, 3; 351 § 2; 352 § 1; 359 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Cann. 87 § 2; 242 § 1; 253 § 1; 312 § 1; 320 § 1; 361; 364; 403 § 3; 413 §§ 1, 3; 415; 416; 419; 420; 430 § 2; 433 § 1; 434; 508 § 1; 592 § 2; 616 § 2;



Roman curia<sup>12</sup>, Legate of the Roman Pontiff or Papal Legate<sup>13</sup>, Lawful or legitimate Superior<sup>14</sup>, Competent authority<sup>15</sup>, Competent ecclesiastical authority<sup>16</sup>, Ecclesiastical authority<sup>17</sup>, local Ordinary<sup>18</sup>, Competent Ordinary<sup>19</sup>, Ecclesiastical Superior<sup>20</sup>, Hierarchical Superior<sup>21</sup>, Competent Superior<sup>22</sup>, Parish priest<sup>23</sup>,

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638 § 3; 684 § 5; 686 §§ 1, 3; 700; 709; 791, n. 4; 838 § 3; 1047 § 4; 1120; 1232 § 1; 1292 § 2; 1439 § 1; 1444, nn. 1-2 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Cann. 19; 64; 354; 360; 1445 § 2; 1790 § 1 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Cann. 363 § 1; 364; 365; 366, n. 2; 367; 450 § 2 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Cann. 561; 601; 656, n. 5; 671; 1025 § 2; 1192 § 1 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Cann. 33 § 2; 34 § 3; 38; 47; 48; 57 §§ 1, 3; 58 § 1; 79; 80 § 1; 83 § 2; 114 § 1; 116 § 2; 117; 120 § 1; 139 § 1; 145 § 2; 149 § 2; 166 § 2; 179 §§ 1-2; 180 § 1; 182 §§ 3-4; 183 § 1; 186; 191 § 1; 192; 193 § 3; 194 § 2; 195; 221 § 2; 278 § 2; 299 § 3; 302; 320 § 3; 326 § 1; 409 § 2; 576; 580; 581; 585; 587 § 4; 636 § 2; 653 § 1; 691 § 1; 700; 733 § 1; 841; 843 § 2; 844 § 5; 846 § 1; 882; 884 § 2; 966 § 2; 978 § 2; 1080 § 1; 1124; 1161 § 1; 1292 § 1; 1296; 1298; 1457 § 1 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Cann. 114 § 3; 116 § 1; 122; 147; 216; 278 § 3; 287 § 2; 298 § 2; 300; 301 §§ 1-2; 305 § 1; 322 § 1; 325 § 1; 573 § 2; 578; 587 § 2; 784; 803 §§ 1, 3; 808; 811 § 1; 812; 827 §§ 2, 4; 1152 § 2; 1297; 1303 § 1, n. 1 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Cann. 95 § 1; 165; 199, n. 7, 223 § 2; 229 § 2; 286; 299 § 2; 301 §§ 1, 3; 315; 317 § 1; 319 § 1; 322 § 2; 323; 381 § 1; 588 § 3; 591; 774 § 1; 803 § 1; 828; 834 § 2; 982; 1153 § 2; 1167 § 2; 1187; 1368; 1370 § 3; 1373 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Cann. 88; 134 § 2; 297; 311; 324 § 2; 325 § 2; 366; 390; 527 §§ 2-3; 533 §§ 1-2; 541 § 2; 550 §§ 1-2; 559; 560; 562; 563; 565; 567 § 1; 1131, n. 2; 1132; 1144 § 2; 1145 § 1; 1147; 1148 § 3; 1153 § 1; 1168; 1172; 1183 §§ 2-3; 1184 § 2; 1196, nn. 1, 3; 1211; 1225; 1226; 1228; 1230; 1232 § 1; 1241 § 2; 1265 § 1; 1266; 1287 § 1; 1302 § 3; 1320; 1684 § 1 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Cann. 764; 1212 of the 1983.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Can. 1390 §§ 1-2 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Cann. 1736 § 2; 1737 § 1 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Cann. 520; 638 § 3; 657 § 2; 681 § 2; 682 § 1; 967 § 3; 974 §§ 1, 3, 4; 1028; 1223; 1357 §§ 1-2 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Cann. 107; 213 § 1; 262; 510 §§ 2-3; 515 § 1; 517 § 2; 519; 520 § 1; 521 §§ 1, 3; 522; 523; 525, n. 2; 526; 527 §§ 2-3; 528; 529; 530; 532; 533; 534; 535 §§ 1, 3, 4; 548; 549; 550 §§ 2-3; 554 § 1; 555 § 3; 568; 571; 757; 770; 771 § 1; 776; 777; 847 § 2; 858 § 2; 861 § 2; 867 § 1; 874, nn. 1-2; 877

Chaplains<sup>24</sup>, Rector of a Church<sup>25</sup>. The code also speaks of the various categories of superiors of the religious institutes both male and female.

This word “superior” is applied to a religious Leader without additional description<sup>26</sup>. They are qualified as supreme moderator<sup>27</sup> (referred to frequently as superior general); major superior<sup>28</sup>, competent major superior<sup>29</sup>, proper major superior<sup>30</sup>, Provincial superior<sup>31</sup>, Local superior<sup>32</sup>, Religious superior<sup>33</sup>, Abbot superior<sup>34</sup> or Local abbot<sup>35</sup>, Abbot primate<sup>36</sup>, Abbot<sup>37</sup>, Prelate<sup>38</sup>, Superior of

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§§ 1-2; 878; 883, n. 3; 890; 895; 896; 911; 914; 958; 1043; 1054; 1067; 1070; 1079; 1081; 1105 § 2; 1108 § 1; 1109; 1110; 1111 § 1; 1114; 1115; 1118 § 1; 1121; 1122 § 2; 1123; 1196, n. 1; 1245; 1307 § 2; 1706; 1741; 1742; 1743; 1744; 1745; 1746; 1747 §§ 1, 3; 1748; 1749; 1750; 1751 § 1 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Can. 564; 565; 566; 567; 568; 569; 570; 571; 572; 911 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Cann. 556; 557 §§ 1, 3; 558; 563; 764; 958 § 1 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Can. 241 § 3; 307 § 3 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Can. 592 § 1; 616 § 1; 620; 622; 624 § 1; 625 §§ 1-2; 631 § 1; 647 §§ 1-2; 668 § 4; 684 § 1; 686 §§ 1-3; 688 § 2; 690 § 1; 691 § 1; 695 § 2; 697, n. 3; 698; 699 § 1; 717 § 2; 726 § 2; 727 § 1; 743; 744 § 1; 745; 1308 § 5; 1405 § 1, n. 2; 1427 § 2; 1438, n. 3 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Cann. 134 § 1; 443 § 3, n. 2; 613 § 2; 615; 623; 636 §1, 641; 645 § 2; 647 § 3; 649 § 2; 650 § 2; 653 § 2; 665 § 1; 672; 679; 684 § 3; 689 § 1; 694 § 2; 695 § 2; 697; 703; 708; 832; 967 § 3; 1019 § 1; 1025 § 1; 1029, 1030; 1032 § 2; 1036; 1038; 1051, n. 2, 1054; 1302 § 2 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Can. 625 § 3; 1025 § 1; 1029; 1032 § 2; 1036; 1038; 1054 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Can. 672; 678 § 2 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Cann. 1427 § 1; 1438, n. 3 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Can. 636 § 1; 703 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Can. 639 § 5; 678 § 3; 681 § 1; 682 § 2; 683 § 2; 778; 833, n. 3; 968 § 2 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Cann. 370; 620; 1405 § 3, n. 2; 1427 § 2; 1438, n. 3 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Can. 1427 § 1; 1438, n. 3 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Cann. 620; 1405 § 3, n. 2 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Can. 370 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Cann. 295; 353 § 4; 370 of the CIC-1983.

the religious institute<sup>39</sup>, Superior of the autonomous monastery<sup>40</sup>, Superior of the monastic Congregation<sup>41</sup>, Community superior<sup>42</sup>, and Vicar general<sup>43</sup>.

A superior is a competent ecclesiastical authority<sup>44</sup> over a specific community or communities of the faithful, represents the community in legal matters, and governs the community according to the norms of universal and particular or proper laws<sup>45</sup>. The Pope is the supreme superior of the universal Church. In other words, he is the first superior towards whom the vow or another bond of obedience is obliged<sup>46</sup>. He has supreme, full, immediate, and universal ordinary power in the Church which he can freely exercise always<sup>47</sup>. All the Christian faithful are subject to him. All the religious, both the members and the superiors of the pontifical or diocesan right are also subject to him as their ecclesiastical superior in a special way through their bond of obedience, for instance, the

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. Cann. 134 § 3; 317 § 2; 463 § 1, n. 9; 520 § 2; 681 § 2; 819; 969 § 2; 1196, n. 2 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Cann. 625 § 2; 690 § 2 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Cann. 620; 1427 § 2 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Can. 911 § 1 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Cann. 65 §§2-3; 134 §§ 1, 3; 417; 462 § 2; 463 § 1, n. 2; 473 §§ 2-3; 475; 476; 477; 478; 479; 480; 481 § 2; 1420 § 1 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Cann. 114 § 3; 116 § 1; 122; 147; 216; 278 § 3; 287 § 2; 298 § 2; 300; 301 §§ 1-2; 305 § 1; 322 § 1; 325 § 1; 573 § 2; 578; 587 § 2; 784; 803 §§ 1, 3; 808; 811 § 1; 812; 827 §§ 2, 4; 1152 § 2; 1297; 1303 § 1, n. 1 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Can. 617 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Can. 590 § 2 of the CIC-1983; D.J. ANDRÉS, *Los Superiores Religioso de los Religioso según el Código*, Madrid 1985: «Todos y cada uno de los religiosos están obligados a obedecer al Sumo Pontífice, incluso en virtud del voto profesado de obediencia, pues es su primero y más alto Superior», p. 22; E. GAMBARI, *I Religiosi nel Codice – Commento ai singoli Canonici*, Milano 1986, p. 67.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Can. 331 of the CIC-1983.

Jesuit make their vow of obedience directly to the Pontiff. The Pope can command members of institutes of Consecrated life, and Societies of Apostolic life to do something within the context of their proper law<sup>48</sup>.

The superior who himself or herself is a member of the community, is given charge of the common good of a particular community by a higher authority. Ultimately, this authority is derived from Christ's<sup>49</sup>, and it is for service. In the strict sense of the word, the superior is a religious, that is to say a physical person<sup>50</sup>, who by virtue of his or her office, is constituted in a stable manner<sup>51</sup> either by appointment or election<sup>52</sup> to govern an institute. He or she exercises ordinary religious power, either proper or vicarious, which comes from God through the ministry of the Church<sup>53</sup>.

The religious superior exercises the power within the institute in accord with the norms of universal and proper

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. D.J. ANDRÉS, *Los Superiores Religiosos segun el Codice*, p. 22; F. D'OSTILIO, *L'esercizio della Sacra Potestas negli Istituti Religiosi*, Città del Vaticano 2000, p. 21; Can. 499 § 1 of the 1917 code as well commends that, «All religious, as to a supreme Superior, are subject to the Roman Pontiff, whom they are bound to obey even in virtue of the vow of obedience»; Pio PP. XII, *Motu proprio: Postquam Apostolicis: CICO e Religiosi*; Can. 23, in *Enchiridion della Vita Consacrata*, Bologna 2001, p. 1321.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. B. COLE – P. CONNER, *Christian Totality: Theology of the Consecrated Life*, New York 1997, p. 273.

<sup>50</sup> D. J. ANDRÉS, *Il Diritto dei Religiosi: Commento al Codice*, Roma 1994, p. 81; D. J. ANDRÉS, *Le Forme di Vita Consacrata: Commentario Teologico – Giuridico al Codice di Diritto Canonico*, 4 ed., Roma 2005, p. 138; ; D. J. ANDRÉS, *Il Diritto dei Religiosi: Commento Esetetico al Codice*, 2 ed., Roma 1996, p. 100; D. J. ANDRÉS, *Le Forme di Vita Consacrata: Commentario Teologico – Giuridico al Codice di Diritto Canonico*, 6 ed., Roma 2008, p. 138; J.F. CASTAÑO, *Gli Istituti di Vita Consacrata (cann. 573-730)*, Roma 1995, p. 151.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Can. 145 § 1 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Cann. 145 § 1; 625-626 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Can. 131 of the CIC-1983.

law<sup>54</sup>. He or she has the primacy in the internal hierarchy. That is to say, the religious superior is one who governs at least a canonically erected house. He or she is the leader of a religious institute in the Roman Catholic Church. He or she is the first servant of the community, promoter of the human and spiritual union of the members who compose the visible unity of intent and of the fraternity<sup>55</sup>. A religious superior is not only the leader, but also the father or mother of the religious institute or community entrusted to his or her care. Thus he or she should do his or her best to see that the members in his or her care bear good fruit, fruit that will last.

The code also recognizes as religious superiors the Vicars of the institute. They are those religious who exercise a vicarious ordinary power<sup>56</sup>, but only when they substitute the relevant superior, that is to say, major superior, if he or she is absent or impeded<sup>57</sup>. In accord with the description of the religious superior stated above,

The religious superior is not only viewed as the physical person who governs the institute or community but also as the *vices Dei gerentes*, that is, the representative of God<sup>58</sup>. He or she holds the place of God, in particular when he or she commands in accordance

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<sup>54</sup> Can. 617 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>55</sup> «Il superiore è il primo servitore della comunità, promotore dell'unione umana e spirituale dei membri che la compongono, punto di riferimento visibile dell'unità di intenti e della fraternità». See J. ROVIRA, *Consigli Evangelici e Vita Religiosas*, Roma 1992-1993, p. 141.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Can. 131 § 2 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Can. 620 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. PAUL PP. VI, *Decretum de Accommodata Renovatione Vitae Religiosae: Perfectae Caritatis*, 28 October, 1965, in AAS, LVIII (1966), 702-712, n. 14; Can. 601 of the CIC-1983.

with the norms of the institute<sup>59</sup>. The religious superior is qualified as God's representative, because he or she is the concrete bearer of a legitimate and divinely willed administrative competence in a society which itself may be regarded as God's will. The religious superior does not command according to his or her own wishes and criteria, rather as a faithful interpreter of the charismatic project of his or her own religious family. He or she can command only in the name of God and in virtue of the powers conferred on him or her. The members, for their own part, are bound to obey the religious superior of the community or the institute only for love of God, and not for motive of human advantage or convenience<sup>60</sup>.

To be authentically such, the religious superior must be in a constant attitude of listening to the Word of God, and that of the subjects in his or her care. The teaching document of the Church *Perfectae Caritatis* prescribes, «Religious under the motion of the Holy Spirit are to subject themselves in faith to their superiors who hold the place of God»<sup>61</sup>. Religious superiors are qualified as such, in that they are the ones who receive the surrender and submission of the religious in the name of Christ and also respond to it in that same name by accepting the office<sup>62</sup>. Amongst the names listed above, members of the

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<sup>59</sup> Can. 601 of the 1983 code views the religious superiors as those who stand in the place of God when they command according to the proper constitutions; therefore those subjects to them in a spirit of faith and love should submit to their superiors.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. L. BOUSCAREN – J.J. O'CONNOR, *The Canon Law Digest*, New York 1963, p. 351.

<sup>61</sup> PAUL PP. VI, *Decretum de Accommodata Renovatione Vitae Religiosae: Perfectae Caritatis*, in AAS, LVIII (1966), 702-712, n. 14.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. E. McDONOUGH, *Religious in the 1983 Code: New Approaches to the New Law*, Chicago 1984, p. 64.

religious institutes both male and female use different names in designating their own superior, such as, Moderator, Superior, Rector, Minister, and Guardian; but the code uses only the term “Superior and Moderator”<sup>63</sup>.

Antonio Calabrese divides religious superior into «major superior and minor superior»<sup>64</sup>, while James A. Coriden categorizes superiors into two levels: «provincials and supreme moderator»<sup>65</sup>. Both are called “major superiors”<sup>66</sup>. Francesco D’Ostilio, enunciates two principle categories of the religious superior as: a) Major superiors and minor superiors, b) Collegial superiors and Personal superiors<sup>67</sup>.

Major superiors and minor superiors, according to Francesco D’Ostilio, are all supreme superiors of the centralized institute of Consecrated life<sup>68</sup>. They are qualified as the Abbot primate of the Benedictine monastic federation Congregation, Abbot of the single Benedictine Congregation, Provincial superiors and those who do not have the same name, but have the same powers as ordinary, such as the superior of the general

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<sup>63</sup> Cf. A. CALABRESE, *Istituti di Vita Consacrata e Società di Vita Apostolica*, 2 ed., Città del Vaticano 1997, p. 97; A. CALABRESE, *Istituti di Vita Consacrata e Società di Vita Apostolica*, 3 ed., Città del Vaticana 2010, p. 97.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. A. CALABRESE, *Istituti di Vita Consacrata e Società di Vita Apostolica*, 2010, p. 97; See also T. RINCÓN, *Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life*, Commentary on Can. 620-622 in E. CAPARROS, M. THÉRIAULT, J. THORN., eds., *Code of Canon Law Annotated*, Canada 1993, p. 432; T. RINCÓN, *Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life*, Commentary on Can. 620-622 in E. CAPARROS, M. THÉRIAULT, J. THORN., eds., *Code of Canon Law Annotated*, 2 ed., Canada 2004, p. 432.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. J.A. CORIDEN, *Introduction to Canon Law*, New York 1991, p.102.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. J.A. CORIDEN, *Introduction to Canon Law*, p. 102.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. F. D’OSTILIO, *L’esercizio della Sacra Potestas negli Istituti Religiosi*, pp. 76-77.

<sup>68</sup> F. D’OSTILIO, *L’esercizio della Sacra Potestas*, p. 76.

guardian and provincial, Vicars of all these people who have ordinary power, that is, the Vicar general and Provincial vicars, and Abbots of the monastery *sui iuris*<sup>69</sup>. He also states that those who do not have continuous and permanent office are not major superiors, for instance, visitors, delegates to make a canonical visit<sup>70</sup>.

Elio Gambari classifies superiors into three grades: General (also called supreme moderator), provincial superior and local superior<sup>71</sup>. José Castaño categorizes religious superior based on two reasons; first, by reason of extension, second, by reason of qualification<sup>72</sup>. According to Castaño, by reason of extension, the religious superior is local, provincial, and general superior (Supreme moderator) and by reason of qualification, some religious superiors are qualified as Major superiors of the institutes, who preside over the entire institute or a province or its equivalent or a *domus sui iuris*<sup>73</sup>. The code itself designates religious superior in three levels as

- a) Supreme moderator referred often as Superior general,
- b) Provincial superior and its equivalent
- c) Local superior<sup>74</sup>.

#### a) *The Supreme Moderator*

The term “Supreme moderator” is used to designate the superior general<sup>75</sup> of the religious institute. He or she is

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<sup>69</sup> F. D’OSTILIO, *L’esercizio della Sacra Potestas*, pp. 76-77.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. F. D’OSTILIO, *L’esercizio della Sacra Potestà*, p. 77.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. E. GAMBARI, *Vita Religiosa Oggi Secondo il Concilio e il Nuovo Diritto Canonico*, Roma 1983, p. 559.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. J.F. CASTAÑO, *Gli Istituti di Vita Consacrata*, p. 151.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. J.F. CASTAÑO, *Gli Istituti di Vita Consacrata*, pp.151-152.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Cann. 621-622 of the CIC-1983.



called supreme, not because he or she does not have any one above him or her, but because he or she occupies the summit of both the internal and personal hierarchy of the religious institute. The expression “moderator” is used to refer to someone who rules or measures: the ruler, director, conductor or referee, pilot, driver or judge, president, teacher, and guide<sup>76</sup>. Thus, the supreme moderator is the highest superior of an institute. He or she has authority over the entire institute, all provinces, and equivalent subdivisions of the provinces, all houses, and all members of an institute<sup>77</sup>. He or she obtains this power when it is conferred on him or her by law<sup>78</sup>. For that reason, the supreme moderate has to exercise his or her authority according to the universal law and the proper law of the institute<sup>79</sup>, and in spirit of the Gospel<sup>80</sup>.

Most religious institutes use different names in designating their supreme moderator. Some prefer to call the person who holds such an office a “President” or “Superior general”<sup>81</sup>. Some institutes identify the supreme moderator with a title incorporating the institute’s spirit

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<sup>75</sup> Canon 418 § 1 of the Eastern code uses the term “superior” for one who governs a monastery and “superior general” for one who governs an order or congregation.

<sup>76</sup> D.J. ANDRÉS, *Il Diritto dei Religiosi*, p. 100; D.J. ANDRÉS, *Il Diritto dei Religiosi*, p. 121; D.J. ANDRÉS, *Le Forme di Vita Consacrata*, 4 ed., p. 162 ; D.J. ANDRÉS, *Le Forme di Vita Consacrata*, 6 ed., p. 162.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Can. 622 of the CIC-1983; Also Can. 502 of the 1917 code prescribes the supreme Moderator of a religious institute as one who obtains power over all provinces, house, [and] members of the religious [institute], exercising this according to the constitutions.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Can. 596; 620; 622 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Can. 622 of the CIC-1983; Also Can. 502 of the CIC-1917.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Can. 618 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. BENEDICTUS PP. XVI, *Annuario Pontificio per L'anno 2010*, Città del Vaticano 2010, pp. 1437-1491; 1495-1693.

or tradition. For instance, the Franciscan Order refers the person who holds the office of the supreme moderator as “Minister General”<sup>82</sup>, the Benedictine Order identifies such a person as «Abbot primate or Prior general»<sup>83</sup>, the Dominican Order uses the term “Master general”<sup>84</sup>. The order of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) designates their supreme moderator as “*Praepositus Generalis*”, meaning Provost general<sup>85</sup>, which is identified as “Father general” or “General”, who is elected for life or until he resigns<sup>86</sup>. The Congregation of the Daughters of Mary Mother of Mercy uses the term Superior General.<sup>87</sup> The fact that the supreme moderator obtains power over the entire institute does not mean that he or she has every power to do whatever he or she wants or exercises the power or authority as she/he believes. Can. 622 of the current *Code of Canon Law* commends that the supreme moderator of the religious institute has to exercise the power obtained in accordance with the institute’s own law<sup>88</sup>.

Moreover, the supreme moderator cannot govern alone, but with the assistance of a council. The supreme moderator of the religious institute, in carrying out his or her responsibilities, must obey the Church that approved

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<sup>82</sup> Cf. BENEDICTUS PP. XVI, *Annuario Pontificio per L’anno 2010*, pp. 1434-1435.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. BENEDICTUS PP. XVI, *Annuario Pontificio per L’anno 2010*, pp. 1424-1433; Cf. BENEDICTUS PP. XVI, *Annuario Pontificio per L’anno 2011*, Città del Vaticano 2011, pp. 1420-1429.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. BENEDICTUS PP. XVI, *Annuario Pontificio per L’anno 2010*, pp. 1434-1438; Cf. BENEDICTUS PP. XVI, *Annuario Pontificio per L’anno 2011*, pp. 1430-1434.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. BENEDICTUS PP. XVI, *Annuario Pontificio*, p. 1434.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. BENEDICTUS PP. XVI, *Annuario Pontificio*, p. 1434.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. *Constitutions of the Daughters of Mary Mother of Mercy*, Rome 1994, p. 72.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Cann. 617; 622 of the CIC-1983.

the special law of the institute. He or she is to obey the Supreme Pontiff who is the highest superior over all the religious<sup>89</sup>. This is applicable to provincial, regional, and local superiors including the members of the religious institute. Pope Paul VI in his ecclesial pronouncement to all religious on May 23, 1964 declares that the members of the religious institutes are, at all times and in all places, subject principally to the Roman Pontiff, as to their highest Superior. For this reason, the religious institutes are at the service of the Roman Pontiff in those works which pertain to the welfare of the universal Church.

With regard to the exercise of the sacred apostolate in various dioceses, religious are also under the jurisdiction of Bishops (cf. Can. 681 § 1), to whom they are bound to give assistance, always without prejudice to the nature of their proper apostolate and the things that are necessary for their religious life. The Supreme moderator must not only obey the supreme pontiff but as well be obedient to the General chapter who updates and supplements the statutory norms on religious life and the apostolic activities.

#### b) *The Provincial Superior*

The provincial superior is the major superior of the religious institute who acts under the superior general or supreme moderator of the religious institute. He or she is an individual physical person who holds power of governance by reason of his or her office<sup>90</sup>. He or she

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<sup>89</sup> Cf. Can. 590 of the CIC-1983; Also Can. 412 § 1 of the Eastern code ascertains that all religious are subject to the Roman Pontiff as their highest superior, whom they are also bound by the obligation to obey by virtue of the vow of obedience.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Can. 131 § 1 of the 1983.

exercises power over all the members of that part of the institute in a territorial division of the order called a province of an institute or a part equivalent to a province<sup>91</sup>. The provincial superior is elected by the provincial chapter. The election is confirmed by the supreme moderator of the institute, depending on the regulations of the particular groups. The provincial superior, as the major superior, exercises ordinary proper power of governance<sup>92</sup>, as it is attached to an autonomous office. He or she exercises authority over all the province, houses and members of a province or its equivalent in accordance with the universal and proper law of the institute<sup>93</sup>.

According to De Paolis, the scope of the provincial superior's power is that of the office constituted by the universal law than the proper law<sup>94</sup>. The provincial superior cannot be private in exercising his or her power, which is attached to the same office, except in the cases and according to the manner provided by the same juridical order<sup>95</sup>. Accordingly, the provincial superior of the clerical religious institute of pontifical right is considered in law as Ordinary<sup>96</sup>. He governs the part of the institute which is a province entrusted to him with the assistance of the councils. Thus, the religious who obtains the office of the provincial superior must be in communion with the supreme moderator, who is the

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<sup>91</sup> Cf. Can. 620 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. Can. 131 §§ 1-2 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Can. 617 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>94</sup> V. DE PAOLIS, *La Vita Consacrata nella Chiesa*, Bologna 1991; V. DE PAOLIS, *La Vita Consacrata nella Chiesa*, Venezia 2010; V. DE PAOLIS, *La Vita Consacrata nella Chiesa*, Venezia 2011, p. 348.

<sup>95</sup> V. DE PAOLIS, *La Vita Consacrata nella Chiesa*, p. 348.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Can. 134 § 1 of the CIC-1983.

highest Superior of the institute, and who holds authority over all the provinces, houses and members of the institute. The office of the provincial superior is not for life; rather it has a definite term of office. Both the provincial superior, provincial vicar, commissioner, guardian bear the name which corresponds to that body which they preside<sup>97</sup>.

c) *The Local Superior*

This is one who governs a house or community of an institute<sup>98</sup>. The local superior is the key projector of an institute. He or she is subject to the major superior (supreme moderator or provincial superior) or the regional superior of an institute. The local superior is appointed by the competent authority of the institute, or that of the province; specifically, the provincial superior or supreme moderator, with the consent of his or her council.

The local superior moreover, cannot be seen as only the delegate of the supreme moderator, but also qualified as the major superiors<sup>99</sup>. The local superiors who are considered as the major superiors are those of the autonomous or *sui iuris* houses<sup>100</sup>. The authority of the local superior is determined by the universal law and proper law of the institute (cf. Can. 617). To be precise, the local superior of a community holds ordinary and proper power of governance<sup>101</sup>. The nature of the office of the local superior requests at least the authority

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<sup>97</sup> A. CALABRESE, *Istituti di Vita Consacrata e Società di Vita Apostolica*, p. 97.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Can. 608; 636 § 1; 703 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. G. ESCUDERO, *Il Capitolo Speciale*, Roma 1968, p. 127.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. Can. 620 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>101</sup> Cf. G. ESCUDERO, *Il Capitolo Speciale*, p. 127.

necessary for the government of a house entrusted to his or her care and the members<sup>102</sup>.

## 2. *The Authority of the Religious Superior*

Authority in religious institutes is a necessary instrument to achieve its purpose. The religious superior within a religious institute has a well-defined authority. This authority is common to the entire institute; and is guided by the universal law and the proper law of the institute as affirmed by canon 617 of the 1983 code<sup>103</sup>. It does not come from any human person, or from the structure through which the religious superior was elected. It neither comes also from those that elected the religious superior nor from the members. There is one authority in the Church, and it is the power of Christ poured forth on the Church by the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Church's authority is received from God and it is transmitted through the Church as ordained by Christ the Head.

In the religious institutes of consecrated life, the authority exercised by the religious superior also comes from God, through the Church's Hierarchy (cf. Can. 618)<sup>104</sup>, when the institute is recognized and its constitutions approved<sup>105</sup>. This stresses that religious

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<sup>102</sup> Cf. J.F. GALLEN, *Canon Law for Religious: An explanation*, New York 1983, p. 56.

<sup>103</sup> Superiors are to fulfill their office and exercise their power in accordance with the norms of the universal law and of their proper law (Cf. Can. 617); See also Cf. Cann. 501 § 1; 502 of the CIC-1917.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. V. DE PAOLIS, *La Vita Consacrata nella Chiesa*, p. 337; V. DE PAOLIS, *La Potestà di Governo della Chiesa. Gli Uffici Ecclesiastici*, in AA. VV., *I Religiosi e il Nuovo Codice di Diritto Canonico*, pp. 31-63; P. MARCUZZI, *Natura della Potestà degli Istituti di Vita Consacrata*, in AA. VV., *Lo Stato Giuridico dei Consacrati*, pp. 103-118.

<sup>105</sup> Cf. Can. 618 of the CIC-1983; V. DE PAOLIS, *La Vita Consacrata nella Chiesa*, p. 337; A. CALABRESE, *Istituti di Vita Consacrata e Società di Vita*

superiors receive their authority from God through the ministry of the Church<sup>106</sup>. This expression demonstrates that the right which the religious superiors have in exercising their authority within the institute does not have its source in the profession of obedience, or another profession of the evangelical counsels, but from the Church which has canonically erected the institute. All religious authority ultimately comes from God and is exercised in faith in God's name<sup>107</sup>. In other words, it is divine and supernatural. Thus, it must be exercised in a spirit of service, of faith and humility<sup>108</sup>. Likewise, the members of the institute ought to submit their own will to the religious superior with the same spirit of faith. In doing so they should be aware that it is not the superior that they are obeying but God Himself whom the superior represents<sup>109</sup>. This entails that the obligation of obedience rises from the divine representation especially when the religious superior gives command in accordance with the norms of the institute (cf. Can. 601).

Furthermore, the authority of the religious superior intensifies from the double sources, first, in accordance with the norm of the universal and, second, that of the proper law of the institute<sup>110</sup>. The formula "in accordance with the norm", in relation to the law that direct the religious life and that of the individual institute indicate

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Apostolica, p. 98; D. J. ANDRÉS, *The Governance of Institutes*, in Á. MARZOA – J. MIRAS – R. RODRÍGUEZ-OCAÑA, eds., *Exegetical Commentary on the Code of Canon Law* vol. II/2, Canada, 2004, p. 1621.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. Can. 618 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. J.I. O'CONNOR, *The Canon Law Digest*, p. 416.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. F. OSTILIO, *L'esercizio della Sacra Potestà*, p. 91.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. Can. 610 of the CIC-1983; F. OSTILIO, *L'esercizio della Sacra Potestas*, p. 91; D. J. ANDRÉS, *Il Diritto dei Religiosi*, p. 47.

<sup>110</sup> E. GAMBARI, *I Religiosi nel Codice*, p. 142.

that religious superior must deduce their function and their authority from the universal law of the church<sup>111</sup>, through the ministry from which that authority is received<sup>112</sup> and the proper law.

This authority of the religious superior can also be proper or vicarious of power of jurisdiction. It can also be “papal”<sup>113</sup>, “ordinary, and vicarious”<sup>114</sup>. It is said to be “papal”, in that, it is part of the Pope’s power, without any intermediary. It is “ordinary” because, it is joined to a certain office by the law itself<sup>115</sup>. It is “vicarious” for the reason that, it is exercised in the Pope’s name, who is the supreme superior of the religious institutes of consecrated life<sup>116</sup>. The religious superior will not act alone; but acts in function of an authority conferred by the Holy Spirit through the proper channels of every religious institute or Congregation such as, General chapter, Council, provincial chapter, norms and Constitutions of the institute. The authority exercised by the religious superior is limited, in the sense that the religious superior cannot handle matters reserved to the highest superiors, for instance, Supreme Pontiff, Holy See, diocesan bishops, conference of bishops, general, provincial or local chapters, a superior of higher level in the institute; or which require a deliberative or consultative vote of the council. The reason is that, in the

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<sup>111</sup> E. GAMBARI, *I Religiosi nel Codice*, p. 142.

<sup>112</sup> Cf. Can. 618 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>113</sup> F. OSTILIO, *L’esercizio della Sacra Potestas*, p. 91.

<sup>114</sup> F. OSTILIO, *L’esercizio della Sacra Potestas*, p. 91; A. CALABRESE, *Istituti di Vita Consacrata e Società di Vita Apostolica*, p. 96.

<sup>115</sup> Cf. Can. 131 § 1 of the CIC-1983; F. OSTILIO, *L’esercizio della Sacra Potestas*, p. 91; A. CALABRESE, *Istituti di Vita Consacrata e Società di Vita Apostolica*, p. 63.

<sup>116</sup> F. OSTILIO, *L’esercizio della Sacra Potestas*, p. 91.



Religious institutes, there are two-fold hierarchies or authorities that see to the governance of every institute namely, external and internal authorities.

### *2.1. The Exercise of Authority as Service*

This indicates an interior attitude and spiritual part of the one who holds authority and who often conveys it in outward corresponding attitudes and behaviours. Authority exercised by the religious superior is derived directly from God through the ministry of the Church. It is not an honour or dignity but a service<sup>117</sup> (cf. Can. 618); which the religious superior within a religious institute must lend to the community. The notion of service includes all the ministerial activities of the Church and that of the religious superior. The proper service of one who possesses authority is used for the good of the brothers or sisters and of the community. Every authority is from God and not from man.

The spirit of service with which authority must be exercised has its origin in the gospel (cf. Lk. 22:27).<sup>118</sup> The authority given to the Apostle Paul was given to build up the Christian community and its members (cf. 2 Cor 10: 8, 10, 13). The same is also applicable to the religious superior of a community. The authority which the religious superior possessed by virtue of his or her office proceeds from God, so he/she shares in the authority of Christ, who came to teach, sanctify and govern. He or she is to exercise this authority as one who has Christ as model and in accordance with its purpose<sup>119</sup>. This is

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<sup>117</sup> G. ESCUDERO, *Il Capitolo Speciale*, p. 68.

<sup>118</sup> This reflect the humility and self-giving of the Divine Master.

<sup>119</sup> Cf. Cann. 617-640; 732; 734 of the CIC-1983.

because the religious institute is in the Church as a living cell and is also closely connected with the life of the Church (cf. Lk 43)<sup>120</sup>. A religious superior extends this authority to each individual member of the institutes and to the community as a whole and all its apostolate. This authority enable him or her to look to the spiritual development, apostolic fruitfulness, fulfilment of the community's mission and providing of all helps needed in the institute/community. The religious superior is expected to be docile to the will of God in fulfilling his or her authority and functions. He or she is also to govern his or her subjects as sons and daughters of God and to promote the voluntary obedience of their subjects with reverence for the human person. The religious superior is to listen to them willingly, always be open to the insights and opinions of the members, foster and promote their common endeavour for the good of the members, the institute, and the Church. He or she is to encourage the members to a closer following of Christ, and to have zeal for the apostolate with love and fidelity, and respect them as persons (a person is a being with dignity).

In exercising this authority he or she must do so in conformity with the nature, purpose, spirit, character of the institute and its patrimony<sup>121</sup>. The superiors' authority corresponds to the responsibility of their office and must be exercised not in accordance with their own initiatives or preferences but according to the law. Canon 617 states that superiors are to fulfill their office and exercise their authority in accordance with the universal

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<sup>120</sup> Cf. J. BEYER, *Chiarimenti Sull'ufficio dei Superiori nell'Istituto Religioso in Vita Consacrata*, 16 (1980), 394; PC n. 14.

<sup>121</sup> Cf. Can. 578 of the CIC-1983.

law and their own particular laws. This is because, it is through the law that their authority is conferred (Mt. 20: 24-28; Mk. 10: 43-45). Sometimes superiors are unwilling and are afraid to implement what the laws of the institute stated; sometimes they are the ones to criticize when applied; instead of helping in preserving the whole and entire patrimony of the institute. According to *Mutuae relationes* «Religious superiors have a grave duty; their foremost responsibility in fact, is to assure the fidelity of the members to the charism of the Founder»<sup>122</sup>. What is this charism all about? The charism according to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council is «the spirit and aims of each founder»<sup>123</sup> which should be faithfully accepted and retained. The charism of the founder is contained in the proper law of the institute, especially in the Constitutions<sup>124</sup>, which has been approved by the competent ecclesiastical authority<sup>125</sup>.

### 3. *The Religious Superior as the Promoter of Love*

The religious superior who has our Lord Jesus Christ as his or her model is to execute the office entrusted to him or her in a spirit of love and at the same time endorse this love in the community/institute. This is because his or her office of service is the manifestation of love. Our Lord Jesus Christ first demonstrated this act of love to his disciples; and before He bestowed His authority to Simon Peter He asked him three times “Do you love me? With Peter’s positive response He granted him (Peter) the supreme authority to «tend His sheep and to feed His

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<sup>122</sup> MR n. 14c.

<sup>123</sup> PC n. 2b.

<sup>124</sup> Cf. Can. 587 § 1 of the CIC-1983.

<sup>125</sup> Cf. Can. 587 § 2 of the CIC-1983.

flock»” (cf. Jn 21:15-17). Superiorship is not a mistake but a vocation. Since one is called to feed the flock in his or her care, the person is expected to carry it out with love and joy. The religious superior is not to discriminate but has to consider everyone in the community/institute as his or her child, as members of the same family and should love every member equally. He or she is not to engage in any particular friendship to any of the members. If a superior notice an abnormal friendship among the members, he or she should not hesitate in correcting them in a fatherly or motherly tone. A superior is not to be afraid of anything the members will say about him or her; the members will criticize, stone and give the superior a bad name, but the superior needs not to be afraid because the person he/she represents is always with him/her (especially when he/she seeks Him in personal and communal prayers). When a superior carries out the duties given to him or her properly, no harm will befall him or her; in that God is with him or her always to the end of his or her mandate (cf. Mt. 28: 20). The superior should not be the one to discriminate, neglect, despise any member or divide the community/institute as such acts can damage the good of the community or institute. With patience, humility and gentleness, the superior has to support the subject with love (cf. Eph 4: 2). He or she is not to be partial in rendering judgment. He or she should know the whereabouts of the brethren and also observe changes in a member’s character. If a superior observes negative changes in a member’s behaviour he or she has to call the attention of the person and try to find out what is disturbing him or her. Unfortunately, some superiors will be in a community or an institute without noticing some

members of the same community or speaking to them. The superior's mission is to reveal, manifest, express and translate in an intelligent and intelligible form, the love through which God loves His people. He or she is to be a sacramental, visible and efficacious sign of the same love of God. Saint Paul, in his letter to the Romans says, «Love is the fulfilment of the law since, it cannot cause any harm to its neighbour», he also enjoins us to, “bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfil the law of Christ”» (cf. Rom 13:8, 10). What does the law of Christ mean if not charity! The superiors fulfil the law of Christ when they, for the principle of love, bear the burdens of their members. Love accepts, forgives and assists each other. The superior's constant preoccupation is to maintain among his or her brethren a family union and spirit, and that sweet charity will cause the members of a community to be of one heart and mind.

### *3.1. The Religious Superior as the Advocate of Peace and Unity*

Two of the basic qualities that help in the building of a community or an institute and enhance the personal growth of its members are peace and unity. In a community/institute where peace and unity are lacking, such institute will deteriorate, instead of prospering. The superiors at all level have a great responsibility concerning this aspect. They are the centre of peace and unity in the community/institute where they belong. They are to live, create and foster peaceful atmosphere among the members. This is tricky but it is an essential task of every religious superior. No superior should run away from this responsibility. Even though there will be forces, but He or she shall do everything possible to see that

peace and unity reign in the religious family where he/she is the head. He or she has to take every care to preserve the unity which the spirit gives (Cf. Eph 4: 3). The superior should not be the one to disrupt the peace and unity that exist in the community/institute. Peace and unity give life to the community, the members and the institute at large. Where these two exist there will be no ambiguity and no obsession with fault finding. In order to achieve this goal of peace in the community/institute, the superior ought to make peace within himself/herself by admitting his or her flaws and worth. Acquiring peace within oneself helps one to be able to create peace and unity in the community/institute.

The religious superior's countenance should always be tranquil and jovial, he/she should have a friendly tone, a kind speech and not to show ill-humour or excessive passion. In a community where the religious superior does not live the life or show good personal examples of life he or she professed, how then would the behaviour of those entrusted to his or her care be? This calls to mind the qualities required for the designation of the superior of a religious community/institute. Superiors are to be examples to the members in cultivating virtue (cf. Can. 619). The superior is not to indulge in anger or always scolding the members. The superior should control his or her temper at all time and not to bear grudges. A scolding religious superior loses the esteem and confidence of his or her subjects, disturbs the community, and such superior stirs up a bad spirit in his or her subjects. This bad spirit from the superior is detrimental to the good of the members and the institute.

### *3.2. The Religious Superior as the Promoter of Communication*

This is one of the skills a religious superior cannot disregard, as it is a way through which trust is built and conflicts resolved in the community/institute. The superior who is at the head of his or her members is not only to guard them but also to ensure that communication is promoted in the family. The superior is not to plan for the welfare of the community/institute alone. He or she should have conversation with the brethren.

According to canon 618, superiors execute their authority through dialogue, and in communion with those who share information, by active participation in the reflections involved, leading to a better decision (cf. Can. 618). Dialogue is not a one person business. It requires two or three parties. Since there is wisdom in the group as well as in the one leading; it is necessary that the superior allows the members to take part in the conversation or discussion for the common good of the community and the institute, and not after drafting conclusion he or she will pass it across to the community. Every superior ought to communicate to the members of the community or the institute whatever is happening in the community/institute. He or she should not be slow in dispatching the happenings of the community or the institute to the members. Superiors are to allow the members to contribute but at the end it is the authority of the same superior to decide and prescribe on what must be done (*PC* 14), but not in a forceful manner. When superior communicate effectively with the members, he or she is showing respect to them. Inefficient communication between superior and the members can lead the members to believe that they worth nothing and

not important in the community/institute, they will feel that they do not belong. They will be reluctant to carry out an activity given to them by the superior. They will also feel insecure and be suspecting the superior.

The superior is to listen to his or her members (cf. Can. 618). That is a way of communicating to the brethren. Listening to the members will make them feel that the superior cares about them and what they say. The superior while listening to the members should not interrupt them. He or she is to be patient towards the members (cf. Can. 619) and at the same time cooperate with them even if what they are saying does not make sense.

#### *4. The Exercise of the Office of the Religious Superior and Respect for persons*

This office needs to be exercised with humility, modesty, respect and simplicity. Thus any religious who is elevated to the position of a superior is expected to enfold his or herself with these qualities. According to St. Augustine «all strength is in humility, for it is its source; and all pride is weak»<sup>126</sup>. The religious superior in exercising the office entrusted to him or her should not to be a proud person or see himself or herself as greater as or better than others, but a humble servant. Ecclesiasticus 3: 20 states, “The greater thou art, the more humble thyself in all things, and thou shalt find mercy in the sight of God”. Being humble does not mean reducing oneself to zero before the members or being too acquainted with any of them. Humility of the superior will help him or her to

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<sup>126</sup> J.H. PARKER – J. RIVINGTON, Harmony Media for St. Thomas & Aquinas the Summa Theologica, Gervais 1995.



direct the members in a right part and to train them in virtues

The religious superior in exercising this office should be a reserved person<sup>127</sup>, one who respect him or herself and simultaneously accord the same respect to the members under his or her care. He or she should be kind, polite and vigilant to know the feelings of his or her subjects and not always finding faults with them. He or she should endeavour to discover what the members are capable of doing, that is to say, their qualities. When discovered, the superior should channel such qualities in a proper way. The religious superior should avoid personal service from the members rather he or she as God's representative is to serve the members (Cf. Mt 20: 28; Jn. 10: 14-18) and not the other way round. With that the superior will definitely win the members' respect, their submission and they also will confide in him or her in whatever they do.

Furthermore, the superior in exercising this office should not neglect the members assigned to him or her no matter the condition or neglect the person he or she delegated his or her power to. The superior should treat them respectfully. If the religious superior assigns a function to the members, or a subject is appointed to assist him or her, he or she should allow the member/s to exercise the duty allocated to them. The superior should not perform both his or her duties as well as that of the subjects by him or herself. Such destroys the harmony that exists between the superior and the subject or assistance and equally the synergy and harmony in the

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<sup>127</sup> This does not mean to be indoors, or without missing up with the subjects. The superior should always have time for the members.

community. The superior should not obstruct but has to give correction when and where necessary. Even if the superior finds the subject's faults, mistakes or defect from his or her assistance and wants to correct it, the superior is not to do it in the presence of others. The superior has to excuse the person or persons present and prudently correct the person concerned. The way you speak to other matters, hence, should be done in a polite way. Additionally, the superior should not discuss his or her fellow superiors or the delegates at the community level. The superior ought to respect himself or herself in all manners and also apply the same respect to others. A respectful superior gets the same respect from his or her subjects. Respect for persons is so important. This is because it helps to create feelings of safety, trust, happiness and love. There is need to accept the other as he or she is; knowing quiet well that others are different from you and cannot be as you want him or her to be.

#### *4.1. The Duty and Imperative of Respect to the Office of the Religious Superior*

Just like any other ecclesiastical offices in the church, the pastoral responsibility of the religious superior toward the members is established and stressed in the universal law. Canon 619 clearly describes the superior's principal duty in respect to his or her office as to build community of brothers or sisters in Christ<sup>128</sup> through their *tria munera* (teaching, sanctifying and governing functions). These threefold functions of the superior are discrete but they frequently have common characteristics in their

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<sup>128</sup> Cf. PAUL PP. VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelica Testificatio*, n. 25; in AAS, LXIII (1971), 497-526.

exercise. The religious superiors cannot renounce their obligation to guide their subjects in the spiritual and apostolic life<sup>129</sup>. Their responsibility is not merely to build a communion in Christ, but also communion with all the members of the institute. Therefore, both the members and the superior ought to show utmost respect to the office. It is not an office one has to joke with. The members share many of these responsibilities entrusted to the superior by virtue of their membership. For this reason, the superior exercises the teaching function by breaking open the word of God and by the personal example of a religious life. He or she exercises the sanctifying office by centring the life of the community in God and drawing it to liturgical celebration, by example of personal virtue and religious discipline and by solicitude<sup>130</sup> for all. He or she as well exercises the governing function by animating the community, by coordinating and responding appropriately to the personal needs of members and by correcting, consoling and encouraging members as needed.

### *5. Present day Challenges in the Exercise of the Office of the Religious Superior*

The religious superiors are facing a lot of challenges, pressure and tension in the exercise of the office bestowed on them. These occasionally tug the superior behind from executing his or her office. This is because these challenges do not come from outsiders but rather

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<sup>129</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL PP. II, Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consacrata*, n. 43.

<sup>130</sup> The superior should solicitously care for and visit the sick, the restless and console the faint of heart of the community/institute.

from the members or the collaborators of the superiors. There are some members with disruptive behaviours and troublesome attitude; they are reluctant to take the superior's orders or even to listen to him or her. They find it difficult to take correction, rather they prefer to always do what they want. Sometimes the superior's collaborators will not always agree with the superior's suggestion, even if they know that the superior is in the right track, they will look for a way to disrupt the idea given by the superior. These challenges from the members could encumber or help the superior to move forward, to face the life with new thought, although it is not easy. However, encountering these challenges, the superior should exercise humility, patience and as well carry out his or her functions with love. He or she should not rush anything, or act in anger to avoid mistake, he or she ought to create time in moments like this; because the subjects with disruptive character feel that they are always right and want everyone to listen, believe and support them. Before carrying out any act, the superior has to investigate properly.

Other challenges include the wrong use of electronic gadgets which disrupt internal harmony, community spirit and confidentiality in the religious institutes. It could encourage rumour mongering, gossip, ganging-up and leaking of confidential communication and gentle private internal admonitions. These can at times subject superiors to blackmail and embracement which can dampen the zeal of some of them. In the face of such

challenges, the superiors should be bold, but innovative and attentive while members should understand their co-responsibility in maintaining the unity of the institute and its entire charism and patrimony.

### *5.1. Authority and Freedom as the meeting point*

It is true that the superior by virtue of his or her office has the authority to exercise freely the task entrusted to him or her. But canon 617 of the 1983 code subjected the superior to both universal law and the proper law of the institute. The superiors are to be careful and with prudence in executing their responsibility. The superior's authority is for the collective members. In the exercise of the authority given to him or her, the superior should respect the dignity and fundamental freedom of all the members as guaranteed within the limit of the universal and proper laws of the institute. No member should be unduly maltreated, punished or subjugated to arbitrary sanction outside the scope of the law. Rather the superiors should look at all members as sisters and brothers in the same religious family. Authority should be seen as means for enhancing the wellbeing of all members and not for their destruction.

### *6. Recommendations and Conclusion*

Since the office of the religious superior exists for the good of the institute, the members and the church, it is necessary to be very careful in appointing or electing one to occupy this position. It is not an anyhow office rather it requires a person with good skills. Anyone who is elevated to the office of the religious superior much is expected from him or her. A religious superior should be

focused and of good character, worthy of being emulated by the members through his or her personal example. He or she should be fit to govern or direct the members and also be ready to inspire them with good virtues. He or she is to be ready to sacrifice his or her live for the brethren, putting on humility like cloth; be prudent, honest and peaceful, be one who accommodates and turns all into good. He or she should be an animator of unity and peace in the community/institute, placing the good of the institute above every other thing. The religious superior should be the first in all the community/institute activities, be punctual and faithful in everything, one who respects the rules of the institute and that of the members. He or she is expected to be perfect, although no one is perfect. He or she should avoid unnecessary familiarity and favouritism rather in all occasions and at all times, work for the good of all the members.

Above all, the authority of the religious superior is a divinely derived gift to be treasured and respected as if one were respecting God. The superior should serve and not be served while the members should willing yield their wills in charity and collaborate with their superiors for the common good of the community/institute. Both superiors and subjects should live and act in mutual love and respect, imitating Christ who is the true head of the Church and our Lady the Blessed Virgin Mary who became the true handmaid of the Lord through her fiat.

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**STUDIES AND  
PERSPECTIVES**



**CANONICAL VISITATION OF MAJOR SUPERIORS  
AS AN INSTRUMENT OF UNITY AND SERVICE**

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**Abstract**

This chapter introduces the section of canonical visit of major superiors as an instrument of unity and service that focuses on definition of canonical visit. It begins by stressing the importance of a greater concern with canonical visit.

The Canonical visitation of Major Superiors has been a long practice in the church. Such visitation is incumbent on the shepherd who would properly feed and guard his flock. This practice, in vogue from early Christian times, had somewhat fallen into desuetude (disuse or discontinuance) when re-established by the Council of Trent(1545 to 1563) in these words:

"Patriarchs, primates, metropolitans and bishops shall not fail to visit their respective dioceses either personally, or if they be lawfully hindered, by their Vicar-general or visitor; if they shall not be able on account of its extent, to make the visitation of the whole (diocese) annually, they shall visit at least the greater part thereof, so that the whole shall be completed (within) two years, either by themselves or by their visitors".

But the principal object of all the visitations shall be to lead people to sound and orthodox doctrine, by banishing heresies; to maintain good morals, and to correct such as are evil; by admonition and exhortation to animate the people, to religion, peace, and innocence; and to put in vogue whatever else may be dictated by the prudence of the visitors for the benefit of the faithful, as time, place and opportunity shall permit.

The presence of the major superior is a Grace-Filled Moment to the community, apostolic and spiritual life of the religious. The Major Superior during her/his visit hears complaints, investigates crimes, sees whether a member and others properly discharge their duties, and inquiries into the private conduct or morals of members and co-workers.

## **Introduction**

Canonical visitation of major superiors is an essential part of the office of a superior which can take place within the term of office of the major superior of a religious institute. This service is essential in the sense that it promote peace, unity, trust, mutual understanding etc. among members and their superior.

In this article, we shall seek to understand the meaning of a canonical visitation, the role of major superiors

during canonical visit, what is so important about canonical visit? the service and authority of a major superior and the impact on the church as a whole.

At the end of this article it will explain in detail a lived experience of canonical visit of the general council after the general chapter of the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ, as the visit brought about mutual understanding and trust among the sisters and the general leadership of the Congregation.

Visitation is seen as "a privileged time." It has a twofold purpose: one is to help the Provincial to see the life of the House, the second is for him/her to guide and be available to the membership in a very personal way (one on one, this is "all about you" time). This allows for a great communication, and more direct communication, to occur' between the superior (Provincial) and the members. It is clearly one of the most important responsibilities of the major superior - to be first in the ministry of unity and animation to the province/Region. This law focuses on two parts of the visitation - the houses and the members. I think that these are two related concepts. By visiting the house, the Provincial/superior can at least see the living conditions, know the daily schedule of the community, and see the reality that particular group lives in, so that the provincial/general superior understands the nature of the distances between communities/parishes

### **Meaning of Canonical visitation**

A canonical visitation is the act of an ecclesiastical superior who in the discharge of his office visits persons or places with a view of maintaining faith and discipline, and of correcting abuses

by the application of proper remedies. A person delegated to carry out such a *visitation* is called a visitor.

The Visitation process sought to convey the caring support of the Church in respectful, "sister-to-sister" dialogue, as modelled in the Gospel account of the Visitation of Mary to her cousin Elizabeth.

In the history of our Congregation, the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ there is a long tradition of making visits to the houses by the Superior General or one of his delegates, starting from the time of our foundress herself St. Katharina Kasper, she wrote frequently on this subject, giving abundant indications of the contents of a visitation, above all from the point of view of renewal in the community. As an introduction I will make use of some thoughts from St Katharina the foundress of the Congregation of the poor handmaids of Jesus Christ, her advice to sisters and her assistants during their visit.

"This year we will have to accomplish many difficult tasks. Our loving God will help, for nothing is to be done but His holy will" (to sister *Secunda*, November 18, 1888.)

"Oh what joy I have in being able to fulfill my duties" (to the assistants, July 31, 1872)

Let us serve the loving God with great zeal. (to the sisters of the American province, march 19, 1883)

"Let us serve and love God in unity with all our hearts, and with all our souls, so that God may always be with us now and eternity and we may love Him as His Children.

Thus we can rest in Him and enjoy His presence".  
(Newsletter, January 2, 1882)

"After all the experiences we make with ourselves and others, the only thing that remains, if we want to remain steadfast and attain salvation, is to follow the way of Jesus Christ; yes to tread that path seriously, to overcome all obstacles to march through difficulties we encounter along the way." (to the assistants, June 13, 1867)

"Things look distressing, let us pray and support one another in both natural and supernatural ways." (to the assistants, May 23, 1876)

After more than two centuries of history of the Congregation, we note that many developments have been made in its juridical structure, and thus even in the visitations.

But now this topic is regulated by the Constitutions and directory. The Constitutions have an explicit reference to the visitation, saying:

It is the right and duty of the Superior General:

"to make a canonical visit to all houses of the Congregation personally or through a delegate at least once during her term of office" (cons.74 page 55)

### **Why and when is the visitation made?**

Based on the above-mentioned articles of the constitutions, we can give the following summary of what usually is done during the visitation.

1. First of all, the end, the scope of the visitation is primarily to animate the provinces/Regions in all the aspects of our missionary life.
2. To improve mutual communication in the provinces and Regions among the sisters with general superior since she is "to promote dialogue among the different

provinces and Regions to foster unity according to the Constitutions and decree of the general Chapter (GD 74. page 55).

All these prescriptions and program are carried out in the following way:

1. The visitor prepares the calendar of the visitation of the houses and informs the province or Regions about the essential points of the visit e.g., that a personal interview will be held with each sister of the province/Regions and also a community meeting, in each house.
2. At the beginning of the visitation there is a meeting with the provincial/ Regional councils (as far as possible).
3. A (second) meeting with the provincial/ Regional council is held at the end of the visitation. This meeting is very important. Whoever makes the visitation usually at this moment gives the visitor and the councillors her/his impressions and recommendations. It is very important to share and talk together about the visitation.

The Assistant General who makes the visitation then writes a report for the Superior General and the General Council about the visitation. After a common discussion during a meeting of the General Council, the Superior General sends out two letters. One of these, to all the sisters/brothers of the province, is primarily intended to encourage and animate them. A second letter is generally sent to the visitor and the provincial council. This one is meant, in particular, to give suggestions or recommendations to the visitor for special cases, or particular situations. These recommendations need not necessarily be made public.

One year after the visitation, the Superior General, either directly or through the Assistant who made the

visitation, asks the Visitor for a brief report of how the recommendations and suggestions which were made in the letters sent to the province at the conclusion of the visitation, were implemented.

Because the visitation is one of the main duties of the Superior General or his delegate, and since she/he is the center of unity of the Congregation, the visitation has principally the effect of maintaining such global unity in the Congregation, and developing spiritual animation and apostolic activity in the provinces (Con 74 page 55,).

The nature of the visitation may also be noted in "GD74.2-page 56", where it is said that the "the canonical visit gives the general superior an opportunity for a more intense encounter with the sisters of a convent. Together they attempt to reorient their lives in the spirit of Mother Mary Katharina according to the constitutions"

The canonical visitation of a diocese is incumbent on the bishop personally unless lawfully hindered. A bishop may visit the various parts of his diocese as often as he chooses. According to the Council of Trent he must do so every year if possible or at least every two years. Attention is drawn to this Decree by the Sacred Congregation of the Consistory (*A remotissima*, 31 Dec., 1909). The Third Plenary Council of Baltimore requires a bishop to visit every part of his diocese at least once every three years, not only that he may administer the Sacrament of Confirmation, but likewise that he may know his people. Associate visitors, men versed in ecclesiastical affairs, are recommended as useful in promoting the end in view.



### *Rights of visitation*

The right of visitation belongs to all prelates who have ordinary jurisdiction over persons in the external forum. The pope through his delegates may institute a visitation throughout the world, patriarchs, primates, metropolitans, bishops, vicar apostolic and a vicar capitular or administrator of a vacant diocese, all in their respective territories, religious superiors within their own jurisdiction.

Religious superiors also visit canonically institutions and persons subject to them, each observing the Constitution and customs of his/her own order. The efforts of female religious superiors in visiting their houses are directed chiefly to promoting zeal and discipline; their authority is confined to correcting minor breaches of rule, since they are devoid of canonical jurisdiction. Difficulties beyond their power to settle are reported to the bishop or other lawful superior.

### **The Service and Authority of Major Superiors**

The Church explains the special service of authority which religious superior carry out in the light of the religious life as a whole. In the text "*The service of Authority and Obedience*" issued by the Congregation of Institutes of Consecrated Life and societies of Apostolic Life on May 11, 2008 we find a core explanation of the role of obedience in the consecrated life in section 1.

Faciem tuam, Domine, requiram: "*your face, O Lord, I seek (Ps 27:8)*". As a pilgrim seeking the meaning of life enwrapped in the great mystery that surrounds him, the human person does, in fact, seek the face of the Lord, even if unconsciously. "*Your ways, O Lord, make known to me, teach me your paths*"(Ps 25:4) no one can ever take away

from the heart of the human person the search for Him of whom the Bible says " He is all"(Sir 43:27) and for the ways of reaching Him. Consecrated life called to make the characteristic traits of the virginal, poor and obedient Jesus visible, ( Cf, pope St John Paul 11, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata* 25 March 1996,) 1.) flourishes in the setting of this search for the face of the Lord and the ways that lead to him ( Cf. Jn 14;4-6).

This is a search that leads to the experience of peace — “in his will is our peace” (Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, Paradise, III, 85.) — and which underlies each day’s struggle, because God is God, and His ways and thoughts are not always our ways and thoughts (cf. Is 55:8). The consecrated person, therefore, gives witness to the task, at once joyful and laborious, of the diligent search for the divine will, and for this chooses to use every means available that helps one to know it and sustain it while bringing it to fulfillment.

Religious community is made up of a communion of consecrated persons who profess to seek together and carry out God's will, a community of sisters and brothers with different roles, who seek meaning within the same goal and the same passion to seek God's will.

For this reason, while all in the community are called to seek what is pleasing to the Lord and to obey Him , some are called, usually temporarily, to exercise the particular task of being the sign of unity and the guide in the common search both personal and communitarian of carrying out the will of God.

The service of authority simply means that since obedience is one of the constitutive elements of the consecrated life, so too are the superiors and major superiors constitutive element of the consecrated life.

In Section 13 of "The service of Authority and Obedience" we read about some of the priorities of those in authority which are;

- to guarantee to the community the time for and the quality of prayer;
- to promote the dignity of the person;
- to inspire the charism of their own religious family alive;
- to keep alive the "sentire cum Ecclesia"( feel with the church or stand or support for the church);
- to accompany the journey of ongoing formation;
- times through a daily familiarity in prayer with the word of God, with the Rule and other norms of the life;
- the service of authority demand a persevering presence, able to enliven and take initiative, to help the persons entrusted to you to correspond with ever-renewed fidelity to the call of the spirit"(Benedict xvi, Address to superiors General, 22May 2006.in L'Osservatore Romano, English Edition, 31 May 2006, 13;cf. Starting Afresh from Christ, 24-26)";
- Authority and Obedience complement one another when sisters and superiors together yield to the Spirit of God, and recognize the competence of the individual and her/his responsibility for others before God and the Church(const. page 40).

### **Benefits of Canonical Visitation**

Priestly and religious life can be both very rewarding and very difficult. Sometimes this even happens within the same day—even within the same hour! Therefore, I am

thankful for any opportunity to encourage priests/religious to be faithful and to encourage church members/community sisters to be thankful for those who serve them in the ministry of God.

- 1) The visit is not because of issues; therefore, it tends to be encouraging. Just fact that we are not meeting because someone is upset or has done something changes the tone. Everyone tends to be at ease and freely able to focus on what is important.
- 2) It creates a conducive environment in which valuable issues are heard and discussed. What a blessing if such atmosphere is maintained in our community meetings and as always.
- 3) It helps the superior to know his/her members better. If member are over 75 members then it probably will be hard to keep up with everyone. Such visitation to communities helps with this than gathering in one place. Going to the communities helps to identify with the members and hear them. There are often things that one learns about each individual member just by being with them in their community. Further, the discussion is always illuminating. This informs ones prayer life and helps shape the way of relating to one another.
- 4) It gives the chance to sincerely listening to one another. Both the superior and the members develop an attitude of attentive listening knowing well that such visit is serious business.
- 5) It helps to ensure an open line of communication. There is an increase in the meaningful communication related to spiritual growth. No doubt from the members thinking that the superior do not care before the visit, but based on the conversations and interactions the members for sure knew it. And, after the visits there often the superior gets follow up questions or requests for prayer.

- 6) It creates an avenue of feedback and follow up, it is not the time of asking for compliments or looking for critiques, but it is the time to evaluate our lives as to the benefit we get from the ministering of God's word in the church. What is surprising here is what the Lord uses to impact people. Sometimes things that we think are incredibly profound are missed and the little things leave a major impact. Again, this helps us in our task of caring for one another and God's people.
- 7) Superiors are to exercise their power, received from God through the ministry of the Church, in a spirit of service. Therefore, docile to the will of God in fulfilling their function, they are to govern their subjects as sons or daughters of God and, promoting the voluntary obedience of their subjects with reverence for the human person, they are to listen to them willingly and foster their common endeavour for the good of the institute and the Church, but without prejudice to the authority of superiors to decide and prescribe what must be done. (Can. 618)
- 8) Superiors are to devote themselves diligently to their office and together with the members entrusted to them are to strive to build a community of brothers or sisters in Christ, in which God is sought and loved before all things. Therefore, they are to nourish the members regularly with the food of the word of God and are to draw them to the celebration of the sacred liturgy. They are to be an example to them in cultivating virtues and in the observance of the laws and traditions of their own institute; they are to meet the personal needs of the members appropriately, solicitously to care for and visit the sick, to correct the restless, to console the faint of heart, and to be patient toward all. (Can. 619)
- 9) The superiors whom the proper law of the institute designates for this function are to visit the houses and members entrusted to them at stated times according to the norms of this same proper law. (Can. 628 §1.)

- 10) Members are to act with trust toward a visitor, to whose legitimate questioning they are bound to respond according to the truth in charity. Moreover, it is not permitted for anyone in any way to divert members from this obligation or otherwise to impede the scope of the visitation. (Can. 628 §3.)
- 11) Members are to approach superiors with trust, to whom they can freely and on their own initiative open their minds. Superiors, however, are forbidden to induce the members in any way to make a manifestation of conscience to them. (Can. 630 §5.)

### **Some of the Roles of the Superiors during Canonical Visit**

The roles of the superiors during Canonical visit will be discussed under the following headings:

- ❖ Apostolate; can be defined as a form of evangelistic activity or work. All religious institutes have their main apostolate of which some may lie in the areas of education, nursing services, social and pastoral ministries etc. Christian ministry is rooted in the love of the Father who created all people and maintains them in being and it finds its culmination in God. Jesus came and became one with us. He brought reconciliation and life, redeemed the world through his humble and continues his work in the church through the Holy Spirit. Visitation is part of realizing that apostolic spirit. One important part of visitation is to increase the sensitivity in the part of the general/provincial/Regional superior to the apostolic works the institute are in, this can be done through the letter written by the general/provincial/regional superior which could be made public. Because effective ministry requires collaboration, mutual support and the effort of all, each sister endeavours to make the Congregation's goals and priorities in ministry her own (PHJC Cons.31). The

visitor makes out time to visit all the ministries that the members are engaged in, thereby motivates and encourages her/his members especially in difficult tasks. St Katharina wrote to Sr Bernardia, during the trying period” Let us have courage and trust, and otherwise remain calm and keep the peace”(September 8, 1872)

- ❖ Family: A family relationship is based on personal ties between persons. However, you may also be bound to your family members through an officially recognized relationship such as marriage or adoption, or, in certain situations, because you have a factual relationship based on co-habitation. In consecrated life everyone must sincerely seek the will of the Father, because otherwise the reason itself for this choice of life would disappear; but it is equally important to carry out such a search together with the brothers or the sisters because it is properly that which unites them, “making them a family united to Christ”. The general/Provincial gets to know the welfare of the biological family of the members, making their challenges his/hers.
- ❖ Community life/community meeting: Every community finds its most perfect model in the Blessed Trinity, in which the Father, Son and Holy Spirit communicates themselves to one another unconditionally in love (Const. 16). In community life, two elements of union and of unity among members can be distinguished: The more spiritual ‘fraternity’ or fraternal communion’ which arises from hearts animated by charity. It underlines ‘communion of life and interpersonal relationships. Also, more visible: ‘life in common or community life which consists of ‘living in one’s own lawfully constituted religious house’ and in ‘leading a common life’ through fidelity to the same norms, taking part in common acts, and collaboration in common services. Community Meeting means, consisting of group gatherings conducted indoors. Typical uses include synagogues, mosques, temples, churches, community

centers, bingo halls, private clubs, fraternal, philanthropic and charitable organizations, and lodges. Community Meeting can be held during canonical visitation of which matters of concern to the community can be discussed, academic or student life programs or policies explained by the appropriate superior, questions raised, problems identified, service to the institute recognized, and other topics of concern. Another option would be to have visitation during a local community event (consultation for superior, profession of faith, installation as acolyte,), the provincial is usually present for a day or two. At times, this could be the "canonical visitation. Community meetings can provide a reflective and listening space for both superior and members to discuss what's working, what's not working so well, highlight needs and help inform. They can help generate ideas, roles and help engender meaning, understanding and a sense of safety. This same "seeing" of the house goes to things like meal and prayer schedules. It allows the provincial to challenge the community to live in a healthy way that supports the real needs of each member. This time can allow the community to re - focus itself on their primary reality.

Visitation and community animation are emphasized in such a way as to give them priority over other responsibilities, no matter how good they are. In the same way as a priest is first to carry out the duties associated with being a priest of a parish as his primary responsibility to the diocese and to the people go God, so the general Provincial/Regional Superior is first leader to the province/Region before he is a board member or a corporate manager. Without ongoing contact, this pastoral dimension will be neglected. Religious life is not created or founded for the "doing" which is the apostolate but the main primary vocation is the community life,



which is truly being with each other which could be difficult to some members than the doing

In fact, Const. page 17 call this lived reality of community the "creative and unifying power of the Holy Spirit" The General superior/Provincial/Regional can be said that they are very closely tied to the Congregation/province/Region in their service of ministry to the community. Just as the Holy Father is "servant of the servants of God," the general/Provincial/Regional Superior is the "primary servant" of the common good of the Congregation and its members. Through their ministry of unity and service, they "animates, encourages, collaborate with local Church, the religious communities, other religious and secular institutes as well as secular organizations" (Const 33).

- ❖ Peace and Reconciliation. Reconciliation is the long-term process by which the parties to a violent dispute build trust, learn to live cooperatively, and create a stable peace. It can happen at the individual level, the community level, and the national level.

Peace is a stress-free state of security and calmness that comes when there is no fighting or war, everything coexisting in perfect harmony and freedom. It can also mean a state of tranquillity, quiet, and harmony, absence of war and conflicts. When one is at peace, it depicts that the individual is a contented person in spite of his/her flaws. The major superiors play an important role in communities laden with conflicts, they sought ways to help communities honour and dignify victims, support conscientious objectors, provide sanctuary, engage in prayer and action for peace and promote truth, justice, reparations and reconciliation. The canonical visitation of

major superiors to their religious communities strengthen the bond among members, it creates true love of God and unity. St Katharina writes to her sisters in American province, March 19 1883 " Love one another in God and do not take offense, love bears all things, forgives and forgets, and does good to those through whom you must suffer" In other words, absence of love in religious communities brings about conflicts, hatred, chaos etc among members.

Establishing stable and lasting peaceful relations between rival sides to an intractable conflict requires the construction of a culture of peace through the processes of peace-making and reconciliation. This is the peace-building process, which in essence is a long process of major societal change involving building a new socio-psychological repertoire that allows reaching an agreement with the adversary and enables the formation of an allied relationship based on mutual trust and acceptance, cooperation, and consideration of mutual needs. Succeeding in this challenging socio-psychological endeavour may provide hope for a better life with no bloodshed and suffering.

- ❖ Social life may refer to: an individual's interpersonal relationships with people within their immediate surroundings or general public. Human beings are inherently social creatures. As far back as we can trace, humans have travelled, hunted, and thrived in social groups and for good reason. ... Social groups provide us with an important part of **our** identity, and more than that, they teach us a set of skills that help us to live our lives.

Religious communities are basic unit of most Christian organizations in the sense of being the social group with their members in particular localities feel most closely associated. Religious men and women who are not of the world, but who nevertheless live in the world, are subject to its influence. Social changes in the world also affect the life in religious communities such as poverty, misery, unrest etc. In such difficult moments the religious and its major superiors should together find a better way of living through the challenging periods. Some kind of social activities, recreation etc will be better options to relax the mind and shedding off unnecessary stress that may hinder an authentic community living. 'Each sister is provided time for recreation, for relaxation of body and spirit and for building up the community'(const.27). During canonical visit, the general/provincial/regional superiors takes time to evaluate the social life of the sisters, correcting the negative effects/understanding of the social life of the sisters that may be detrimental to their spiritual/community/apostolic life etc.

- ❖ Finance is defined as the management of money and includes activities such as investing, borrowing, lending, budgeting, saving, and forecasting. The Superior during canonical visit takes time to go through the community's, provincial and regional finances and investments. In so doing, it will give a clear view of the community's financial sustainability

*Prayer/Spirituality:* Spirituality is more of an individual practice, and has to do with having a sense of peace and purpose. It also relates to the process of developing beliefs around the meaning of life and connection with others, without any set spiritual values. Spirituality is something that's talked about a lot but is often

misunderstood. Many people think that spirituality and religion are the same thing, and so they bring their beliefs and prejudices about religion to discussions about spirituality. Though all religions emphasise spiritualism as being part of faith, you can be 'spiritual' without being religious or a member of an organised religion.

Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God or requesting of good things from God. This is most important part of religious life which each member and their superior should take it seriously by encouraging one another and finding more ways to support those who may be facing some challenges in their relationship with God. Jesus is completely one with the Father. He obtained power for his ministry from his constant communion with Him. (Const page 12)

### **Practical matters**

*Lived experience of a canonical visitation of our superior general and her council*

From 27<sup>th</sup> November till 17<sup>th</sup> December 2019 our General superior from Germany Sr Judith Diltz and her council were in Nigeria for their Canonical visitation. Canonical visitation is time when our general leadership/regional leadership teams are going around the region to visit each community and apostolate. On their visitation they spend few days in each community. That is, time when they stay in the communities to be with the sisters/Children to pray and work with them. At the same time, they give opportunity to each sister to talk to them or the superior alone, individually. This visitation is every six years/or three years for the regional leadership or once in a tenure before the next general or regional Chapter. The Chapter

is a meeting when the sisters get together to spend time in prayer and also is the time when they choose new administration for next six / three years and decide the future of the Congregation or region.

Our region is still under growing process so it is not big enough and the general team was able to visit all communities, which were lot of travel due to the distance between the communities. The Region is situated in three States: Mgbele in Imo State, Garam in Niger State and Ifetedo, Ilobu, Ibokun in Osun State. Distance in-between these communities are, just, 8-10 hours depending on the traffic.

The superior general and her team did stay with us in each community for 2 to 5 days. At that time, they spent sometimes in our schools to see what our students are busy at. The students have been very happy that they were able to stay with them and did give so much encouragement and want them to stay with them much longer. They did wish them all the best with hope that they will be back soon to see how much they have improved in the studies and what they have done. They also visited the clinic, children's home to have overview of the need in these areas and they gave their advice and support on some of their observations for the growth of the ministries.

We have no way of predicting and securing encouragement. However, by my experience canonical visits are one of the most encouraging things we can happily expect.

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## **AUTHORITY AND POWER IN RELIGIOUS LIFE: IN SEARCH OF A PROPHETIC BALANCE**

*Eucharía Okwudilichukwu UGWU<sup>131</sup>*

### **Abstract**

This paper examines the dynamics of leadership among consecrated persons in Nigeria. It first examines the relationship between authority and power both of which are complementary divine gifts. The purpose of leadership is for service. It is also meant to foster unity, enhance fraternal community living and enable the religious remain focused and committed to the mission and charisms of their congregations. Superiors are thus, symbols of unity and they are to use the authority and power conferred on them positively. The paper also discusses the need for leadership in religious institutes, the characteristics of good leaders, how power can be abused by superiors as well as the challenges of leadership. The paper identifies bad leadership as one of

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the problems facing Nigeria. Jesus is the ideal leader and a model for religious. It suggests that the prophetic voice of the religious will continue to be heard and to remain relevant in the society only to the extent that they maintain the cream of Christian leadership centred on love and service.

**Keywords:** Leadership, religious life, authority and power, love and service

### **Introduction**

The exercise of authority is a commonly-used term among the religious. In religious institutes, leaders (that is, superiors) are often referred to as 'those who hold authority'. Authority confers power on those who hold it. There is no authority without power. Therefore, to be a leader means to have authority over others. In other words, leaders have both authority and power. Superiors in religious institutes are given the power of "leading and deciding".<sup>132</sup> That is to say, they can take decisions for and on behalf of the members who then owe them allegiance. In that sense, it can be said that superiors are undeniably powerful.

However, the concept of power is sometimes associated with something negative. This might be because of the human tendency to mismanage it or use it destructively. Power is often used to oppress rather than to empower.<sup>133</sup> Besides, "the organization of civil life has

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<sup>132</sup> Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. Instruction on the Service of Authority and Obedience, no. 9.

<sup>133</sup> Kathleen Norris (1998). *Amazing Grace. A vocabulary of Faith*. In Mary Pat Garvin: *Graced Companionship: A Metaphor for Religious Leadership Today*, 2013, 9.



often offered the bad example of those who seek their own advantage through the exercise of power".<sup>134</sup> In spite of that, authority and power are complementary divine gifts. Jesus gave the disciples authority over unclean spirits and power to heal the sick, raise the dead and cast out demons.<sup>135</sup> He promised to send the Holy Spirit who would fill the disciples with power<sup>136</sup> and shortly before His resurrection, He asked the disciples to remain in the city until they were clothed with power from above.<sup>137</sup> St. Paul equally states that those who follow Christ receive the spirit of power and self-control.<sup>138</sup>

Consecrated men and women who are called to serve as leaders are therefore, given power and authority but they are expected to use them positively and productively for the good of their institutes, the Church and the society at large. The leadership office they hold is a sharing in the authority and power of Jesus. Therefore, they need to use it in the same way that Jesus did. Jesus "overturned the relationships of power and domination, himself giving the example of how to serve and choose the last place".<sup>139</sup>

### **The Need for Leadership in Religious Institutes**

The desire to lead, rather than to be led, to be in charge, and to control, is inherently human. Being a religious does not obliterate this basic human trait. Children often want to do as they please but their parents direct them so that

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<sup>134</sup> The Consecrated Life and its Roles in the Church, no. 17

<sup>135</sup> Mt. 10:8; Mk. 6:7

<sup>136</sup> Acts. 1:8

<sup>137</sup> Lk. 24:49

<sup>138</sup> Cf. Rm. 8:15

<sup>139</sup> Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Instruction on Fraternal Life in Community *Congregavit nos*, 2 February 1994, no. 9

they can learn not just to be submissive but also to make better choices in life and so bring harmony in the family and in the larger society. Therefore, leadership gives the religious opportunities to fulfil one of the basic human needs. It also enhances fraternal community life. "The authority of a superior works so that the religious house is not merely a place of residence, a collection of subjects each of whom lives an individual history, but a fraternal community in Christ".<sup>140</sup>

Leadership among the religious can be considered a call within a call. The leadership style is rotatory and any member may be chosen at any point in time to play that role. Layers of authority exist in religious institutes. There is first of all, the Superior General (the name may differ by order) whose responsibility spans through the whole institute; this is followed by the Provincial, Regional or Zonal Superiors as the case might be. Then, there is what one may call the grassroots leaders – the Community or Local Superiors. Each of these serves different purposes but their respective functions are interconnected and interwoven. Leaders help to foster unity. For a religious institute to live as a united entity and fulfill her mission in the Church, there has to be a synergy among these different leaders as well as between them and the other members. Without leadership, a religious institute or community could disintegrate and everyone may go her/his own way. In that case, the charism may be lost or misinterpreted because "charisms without authority lack direction".<sup>141</sup> Leaders guide the members to fulfil the

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<sup>140</sup> Instruction on Fraternal Life in Community, no. 50

<sup>141</sup> Alex Rebello, *Seeds in the Wind. God's Touch in Life Events*. Mumbai: The Bombay Saint Paul Society, 2012, 82.

mission of the congregation in the world and they carry this out, knowing that they are stewards of God's grace. Thus, "while all in the community are called to seek what is pleasing to the Lord and to obey Him, some are called, usually temporarily, to exercise the particular task of being the sign of unity and the guide in the common search both personal and communitarian of carrying out the will of God".<sup>142</sup>

Leadership in religious life is a very important assignment and has a significant witnessing value. Superiors stand as signs that unity in diversity is possible in the society. In a world where power is sometimes used to oppress rather than to empower, to take advantage of others, favour some people and neglect others, enrich oneself while impoverishing others and to glorify oneself rather than glorify God, the religious are called to make a difference through their leadership style. "Placed as they are within the world's different societies...communities of consecrated life, where persons of different ages, languages and cultures meet as brothers and sisters, are signs that dialogue is always possible and that communion can bring differences into harmony".<sup>143</sup>

### **Characteristics of Good Leaders**

Good leadership is essential for harmony in every religious institute. Contrarily, bad leadership can ruin an entire institute or a religious community. What then makes for a good leadership? Jesus is a leader par excellence. The religious are men and women who have decided to follow Jesus more closely. Therefore, their

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<sup>142</sup> Instruction on the Service of Authority and Obedience, 1, para. 3

<sup>143</sup> Vita Consecrata, no. 51

leadership style cannot be any different from Jesus' style which centres on love and service. . Persons in authority must act in such a way that the brothers or the sisters can perceive that when they give a command, they are doing so only to obey God.<sup>144</sup> While Superiors have power, such power is for service rather than for control.

In Jesus' time, the abuse of authority and power by secular and religious leaders was not uncommon.<sup>145</sup> However, Jesus offered a new model of leadership, hoping that it "would replace the disciples' experience of absolute and unbridled authority and power".<sup>146</sup> Jesus is the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep<sup>147</sup>. He is also the Lord and Master who washes the feet of His disciples.<sup>148</sup> Religious who take up leadership positions are invited to imbibe similar attitudes. Mary Pat Garvin calls Jesus model of leadership "graced companionship". Superiors are therefore, religious who have been specially called to become "graced companions" to other members. Leadership requires an attitude of faith and openness to God and to others. "Religious life is fundamentally a faith reality, and the faith in question is not simply a generalized conviction that there is more to reality than meets the eye".<sup>149</sup> Companionship entails relationship which is fostered through dialogue. It is also "a communal and shared venture".<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Instruction on the Service of Authority and Obedience, no. 12

<sup>145</sup> *Graced Companionship: A Metaphor for Religious Leadership Today*

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Is. 53:1-12; Heb. 9:15-28; Jn. 10:11

<sup>148</sup> Jn. 13:14

<sup>149</sup> Sandra Marie Schneiders. *Congregational Leadership and Spirituality in the Postmodern Era*. Review for Religious 57 (January-February 1998, 18).

<sup>150</sup> Mary Pat Garvin. *Graced Companionship: A Metaphor for Religious Leadership Today*, 2013, p. 5

In every human relationship, misunderstandings are bound to happen. Conflicts may even arise. Making effort to resolve such misunderstandings or conflicts (when they arise) is fundamental to retaining the grace of companionship. Moreover, the role of leadership places a superior in a position in which she/he may have privileged information about other members, including the good and the bad. For that reason, there could be the temptation of seeking to correct every error and mistake (real or imagined). If unchecked, this kind of attitude can make others to see the superior as a fault-finder. The superior needs to be able to accommodate the mistakes and failings of others, to forgive and to be compassionate. They are to develop "pedagogy of forgiveness and mercy, that is, to be instruments of the love of God that welcomes, corrects and always gives another chance to the brother or sister who makes a mistake and falls into sin".<sup>151</sup>

Graced companionship involves listening through presence and dialogue. Superiors are called to give a listening ear to their sisters and brothers. "Listening is one of the principal ministries of superiors for which they must always be available, above all for those who feel isolated and in need of attention".<sup>152</sup> Listening and dialogue are central to communal living, the creation of a favourable atmosphere for sharing and co-responsibility, discernment and the promotion of fraternal obedience.<sup>153</sup> It is through listening that the communal and individual

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<sup>151</sup> Instruction on the Service of Authority and Obedience, no. 25.

<sup>152</sup> Instruction on the Service of Authority and Obedience, no. 20

<sup>153</sup> Instruction on the Service of Authority and Obedience, no. 20

needs are identified, a helping hand is extended and wounds are healed.

Superiors can listen at three levels or degrees. The first level is listening to God. Those in authority are called to "undertake the pilgrimage that leads to seeking the will of God with intensity and righteousness".<sup>154</sup> They are to "search assiduously with the help of prayer, reflection, and the advice of others for what God really wills so that they will not fall into the temptation of putting themselves carelessly in God's place".<sup>155</sup> A lot of harms can be done to self and to others when a superior fails to listen to God. Decisions that are harmful can be taken and people can be deeply hurt.

The second level of listening is to others - that is, to one's brothers or sisters in the community or institute. Since leadership in religious life is a shared responsibility, the leaders need to be able to accommodate divergent views through listening to others. This opens the way to mutual discernment of the will of God. This level of listening is an act of humility, an admission that one is imperfect, limited in knowledge and does not always have all the answers. The Holy Spirit is at work in each member of an institute of consecrated life and may as well inspire any of them with the needed solution to any problem at any time. "Whoever is in charge has the responsibility for the final decision, but must arrive at it not by him or herself but rather by valuing the greatest possible free contribution of all the brothers or sisters".<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid. no. 12

<sup>155</sup> Ibid. no. 12

<sup>156</sup> Ibid. no. 20

The third level of listening is to individual members. It is important that superiors make themselves approachable so that other members can confidently approach them without fear when the needs arise. Superiors need to create opportunities for dialogue before taking some decisions that may affect the other. From lived experience, many young religious often find it difficult to approach their superior. Those in the service of authority need "to be attentive not to give into the temptation of personal self-sufficiency, to believe that everything depends on him or her...(for) it is better to take one step together than to take two or more alone".<sup>157</sup>

Other traits needed for good leadership in religious life are humility, ability to accept one's limitations and team spirit. The three are interrelated. One who is humble will most likely accept one's limitations. Research has shown that a leader who is humble will work better with her/his team and dispose them to admit their own flaws thereby creating a better working environment.<sup>158</sup> Humility on the part of the leader will enable her/him to accept other's opinions, engender insightfulness as well as the ability to think outside the box.

A leader should also not be too sensitive to criticism and as well, shun the temptation to become bossy. This can happen if a superior believes that accepting her/his mistakes might give the impression that she/he is weak, incompetent or no longer in charge. Leaders are definitely not perfect; they are as imperfect and human as those they lead. Like the high priests of the Old Testament, they

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid. no. 25

<sup>158</sup> David Robson. Is this the secret of smart leadership? BBC, Worklife. Collective Intelligence. 1st June 2020.

are chosen from their fellow human beings to act on their behalf in relationships with God.<sup>159</sup> Thus, the leader comes to the office with all her/his virtues and vices, strengths and weaknesses, fears and hopes. She/he may not have the required prudence and diligence to handle complex issues that may arise. Their human limitations and the complex nature of their office can make them vulnerable and prone to criticism. Accepting these realities will make their work easier. They need to be able to admit their mistakes and to ask for forgiveness when they err. On the contrary, a superior who is too sensitive to criticism may find the task very difficult and may get disillusioned.

### **Abuses of Power and Authority in Religious Institutes**

That *power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely* is a common maxim. The “postmodern culture has radicalised the concept of power”, such that “power is not understood as service, but as control over one’s life, in economic, political, family and sexual matters”.<sup>160</sup> A religious superior can get cut up in this and therefore, become 'a corrupt specie' in the Lord's vineyard.

Superiors can actually misuse the authority and power entrusted to them. From lived experience, there are credible harrowing tales of religious who had been badly treated by their superiors due to an excessive use of their power and authority. A superior can go to the extent of becoming a dictator who would not permit any detractor

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<sup>159</sup> Heb. 5:1-4

<sup>160</sup> Marguerite A. Peeters. *The Globalization of the Western Cultural Revolution: Key Concepts, Operational Mechanisms*. Translated from French by Benedict Kobus. Institute for Intercultural Dialogue Dynamics asbl, 2012, 77.



and a ruler rather than a leader. These are human tendencies. "The superior is the representative of the Good Shepherd, but the glory of his supernatural status can lead to very earthly manipulations".<sup>161</sup> It may be difficult to actually know when a superior is acting in the service of charity or to gratify her/his ego, working for the common good or for selfish interest. The idea of working 'for the common good' can be manipulated for hidden selfish objectives; it can also be over-exercised, leading to a lack of consideration for others. This can lead to a build-up of hurts.

Besides, since the superiors "must render an account in conscience, to the law of the Church, to the Roman Pontiff, and to the proper law of the institute",<sup>162</sup> this idea of accountability can be narrowly interpreted to mean 'a sole interpreter of the rules' or 'an absolute guardian of the charism' of the congregation. In that way, a superior may think that her/his role is principally to read the rule of her/his order and ensure full compliance to them in the strictest sense. That way, the superior could tie up heavy burdens on the shoulders of those she/he is leading, like the teachers of the Law and Pharisees of Jesus' time<sup>163</sup> with the conviction that it is for the 'common good'. This could make the rest to see the superior as a necessary evil that has to be avoided as much as possible. However, a superior is not supposed to be a "lone visionary who boldly imagines and projects goals to galvanize the

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<sup>161</sup> Jan Hulshof. *The Religious Superior and Spiritual Leadership*. Address for the Meeting of Local Superiors of France, Mazille, 20 September 2010. Published in France SM no. 68 (2010) 49-53. Translation: E. Duffy.

<sup>162</sup> Instruction on the Service of Authority and Obedience, no. 14

<sup>163</sup> Mt. 23:4

membership toward the future".<sup>164</sup> Religious life is about communal living and every charism is a gift to the church rather than a personal property<sup>165</sup> to be managed singlehandedly. Besides, love is the foundation of every charism in the church. Pope Francis observed that "for the various founders and foundresses, the Gospel was the absolute rule, whereas every other rule was meant merely to be an expression of the Gospel and a means of living the Gospel to the full".<sup>166</sup> In that case, every rule and regulation in any religious institutes is subject to the central message of the Gospel: love.

Meanwhile, overzealousness 'for the common good' without listening to others or engaging in creative dialogue can turn a leader into a dictator. Also, when there is too much of a control, the community may become chocky and unliveable. To balance a sense of accountability and service, the superior need to find a way to foster collaboration and co-responsibility, remembering that change is impossible without collaboration and collaboration is impossible without mutual understanding, acceptance and respect.

*The service of authority is fundamental to the order of fraternal life.*<sup>167</sup> Good leadership characterised by service can lead to better collaboration, commitment, social cohesion and ensure that members remain focused and committed to the charism and mission of their

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<sup>164</sup> Sandra Marie Schneiders. Congregational Leadership and Spirituality in the Postmodern Era. Review for Religious 57 (January-February 1998, 18).

<sup>165</sup> Fernando Millán Romeral, *O. Carm.* The challenges in the leadership of Religious life today in view of ministry both "ad intra" and "ad extra". USG Assembly, November, 2016 – Rome. The Order of Carmelites, 2003-2020

<sup>166</sup> Pope Francis. *Witnesses of Joy*, 2015, p. 9. Paulines Publications Africa.

<sup>167</sup> The Consecrated Life and its Roles in the Church. Working Paper for October 1994 World Synod of Bishops, no. 59

congregation. Consequently, bad leadership, characterised by an abuse of power can mar the mission and make the members sad. It can sour relationships in communities. Although healthy community living thrives on the principle of co-responsibility, the role of the superior is paramount in creating a healthy atmosphere centred on trust, care and true love. Leadership that is not life-giving can breed chaos, acrimony and lack of fulfilment. It can create unhealthy atmosphere and turn the religious to “disciples of gloom”.<sup>168</sup> Consequently, “it is both a contradiction and a countersign when office bearers in the Church...regard their office as a convenient channel to dictate to and dominate those in their charge”.<sup>169</sup>

When power is abused, the core values of religious life are undermined. Fraternal life in community may be seen as a burden rather than a gift; authority may also be resisted and the vows, especially that of obedience may be compromised. When that point is reached, there may be no way out because any route taken might lead to more difficult situations. The following is a vivid description of what could happen when the religious abuse power or try to compromise leadership roles:

The desire for deeper communion among the members and an understandable reaction against structures felt as being too rigid and authoritarian have contributed to a lack of understanding of the full scope of the role of authority; indeed, some consider it to be altogether unnecessary to community life, and others have reduced it to the simple role of co-ordinating the initiatives of the

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<sup>168</sup> Pope Francis. *Witnesses of Joy*, 2015, p. 14. Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa

<sup>169</sup> Alex Rebello, *Seeds in the Wind. God's Touch in Life Events*, p. 82

members. As a result, a certain number of communities have been led to live with no one in charge while other communities make all decisions collegially. All of this brings with it the danger, not merely hypothetical, of a complete breakdown of community life; it tends to give priority to individual paths, and simultaneously to blur the function of authority -- a function which is both necessary for the growth of fraternal life in community and for the spiritual journey of the consecrated person.<sup>170</sup>

Mary Pat Garvin identifies three positive powers that leaders can utilise to enrich community living: the power of encouragement, of hospitality, and of resilience.<sup>171</sup> The first power will enable the leader to encourage other members to remain hopeful in the midst of despair and distress. The second is not just about welcoming people but of being open to new ideas, irrespective of which member it comes from. Lastly, the *power of resilience* could enable members to persevere in spite of the challenges that life brings.

### **Challenges of Leadership in Religious Institutes**

The call to be a leader in religious institutes has its ups and downs. Leadership can be tough for both the leaders and the led. Leaders can face enormous challenges that could make their roles very difficult to play. Indeed, "many are the challenges that the present time places on persons in authority in the task of coordinating energies for the mission".<sup>172</sup> Irrespective of the orientation to see things 'with the eyes of faith', every religious is a complete

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid. no. 48

<sup>171</sup> Graced Companionship: A Metaphor for Religious Leadership Today, 2013.

<sup>172</sup> Instruction on the Service of Authority and Obedience, no. 25

human being, governed by reason. Moreover, the "society is in constant evolution and men and women religious, who are not of the world, but who nevertheless live in the world, are subject to its influence".<sup>173</sup>

One of the challenges could be a lack of corporation by members as well as how to deal with dissident ones. Religious life is made up of people with different dispositions and struggling with different existential realities. Some could be in crisis, some indifferent while some may just have difficult or complex characters. There are also those who "settle for a level of comfortable mediocrity (and) carve out for themselves a niche in which they can live and serve without being too much disturbed by others or by their own frailty".<sup>174</sup> Meanwhile, a leader is expected to be a guide to all these category of people, accommodate all and remain a symbol of unity. This is by no means an easy task. Thus, superiors may experience moments of discouragement and disillusionment especially when faced with the problem of "resistance of some members of the community and of certain questions that seem irresolvable".<sup>175</sup> This could make them diminish their positions to be mere managers of routine, "resigned to mediocrity, restrained from intervening, no longer having the courage to point out the purposes of authentic consecrated life and running the risk of losing the love of one's first fervour and the desire to witness to it".<sup>176</sup>

Besides, the leader has to deal with personal human limitations and those of their fellow members. Pope

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<sup>173</sup> Instruction on Fraternal Life in Community, no. 4

<sup>174</sup> Drinking from a Dry Well, Thomas H. Green (1990), p. 102

<sup>175</sup> Instruction on the Service of Authority and Obedience, no. 28

<sup>176</sup> Ibid, no. 28

Francis observes that a temptation that looms over religious life today is "seeing things in a worldly way", that is, "no longer seeing God's grace as the driving force in life, then going off in search of something to substitute for it: a bit of fame, a consoling affection, finally getting to do what I want".<sup>177</sup> If members of a religious institute no longer see the call to obey with the eyes of faith, then leadership is bound to become very difficult.

Since relationship is central to leadership, it is certain that wrongdoings will definitely take place. The primary and most profound characteristic of leadership is its relational quality.<sup>178</sup> It is the relational dynamics of leadership that often creates problems. Leadership among religious is about human beings leading fellow human beings in an atmosphere of faith. Although through the vow of obedience, religious are to see and accept the decisions of their superiors as being the will of God, this is not always easy. Moreover, while people around the world crave to achieve democracy, more emphasis is now placed on the individual as well as "the demands for personal freedom and human rights".<sup>179</sup> In religious life, communalism is preferred rather than individualism. How to deal with these contradictions can make leadership in religious life more difficult. Thus, "In an atmosphere strongly affected by individualism, it is not an easy thing to foster recognition and acceptance of the role which authority plays for the benefit of all".<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Pope Francis (2020). Homily on the feast of the presentation of the Lord. 24th world day for consecrated life.

<sup>178</sup> Mary Pat Garvin. Graced Companionship: A Metaphor for Religious Leadership Today, 2013, 4.

<sup>179</sup> Instruction on Fraternal Life in Community, no. 4

<sup>180</sup> Vita Consecrata, no. 43

The unpredictability of some issues a superior may be required address is another possible problem that makes leadership difficult. Since life is itself dynamic, a leader may be called upon to solve complex problems that she/he never envisaged would come up. For any new issue that arises, she/he is expected to attend to it. In such situations, from where will come the leaders' help? The leader should return to the feet of the Master and ask for His direction. Jesus knew that His disciples would be incapable of dealing with many issues that would surface in the course of the mission. Therefore, He told them not to give in to fear, and promised that the Holy Spirit would teach them all things when such time comes.<sup>181</sup> Living a prayerful life is therefore, indispensable to effective leadership. It is through deep prayer, that is, a personal relationship with Christ that the leader will derive strength and wisdom needed for the office of leadership. Without prayer, the leader can falter, make avoidable mistakes and even become disillusioned. The leader equally needs to maintain an on-going and in-depth relationship with a spiritual director or counsellor.<sup>182</sup> These would enable her/him to adequately handle the ups and downs of the leadership position.

However, for the religious to continue fulfilling their prophetic roles in the postmodern world, they need to be attentive to the signs of the times. Bad governance, characterised by an abuse of power is a modern-day plagues in Nigeria. These have led to inequality and injustice, intense poverty, diseases and hunger, loss of

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<sup>181</sup> Jn. 14:26; Mt. 10:19-20

<sup>182</sup> Mary Pat Garvin. *Graced Companionship: A Metaphor for Religious Leadership Today*, 2013, 7.

faith (in God and in fellow human beings), lack of respect for the dignity of life, insecurity and violence. Political power is often sought and exploited for personal aggrandisement and to amass wealth for oneself while the masses are left to suffer. This is opposed to the Christian understanding of leadership which is for service. Obsession with power impoverishes people, leads to underdevelopment and sufferings. As Pope Francis stated "this vision of "might is right" has engendered immense inequality, injustice and acts of violence against the majority of humanity, since resources end up in the hands of the first comer or the most powerful: the winner takes all".<sup>183</sup>

In the face of these, the leadership style among the religious should stand as a model for the secular Nigerian society. They need to uphold the admirable qualities of their leadership style which emphasis service. Leadership is a divine mandate for order in the society and those who wield authority in the church are meant to be the "servants of the servants of God".<sup>184</sup> Leadership roles are assigned and accepted in a prayerful and peaceful atmosphere. At the completion of their leadership tenures, superiors return to the normal routines of daily community living without clinging to any right or privilege (including properties) they enjoyed while in office. They also take up any apostolate assigned to them by the new superior.

Meanwhile, while the consecrated persons cannot solve all the societal problems, they can make a difference

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<sup>183</sup> Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter on the Care of Our Common Home, *Laudato Si*, 24 May 2015, no. 82

<sup>184</sup> Instruction on Fraternal Life in Community, no. 50



through exemplary leadership. A prophet does not solve all the problems but shows the way through her/his actions so that others may see and follow. To accept to be a superior is to accept the responsibility of presence, caring, listening and responding. It is in that atmosphere that members can actually live out the gospel values and be present to those in need. Moreover, religious life was founded on the principle of equality as children of God, mutual love and care in community. The first Christian community lived together joyfully, owned everything in common and ensured that everyone was taken care of.<sup>185</sup> Superiors need to make the welfare of each of their member a priority. A religious who feel victimised, abandoned and uncared for would most likely live a joyless life. Authentic witnessing cannot take place in the absence of joy. It is in an atmosphere of joy that the religious can bring consolation to the afflicted, feed the hungry, bring hope to the afflicted and seek justice for the oppressed. The secular Nigerian society is awash with selfish leaders who are hardly present to those they are leading in their pains and worries. Superiors who are not attentive to the needs of their members are no different from the selfish Nigerian politicians. Accordingly, religious leadership will remain prophetic to the extent that those in authority care for their members.

## **Conclusion**

The exercise of authority and power is not strange to the religious. Jesus is the most powerful Son of God but used His power to serve. Those who serve as leaders share in His divine power and authority. However, the religious

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<sup>185</sup> Acts 2:44-47

can misuse the gift. Leadership calls for patience on both sides: the leaders and the led. The leaders should be careful not to abuse their position and make others to suffer or see them as necessary evils. They should also bear in mind that they hold the treasure of their offices in earthen vessels<sup>186</sup> and that without the grace of God, they can do nothing. As people of faith called to be the light of the world, the religious need to strive to be models of true leadership so that their prophetic voice can continue to resound in the world. They also need to be supported and prayed for since the task they undertake is not an easy one. Accordingly, leaders in the civil society have a lot to learn from the religious style of leadership but only to the extent that the former follow the Master's footsteps as servants of charity.

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<sup>186</sup> Cf. 2 Cor. 4:7

## THE FUNDAMENTAL NORMS CONCERNING THE GOVERNMENT OF THE PHJC CONGREGATION

*Rev. Sr. M. Christeta Hess PHJC<sup>187</sup>*

### **Abstract**

*Changes in the constitutions of religious congregations are rare. As part of the necessary renewal of religious life, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council demanded that all constitutions should be checked and changed, to take into account the radical changes in the world and the understanding of religious life. Chapters were necessary to do this renewal work. In the present article, the result of this renewal chapter in the Congregation of the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ is presented, mainly concerning the values that are seen in attitudes of leadership. A short survey of conditions before Vatican II is followed by a description where the main attention of the renewal chapter was focused.*

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<sup>187</sup> Born in 1936 in Germany, the author entered the congregation of the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ in 1956 and was trained as a college teacher, majoring in German and English language and literature. Later she also added Theology. From 1977 to 1989 she was a member of General Council, and from 1992 to 2002 she served as German Provincial. In April 2006 she came to Nigeria with one Nigerian sister, who had been trained in the German novitiate, to start congregational ministry in Owerri Archdiocese. She led this young mission to become a Pro-Region in 2010, then having one Nigerian sister as councillor besides another German sister who was novice mistress. Both Germans left Nigeria in August 2014, by then there were three convents with 40 Nigerian sisters who have been in charge in leadership as well as in novitiate and in all ministries since that time.

**Keywords:** Fundamental norms, values

The congregation of the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ (PHJC) was founded by St. Katharina of Dernbach in Germany in 1851 and gained papal approval in 1870. Spreading first within Europe (Germany, Netherlands, England) and then in the United States of America to care for German immigrants there from 1869 onwards, the congregation followed the call of Indian bishops to go to India in 1970 and in the following years to Mexico, Brazil, Kenya and finally in 2006 to Nigeria.

After Vatican II<sup>188</sup>, all religious institutes were asked to rewrite their constitutions, abolishing traditions that were no longer fitting to religious life and giving members a sure basis for a life moulded according to Jesus Christ and His teachings. In our congregation, this reform chapter was held in 1979 – I was a member of this chapter. Since I had been a college teacher of both German and English, I had to make sure that the German and the English texts were saying the same, and I was privileged to also draft some of the texts that were then accepted by Chapter and later by Rome.

So I write from this experience which I still treasure. I believe that constitutions are important for

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<sup>188</sup> See *Perfectae caritatis*, parts 2 and 3. This document was promulgated by Pope Paul VI in 1965. Congregations were given up to 15 years to hold the chapters necessary for the changes. In our Congregation, the General Superior died of cancer in office in 1977; a special chapter of elections had to be held in the same year which was not prepared to rewrite the constitutions. In 1978, our foundress was beatified, so only in 1979, this special chapter of affairs was held and in the end the new constitutions and general directory were unanimously accepted. The text of our constitutions is given to each of the sisters at the beginning of novitiate; it is not available outside the congregation.

congregations, not only for the necessary legal framework but also for a sense of belonging to a religious family with a tradition and precious heritage and a special charism and spirituality. In our congregation, the first rule was written by the foundress herself, a simple peasant woman in a poor part of Germany. She understood God's call to her to care for and serve all the needs of people around her. The attitude of listening attentively what the Holy Spirit tells us as to what is most needed in a place and at a time, constitutes the basis of our charism.

Our constitutions have two parts – the first part covers origin and charism, our life in vows, in ministry and in community, our prayer life and formation. The second part concerns leadership within the congregation. All through the text, there are the constitutions as such and then the General Directory, explanations and legal norms. They are clearly defined by having numbers from 1-101 (constitutions) or clarifications to these numbers, such as 56.1, (directory).

Main chapters have introductions laying down basic ideas. Concerning leadership, we read that the congregation has provinces and regions and that superiors see their office as growing out of love and service, in order to help build the kingdom of Christ within the church. They respect the dignity of each member, calling each to accept responsibility so that authority and obedience can supplement each other. It is stressed that the sisters are adults who are following a vocation given by God, so there is respect and love between all the members of the congregation – that is the ideal.

After this introduction, 56.1 defines the guidelines for the total congregation. Before quoting this text, I want to add a few remarks.

In the old constitutions and book of traditions and customs, there were a lot of small rules that had to be observed: no contact to the family of origin except for three letters in the course of a year (at a time when very few families has landlines, mobile phones and computers did not yet exist) – all mail was read first by the superior – no home visits except at the death of a parent, and then for at most three days – strict obedience to every command of the superior – silence except for half an hour at noon and in the evening – no contact to religious of other congregations – retreat always within the congregation etc.

Most of these traditions had been brought in by priests who advised the successors of the foundress in leadership. Most of the time the sisters were told that strictly enclosed religious life was much more valuable than charitable work. Most of these rules were more a hindrance than a help to an active religious life. Now, with Vatican II, here was another view of the life we felt we had been called to. Much more attention was given to the personality of the sister, the growth that was to be supported, a strengthening of meditation, bible studies, private prayer, spiritual direction. That also shows in the parts about the vows. Concerning leadership, there were new insights too. They are to be found in the introduction to the chapter about leadership. I will quote the text here in full; the text is to be found just before Constitution 56:

“As an international congregation living out of the same charism, we respect each other’s culture and accept our differences.

Leadership fosters the following principles throughout the whole congregation:

*Internationality* fosters a world-wide way of thinking, understanding, experiencing.

*Collegiality* is expressed in voluntary sharing of authority and responsibility in mutual listening, confidence and trust, evoking the gifts of all the members.

*Subsidiarity* requires that each sister, each local community, each province, pro-region, region and mission-area has the level of autonomy which allows them to assume their responsibilities while assuring the balance and good functioning of the whole.

*Solidarity* promotes mutual caring, support, and assistance among the various units, provinces, regions and mission areas.

*Flexibility* requires the adaptability to the changing needs and situations of the PHJC congregation, the church and the society.”

These guidelines had not been defined in the earlier rules of the congregation. They were felt helpful and necessary at the time they were accepted by all, and in each General Chapter since, some reference to them was made, confirming or basing some request and proposals on them.

All of these norms have some basis in the heritage of our foundress although she did not use the terms –some had not even been invented in her time. I want to just add a few points to each term.

***Internationality:*** In 1851, Germany still consisted of many small kingdoms, it was not yet a national state. And in 1803, all convents had been closed down, religious life just started anew within Germany from about 1830. Many active congregations especially of women were then founded to help the poor in the beginning of industrialization. And soon those religious also crossed borders – into the Netherlands, to England, for some time to Belgium and to Luxemburg, wherever there was need. Our foundress wrote in one of her letters: I do not know foreign sisters, we are all one.

Until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century however, there was rather multi-nationality than internationality. Sisters did not know other languages, each new foundation in another country developed on its own, because of the difficulties of travel, there was not much contact – except for the many letters of the foundress who all her life remained General Superior, until 1898. German remained the main language, circulars were not translated, until about 1930 most local and provincial superiors were German. Now, we have learnt to accept different cultures, languages, mentalities – and see the good in all of them. This was not an easy process. But as difficult as it was, as valuable it proved to be. Each culture has its own colours to add to the whole picture. Western culture for a while seemed to be the dominant culture – but adding Asian and African traits has really made life in our congregation more beautiful, meaningful, global. Thinking of the foundations in Kenya and in Nigeria, these new units strengthened the need to keep contact with one's family of origin; the former division was healed. That helped many of the sisters in the old provinces too. On the other hand, it was felt difficult to combine the financial



demands of those families on the congregation as it happened in both Asia and Africa. New balances had to be found.

There were other changes, too. From 1979, there were observers in General Chapters, non-delegates who could participate (not vote). It has been a blessing and helps the congregation, enabling us to really become international.

**Collegiality** was much easier to learn since the foundress always involved her councillors and the local superiors in decision making, inviting their input, listening with her heart and intelligence. But it is a value that not only counts inside the leadership ranks. It is a new kind of language in our constitutions, different from the former texts. Before, obedience was seen top-down; there were terms like sub-ordinates instead of sisters. Now, obedience is defined as a responsible listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit, discerning where the Spirit leads, and both sisters and leaders try to discern and then make decisions. This does not bar the need to take a final decision if there is conflict, but before a decision is taken, discernment has to be and consensus is aimed at.

**Subsidiarity** is another difficult issue; a bit like in the universal church. Social documents, encyclicals, recommend subsidiarity for any society – but in the church itself, it is not so much practised. So in the congregation, it is an ideal but it still needs growing. Authority sometimes does not believe that the smaller units really understand their own problems better than people outside. Yet subsidiarity guarantees that small units can learn to grow and solve their problems by their own power – and their own right. In Nigeria, we tried

from the beginning to involve our sisters in defining the ministries from seeing the need of the people among whom we lived. And ministries that had not been in the older parts of the congregation grew up in Nigeria where there were people who needed a help that fit their needs. So it is only in Nigeria that the congregation supports and even founds self-help groups for widows in the villages; most of the time the sisters working in the mobile clinics start and guide these groups.

***Solidarity*** is a form of love, and this is very much alive within our congregation. Sisters care for one another, circulars, publications, personal contact ensure that we know about one another and try to understand, to help, to further contact and support – and this is new too, because in the old rule, sisters had been told to only talk to or connect with members of their own local convent. This new help is best shown at times of crisis, sickness, in any kind of need. At the time when the first sisters started to work in Nigeria, Germany was the first authority as the sending province. There were several sisters in Germany who supported the pioneers, in prayer, in support by sending materials and money, in interest. When we accepted the first orphans, handicapped and malnourished children, some of the old sisters sent part of their pocket money to buy food and clothing for those children.

***Flexibility***, the strength to change when that change will further our ministry, our support for the poor, when conditions change, is one of the good attitudes that are prevalent in the congregation. The foundress made that clear from the beginning when she said: The purpose of

our congregation is to further Christian living by example, instruction and prayer.

Furthering Christian living, evangelization, does not mean to keep giving answers according to a catechism, answering questions that no one asks. We have to listen to the questions people have, and to answer them, now, today, in the situation in which they live, in which we live. Like with all ideals and guidelines, it is never enough to practise, to adapt, to live them. In all we do there has to be growth, we wish to become closer to Christ, to be better disciples. This is what we try to be true Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ in this our world.

**PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE ROLE OF  
CONSECRATED LIFE IN FAMILY APOSTOLATE:  
PRESENTED DURING THE ANNUAL OYO DIOCESAN  
PASTORAL SEMINAR 2015**

*Sr. Agnes Acha, DMMM*

**1. Introduction**

In 1997, Pope John Paul II instituted February 2<sup>nd</sup> as World Day for Consecrated Life, which is attached to the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple. The Holy Father Pope Francis proclaimed the ***Year of Consecrated Life***, starting from November 30, 2014 until February 2, 2016! This year is to be along the lines of the Year of the Priest (2009-2010) a few years ago, Year of St. Paul (2008-2009), or the Year of Faith of more recent memory. The year also marks the 50th anniversary of *Perfectae Caritatis*, a decree on religious life, and *Lumen Gentium*, the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. In Pope Francis' message at the Vigil beginning the Year of Consecrated Life, expresses gratitude to God for the precious gift of consecrated life to the Church and to the world. He prayed that this Year of Consecrated Life may be an occasion for all members of the People of God to thank the Lord, from whom every good comes, for the gift of consecrated life, *appreciating it appropriately*. Much of the content connected with this celebratory Year is directed to Consecrated persons, but it is for the whole church.

Pope Francis noted three aims of the Year of Consecrated Life. The first aim “is to look at the past with gratitude.” Pope Francis starts us off with the disposition of gratitude as we look back. He invites Consecrated persons to claim the richness of their Institute’s history, charism, and action of the Spirit which brings them to the point where they are today.

This is a valuable activity because, as Pope Francis explains, “Recounting our history is essential for preserving our identity, for strengthening our unity as a family and our common sense of belonging. More than an exercise in archaeology or the cultivation of mere nostalgia, it calls for following in the footsteps of past generations in order to grasp the high ideals, and the vision and values which inspired them, beginning with the founders and foundresses and the first communities. Looking at our past can help remind us of our goals, values, and ideal, and recognize how we live consistently with this vision and where we might do better.

The second aim of the Year of Consecrated Life is a call “to live the present with passion”. Grateful remembrance of the past leads us, as we listen attentively to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church today, to implement ever more fully the essential aspects of our consecrated life.” Recalling those things most important to me, the things innate to my identity, I can claim them as my own (again or for the first time) and live them out anew, with passion! The challenge to Consecrated persons is no less the same for all believers. “For the various founders and foundresses, the Gospel was the absolute rule, whereas every other rule was meant merely to be an expression of the Gospel and a means of living the Gospel to the full.... The creativity of charity is boundless; it is able to find

countless new ways of bringing the newness of the Gospel to every culture and every corner of society.” According to the Summa Pontiff, “Living the present with passion” means becoming “experts in communion,”... In a polarized society, where different cultures experience difficulty in living alongside one another, where the powerless encounter oppression, where inequality abounds, we are called to offer a concrete model of community which, by acknowledging the dignity of each person and sharing our respective gifts, makes it possible to live as brothers and sisters so as to be men and women of communion. He admonishes that the Consecrated persons should have the courage to be present in the midst of conflict and tension, as a credible sign of the presence of the Spirit who inspires in human hearts a passion for all to be one (cf. Jn 17:21).”

The third aim is “to embrace the future with hope”. Hope for the future makes the past both meaningful and bearable, and the passion for the present possible. This is not meant to be a wishful-thinking hope, but a leap of faith. How can I *embrace* that which is not yet here? Pope Francis explains, “this hope is not based on statistics or accomplishments, but on the One in whom we have put our trust (cf. 2 Tim 1:2), the One for whom “nothing is impossible” (Lk 1:37). This is the hope which does not disappoint; it is the hope which enables consecrated life to keep writing its great history well into the future. It is to that future that we must always look, conscious that the Holy Spirit spurs us on so that he can still do great things with us.”

Our presentation is in four parts. The first part presents the Consecrated life: the identity, initial religious formation and on-going formation. The second part

focuses on the consecrated life and the family apostolate from practical perspective. The main areas are evangelization and mission, authentic life witness, Christian and Catholic education, medical apostolate, pastoral ministry, social services and of course through family visitation. We individuate the challenges to family Apostolate and suggest way forward in the fourth section.

## 2. Consecrated Life

### *2.1 What is Consecrated Life or who are the Consecrated Persons?*

Consecration ordinarily signifies rendering sacred or holy. To be consecrated means to be set apart and be rendered sacred for a religious purpose. Consecrated persons are those who have been set apart for a unique vocation in the church. They are those “who set out to follow Christ with greater liberty, and to imitate him more closely, by practicing the evangelical counsels”<sup>189</sup> of obedience, poverty and chastity. Therefore they “bind themselves to the Lord in a special way”. And so it is seen as an act through which a person is withdrawn from worldly concerns and introduced to the special and exclusive service of God. The Code of Canon law formally presents various forms of consecrated life: religious institutes, secular institutes, hermits, and consecrated virgins; alongside these are societies of apostolic life. According to the Code of Canon law,

*“Life consecrated through profession of the evangelical counsels is a stable form of living, in which the faithful follow Christ more closely under the action of the Holy*

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<sup>189</sup> A. Flannery, ed., The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents, Vatican Council II, Perfectae Caritatis no1.

*Spirit, and are totally dedicated to God who is supremely loved. By a new and special title they are dedicated to seek the perfection of charity in the service of God's kingdom, for the honor of God, the building up of the church and the salvation of the world. They are a splendid sign in the church, as they foretell the heavenly glory" "Christ's faithful freely assume this manner of life in institutes of consecrated life which are canonically established by the competent ecclesiastical authority. By vows or by other sacred bonds, in accordance with the laws of their own institutes, they profess the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience. Because of the charity to which these counsels lead, they are linked in a special way to the Church and its mystery" (Canon 573 # 1 & 2).*

To be a consecrated person presupposes that one is already a Christian. Religious consecration is rooted in the baptismal consecration. Thus it is built on the basic Christian life. However, "baptism in itself does not include the call to celibacy or virginity, the renunciation of possessions or obedience to a superior, in the form proper to the evangelical counsels. The profession of the evangelical counsels thus presupposes a particular gift of God not given to everyone, as Jesus himself emphasizes with respect to voluntary celibacy (cf. Mt 19: 10-12)".<sup>190</sup> The consecrated persons "...are "pro-culture" since they aim to enrich all that is best in local culture. They are "counter-culture" in the prophetic way since their lifestyle contradicts false and bloated values such as excessive materialism, sexism, personalism and secularism. Because of their consecration, they teach with a difference: they

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<sup>190</sup> John Paul II, *The Consecrated Life: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Vita Consecrata*, Vatican City 1996, no. 30.



point the way to the fullness of reality and challenge the values of a materialistic world.<sup>191</sup> It is an unusual way of life; unfamiliar to the natural easier pattern of human behaviour. It is like “swimming against the current”.

Consecrated life has a Trinitarian character. There is always at the origin the initiative of the Father. It is the Father that begins the process of consecration by making one aware of his presence, his excellence, his goodness, and his dazzling attributes surpassing all creatures. Consecrated life is Christological. Christ is central in life of Consecrated persons. Consecrated life simply means taking up the identity of Christ, identifying with Christ, assuming his mode of life and attitude towards life. He sets the example; he is the epitome of consecration. Again, consecrated life has a pneumatological dimension. The Holy Spirit is the force, the strength that gives the energy to consecrated persons to follow God and fulfill their proper vocation and mission. The Trinitarian nature of the Christian life is expressed in a vivid way and it anticipates in a way the *eschatological* fulfillment towards which the whole church is tending. Consecrated life is a foreshadowing of the kingdom.

The religious consecration cannot be considered apart from mission. Indeed, “...*the sense of mission is at the very heart of every form of consecrated life*”.<sup>192</sup> Religious institutes are aggregates of consecrated persons ordered toward the mission of the church in accord with the nature, spirit, and end of each institute. This is true

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<sup>191</sup> Originally affirmed about religious brothers but are applicable to the sisters. Cf. J. Aniagwu, Collaborative Ministry: Priests, Sisters and Brothers, Abuja 2001, 6-7.

<sup>192</sup> John Paul II, The Consecrated Life: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Vita Consecrata, Vatican City 1996, no.25.

whether the religious institutes are dedicated to contemplation or active apostolate. It is likewise true whether the members serve in a corporate apostolate of the institute or perform an individual service in the name of the institute. Through prayer, penance, and charity, the consecrated persons conform themselves ever more fully to Christ as they address human needs in various cultures and particular churches. In cooperation and collaboration with the bishops, priests and lay faithful, the consecrated persons manifest ecclesial communion and build up the life and holiness of the Church.<sup>193</sup>

According to Canon 673, "*The apostolate of all religious consists first of all in the witness of their consecrated life which they are bound to foster by prayer and penance*". The religious bear witness to Christ by living a life of complete dedication through the profession of the evangelical counsels. Their consecration is nurtured and sustained by prayer and penance testifying to the deepest yearning of the soul for union with the divine person. The Church esteems and recognizes it as the primary apostolate of religious in the mission of the Church. In accordance with the teachings of Christ, the Consecrated persons testify that the world cannot be transformed without the spirit of the beatitudes.<sup>194</sup> Consecrated persons thus become true signs of Christ in the world. They live in such a way that

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<sup>193</sup> R. M. McDermott, "The Apostolate of Institutes", in *New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law* (Bangalore 2003) 843; Cf. LG 42, 44-46; PC 5-10, 14, 20; ES I: 23-40; MR 14, 28, 33-37, 46, 52; VC 48-53, 72, 96-99; See also G. Ghirlanda, "Relations between Religious Institutes and Diocesan Bishops", *Con Lif* 14/1 (1989) 37-71.

<sup>194</sup> McDermott, "The Apostolate of Institutes", 843; LG 31b, 44; PC 1, 2, 6, 24; ET 53; VC 33-35, 72.

their very life is an eloquent though often silent, proclamation of the Gospel.

Some religious institutes are dedicated solely to contemplation (Canon 674). The members of such institutes imitate Christ praying on the mountain and offer their entire lives to God in service to others through divine worship, asceticism, contemplation, and charity. They occupy a paramount position in the Church, and the Christian faithful regard their houses as sources of blessings and graces. They contribute immeasurably to the apostolic fruitfulness of the Church. Since the contemplative life is of the very essence of these institutes, their members cannot be called to participate in active apostolic works no matter how great the need may be. Many such institutes offer hospitality and pastoral care through directed and preached retreats, spiritual direction and confessions in conformity with the charism of the institute. The synod on consecrated life praised the witness of contemplative institutes and encouraged their contribution to inter-religious dialogue in younger churches where other religions prevail.<sup>195</sup>

Regarding the Institutes dedicated to Apostolic Activity, Canon 675 # 1 affirms that: "*Apostolic action belongs to the very nature of Institutes dedicated to works of apostolate. Accordingly, the whole life of the members is to be imbued with an apostolic spirit; indeed the apostolic action is to be informed by a religious spirit*". There is a variety of apostolic religious institutes in the Church. Their apostolates flow from the very nature and spirit of

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<sup>195</sup> McDermott, "The Apostolate of Institutes", 843-844; PC 7, 9; AG 40; ES I: 36; VC 8, 101; See also SCRIS, "The Contemplative Dimension of Religious Life" (1980) CLD 9, 410-431.

such institutes. Their members experience and live the dynamic unity between contemplation and apostolic activity.<sup>196</sup> Canon 675 # 2, notes that *apostolic action is to proceed always from an intimate union with God and is to confirm and foster this union*. Contemplation and communion with God sustain and nourish apostolic service. A solid spiritual life enables religious to see all things in God and God in all things. They follow after the example of Christ who showed a profound communion with the Father joined to an intense life of service. They bring God to the people in their apostolates and the people to God in prayer.<sup>197</sup>

Thus, *apostolic action, to be exercised in the name and by the mandate of the church, is to be carried out in the communion of the church* (Canon 675 # 3). As public juridical persons, religious institutes perform their apostolic activities in the name of the Church. Both the religious serving in the apostolates proper or entrusted to the institute and an individual religious assigned by the competent superior to an apostolate perform their work in obedience to their superiors and the diocesan bishops.<sup>198</sup> Mindful of the distinct charism of religious institutes, the diocesan bishop encourages and coordinates their apostolates within the diocese (Canon 394). He meets with major superiors in cordial and open dialogue to assure the organic communion of the diocese, to implement its pastoral directives, and to promote the nature and end of each institute.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> McDermott, "The Apostolate of Institutes", 844; PC 8,20; VC 9.

<sup>197</sup> McDermott, "The Apostolate of Institutes", 844; PC 8; VC 9, 74, 93.

<sup>198</sup> Cf. McDermott, "The Apostolate of Institutes", 844; Canon 678, ## 1-2.

<sup>199</sup> John Paul II, *The Consecrated Life: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Vita Consecrata*, Vatican City 1996, no. 49

According to Canon 678 # 1 *Religious are subject to the power of bishops whom they are bound to follow with devoted submission and reverence in those matters which regard the care of souls, the public exercise of divine worship, and other works of the apostolate.* So as pastors of particular churches, the diocesan bishops promote, coordinate, and exercise due vigilance over all pastoral activity in their dioceses (*CD* 35.4; *ES* I: 25-26; *MR* 53; Canons 375, 392, 394). In works proper to the institute and in works entrusted to them, religious are subject to the authority of bishops in all that pertains to the care of souls (cf. Can 150), the public exercise of divine worship (Can 834). This includes the public celebration of divine worship within the religious community and all other apostolic works (Can 394). Bishops should welcome and support the services of religious, while religious should work in full communion with the bishops. Through cordial dialogue, major superiors and bishops direct the pastoral initiatives of religious in accord with the needs of the people. It is to the advantage of the entire church if there is mutual trust, collaboration, and cooperation between bishops and the consecrated persons.

Moreover, *in exercising apostolate, religious are also subject to their proper superiors and must remain faithful to the discipline of the institute. The bishops themselves are not to fail to urge this obligation if the case warrants it* (Canon 678 # 2). This indicates the dual authority to which the consecrated persons are subject in carrying out their apostolate. Superiors hold primary responsibility for the life and mission of their institutes. They serve as guides for their brothers or sisters in their spiritual and apostolic life (Canon 596; *VC* 43). Bishops, while not interfering in the internal life and governance, have the

responsibility to promote and foster the life and works of the religious institutes present in the particular churches (Canon 586 # 2; *Vita Consecrata* 48-49).

Among consecrated persons there are also those who by vocation and mission are clerics. The blending of these two aspects of the one divine call has been documented since the beginning of the consecrated life. The vocation to the diaconate or priesthood within an institute of consecrated life or society of apostolic life brings out, according to the special character of the charism proper to it, the way in which the ordained minister, although responding to this sacramental reality in the church, can live with an apostolic missionary spirituality and activity, which in its variety reflects the richness of Christ's priesthood, and through the action of the Spirit makes the vocation and pastoral activity of the ministers of the Lord not something univocal, but extremely rich and expressive.

Priests "who belong to religious orders and congregations represent a spiritual enrichment for the entire diocesan presbyterate to which they contribute specific charisms and special ministries."<sup>200</sup> The same thing can be said of clerical members of secular institutes. (Cf. Canon 713.3). Consecrated persons elevated to the episcopate continue to be members of their institute.<sup>201</sup> The harmonious blend of the two aspects of the one personal vocation, that is, the sacramental and charismatic grace of the consecrated life, can bear abundant fruits in holiness and in the apostolate to the degree in which religious priests have a clear

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<sup>200</sup> John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (March 25, 1992), 31.

<sup>201</sup> Cf. *Directives for Formation in Religious Institutes*, 108.

understanding of the nature of their ecclesial ministry, draw inspiration and strength for their spiritual life from the fonts of their own institute, live according to their own style of life and are available for an apostolic outreach in the universal and particular church. (Cf. Canon 705). This is also true of hermits and contemplative monks who combine the diaconate or priesthood with their specific consecration.

## 2.2 *Initial Religious Formation and On-going Formation*

Generally speaking, most institutes have three main stages in their formation program: the aspirancy usually done in a Juniorate which is equivalent to secondary school; postulancy or pre-novitiate period is usually done in a Postulate and novitiate usually in a Novitiate house. While the last stage is a *conditio sine qua non* for a valid profession of vows, the first two are not compulsory and the duration differs from one institute to the other. The novitiate period is usually two years for most institutes. The first year is also known as the canonical year. It is compulsory that the novice remain in the novitiate house during this year unless with a very serious reason. Usually, this period is dedicated to learning the meaning of the consecrated life in general and the ways of life of the particular institute. It is during this period that both the candidate and the institute through the formators determine whether the candidate has a vocation to the consecrated life or not. During this year, most institutes prohibit secular studies. The novices seldom go outside the novitiate and entertain as less visitors as possible to minimize distraction. During the second year, they are sent to various communities of their institute for

experience/apostolic work. In this way, they are exposed to the active apostolate of the institute. They return to the novitiate house a few months before their first profession. They then make the three vows of obedience, poverty and chastity and agree to conform to the charism, spirit and lifestyle of their specific institute.

Some religious institutes have Scholasticates where orientation courses are organized for the newly professed sisters either before they are located to communities or a few years after first profession. The duration of the first profession is one year. The vows are renewed each year for three years. At the end of the third year, the sister renews the vows for three years together no longer yearly. These six years are referred to as a period of temporary vows. If the superiors deem it fit, at the end of the sixth year, the religious is allowed to make her final profession of the three vows. This makes her a full-fledged member of her religious institute with certain rights and obligations varying from one congregation to the other.

We want to emphasize that the formation is a lifelong process. It neither stops after the first profession nor after the final/perpetual profession. This is continued through retreats and the *on-going formation* programs. Each religious congregation organizes hers and there are collective ones. If for any reason a finally religious wants to discontinue or her congregation decides to dismiss him/her, the competent ecclesiastical authority has to confirm the decision and he/she will be dispensed of the vows : the diocesan bishop for institutes of Diocesan right and the Congregation for Consecrated Life for institutes of Pontifical right. The person remains a religious if this is not done and cannot validly receive the sacrament of



matrimony. Each congregation or institute follows the general directives of the canon law regarding the formation of their candidates, however, each institute adapt such norms to their context. Having considered the identity of consecrated persons and their formation, we proceed now to look at their input in the family apostolate.

### **3. The Consecrated Life and the Family Apostolate**

The exhortation made by John Paul II to the heads of institutes of consecrated life is becoming ever more pressing in our day. He urged them "to consider—always with substantial respect for the proper and original charism of each one—the apostolate of the family as one of the priority tasks."<sup>202</sup> Whether in the area of the ordinary pastoral work or through their contact with families in their diverse apostolic ministries, consecrated persons share in various ways the current situation of families in all parts of the world. Some institutes, because of their inspiration from the mystery of Nazareth or their specific apostolic choice are dedicated to the family apostolate. In bringing about mutual aid and an exchange of gifts they highlight the precious value of the vocation to virginity and the complementary aspect of the call to marriage.

The methods of this apostolate are widely known. One need only recall a key text from *Familiaris Consortio*: "Hence the possibility for men and women religious, and members of secular institutes and other institutes of perfection, either individually or in groups, to develop their service to families, with particular solicitude for

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<sup>202</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 74.

children, especially if they are abandoned, unwanted, orphaned, poor or handicapped. They can also visit families and look after the sick; they can foster relationships of respect and charity toward one-parent families or families that are in difficulties or are separated; they can offer their own work of teaching and counseling in the preparation of young people for marriage and in helping couples toward truly responsible parenthood; they can open their own houses for simple and cordial hospitality so that families can find there the sense of God's presence and gain a taste for prayer and recollection, and see the practical examples of lives lived in charity and fraternal joy as members of the larger family of God."<sup>203</sup> The Consecrated persons collaborate with the clergy to ensure the well-being of families.

### 3.1 *In the Area of Evangelization and Mission*

We said earlier on that the Consecrated life presupposes the Christian life. Thus as Christians, consecrated persons participate in the three fold offices of Christ as priest, prophet and king.<sup>204</sup> According to Vatican II, *The baptized, by regeneration and anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated to be a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, that through all the works of Christian man they may offer spiritual sacrifices and proclaim the perfection of him who called them out of darkness into his marvelous light....*<sup>205</sup> By virtue of this common priesthood, the non-clergy among the consecrated persons exercise the liturgical functions that do not require sacramental ordination. Examples of these are: being lectors, leading the petitions at prayer of

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<sup>203</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 74.

<sup>204</sup> Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 783.

<sup>205</sup> Vatican II, *Dogmatic Constitution of the Church (Lumen Gentium)*, no. 10.

the faithful, acting as extraordinary ministers of the Holy Eucharist, participating in the formation of future priests and consecrated persons, animating Christian communities, serving as matrons and spiritual directors/directresses to pious societies both at the parish and diocesan levels, giving spiritual support, directing retreats and promoting the fundamental values of life, justice and peace. It is through the proclamation of the good news that believers primarily exercise their prophetic function. The way in which individual members of the church carry it out depends largely on their particular state in life. The consecrated persons comply with the mandate of the risen Lord to his disciples to *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you...”* (Matt 28: 19-20). As part of the church which is missionary in nature, the consecrated persons readily and willingly engage in various missionary activities. They impart the gospel message to different classes of people and families. They manifest God’s love to all peoples *“even to the ends of the earth”*.

Regarding the royal function of the consecrated persons, in some places they are members of the diocesan and parish pastoral councils. Thus, they are part of the management and policy formulation in the local Church. Their duty in the parish is not reduced simply to making the altar, being messengers, typists or even secretaries. They have been meaningfully engaged as pastoral assistants. Therefore, their duties include counseling, pre-marital enquires, preparation of couples for marriage, taking Holy Communion to the sick, and assisting the priest in distributing Holy Communion. The some assist

as financial administrators of parishes or dioceses. In fact, they engage in collaborative ministry<sup>206</sup> with the clergy and the laity. According to John Paul II, "... consecrated persons 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* in the area of evangelization, catechesis and parish life".<sup>207</sup> The Consecrated persons engage in inter-religious dialogue with other religions and they also dialogue with our separated Christian brethren. Dialogue is a very important avenue of evangelization. It starts from within the church itself at all levels and diffuses further.<sup>208</sup>

### 3.2. *In the Area of Authentic Witness of Life*

More than simply the oral preaching of the gospel, consecrated persons contribute in a significant way to the family apostolate by living a life of authentic witnessing. In the various places they are found, consecrated persons live in such a way that their very lives become an eloquent sermon to all around them. Pope John Paul II noted that rather than needing more teachers, the modern man and woman need authentic witnesses to the love of God in Christ. This implies that they need the consecrated persons who would apart from the missionary activities and teachings are readily available to them as authentic signs of God's love i.e. those whose lives would be eloquent sermons to them. They preach

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<sup>206</sup> To learn more about the collaborative ministry between the religious and the clergy, cf. J. Aniagwu, Collaborative Ministry: Priests, Sisters and Brothers, Abuja 2001.

<sup>207</sup> John Paul II, The Consecrated Life: Post –Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Vita Consecrata, Vatican City 1996, no. 49.

<sup>208</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Ecclesia in Africa, no. 65.

without use of words and testify without calling attention on themselves to the primary place of the divine in daily life.

It is significant that the ecclesial understanding of fruitfulness in apostolate of consecrated persons does not lay much emphasis on the activity aspect of apostolic engagements as much as on the witnessing element, the identity and the being of consecrated persons. Thus a religious is a real apostle by the fact of being a true religious. Thus the most obligatory apostolate is that of good example. Giving good example is a powerful form of witnessing, which in turn is nourished and experienced through prayer, union with God and the spirit of penance.<sup>209</sup>

Consecrated persons live the Christian life and their consecrated life in an authentic way. It is noteworthy that “...people nowadays prefer *to see sermons* rather than just hear them.<sup>210</sup> An old Latin adage has it that *Exempla sunt validiora quam verba* (Examples are more valid, that is more convincing than words). Pope Paul VI along the same line of thought said that “Modern man listens more to witnesses than to teachers, and if he listens to teachers it is because they are also witnesses”.<sup>211</sup> By living a life of authentic witnessing, consecrated persons make an immense contribution to the growth of the Church.

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<sup>209</sup> M. G. Nwagwu, *Consecrated Life in the Church: Discipline and Praxis*, Port Harcourt 2008, 110,113.

<sup>210</sup> J. Aniagwu, “The Church’s Role in Promoting Justice in Nigeria”, in *Bodija Journal*, 3 June 1991, 53.

<sup>211</sup> Address to the Pontifical Council for the Laity, 1974.

### 3.3 *In the Area of Solid Christian and Catholic Education*

Education was considered the fastest and best means of evangelization and remains thus even till today in spite of the government take-over of schools. Remarkably, the early missionaries effectively converted the people to the Christian religion through the provision of education for them. Thus education did not only make impact through the qualitative growth of the Church, but even the actual quantitative growth. Today, most of the important dignitaries of our world including Bishops and priests are products of Catholic missionary schools. And most of these schools were and are still being managed by consecrated persons. The standard and quality of education offered in institutions where the consecrated persons are in charge is simply glaring. No wonder then it is evident in most places, that any time an institution managed by consecrated persons is established, people withdraw their children from other schools to that school.

It is also through institutes of education that the consecrated persons have been able to inculcate Catholic faith and doctrine, discipline and good morals to children. People are generally more confident to leave their children in the hands of consecrated persons than otherwise. And so far, the consecrated men and women have not betrayed the trust!! The consecrated persons share in the teaching ministry of Christ at all levels ranging from Nursery schools to Universities. They teach, train and instruct their pupils and students in such a way as to meet with the challenges of the secular and spiritual life and not simply to obtain the academic certificate. That is the essence of integral education so much in demand in our society today. The consecrated persons extend their teaching apostolate to special schools for the physically

and the mentally challenged, the handicapped, the blind, the deaf and the dumb. Most of the institutes owned or managed by the consecrated persons are characterized by love, peace, justice, dedication and commitment. It is important to note that the majority of the consecrated persons themselves are products of such institutions manned by the consecrated men and women.

*Nemo dat quod non habet*, (no one gives what he or she does not have), religious institutes and congregations have made and are still making serious efforts to train their members in different fields so that they can in turn educate others. Days are gone when the sisters were constrained and restricted to the kitchen and domestic works only. Today, in response to the signs of time there are many consecrated persons who are professionals, medical and academic doctors, lecturers, lawyers, accountants, teachers, nurses etc. And in most of these areas they attain the highest level of the academic statutes and excellence. As consecrated persons with such high qualifications they stand out distinctly by the way they render services to all the people of God without discrimination of race, religion and gender.

The consecrated persons have made much contribution in intellectual advancement of the family, church and society. They have imparted knowledge and made a lot of impact world-wide through their teachings and writings in the area of higher learning. Many of them have helped to train and produce important personnel both for the Church and the society. They have also made enormous contributions towards the formation of seminarians and priests. The Consecrated Persons give integral education (socially, physically, religiously, and morally). We re-echo the words of John Paul II here, "*With*

*respectful sensitivity and missionary boldness, consecrated men and women should show that faith in Jesus Christ enlightens the whole enterprise of education, never disparaging human values, but rather confirming and elevating them. Thus do consecrated persons become witnesses and instruments of the power of the Incarnation and the vitality of the Spirit. This task of theirs is one of the most significant manifestations of that motherhood which the Church, in the image of Mary, exercises on behalf of all her children.... I warmly invite members of institutes devoted to education to be faithful to their founding charism and to their traditions, knowing that the preferential love for the poor finds a special application in the choice of means capable of freeing people from that grave form of poverty which is the lack of cultural and religious training.*<sup>212</sup>

### *3.4 Medical Apostolate*

Through the medical apostolate, consecrated persons participate in the healing ministry of Christ. They serve the sick, the suffering and the agonizing with love, patience, sympathy and compassion. While they care for the sick, they do not neglect their spiritual and material wellbeing. This is done through improved health-care services in Clinics, Dispensaries, Primary Health care programs, Maternity Homes, Homes for the aged and hospitals. Some also engage in home-based nursing. They devotedly attend to all who need medical attention without discrimination. A good number of consecrated women carry out the medical apostolate also through

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<sup>212</sup> John Paul II, *Vita consecrata*, n. 97.



their writings.<sup>213</sup> The consecrated persons touch the families by attending to the sick in the hospitals and at homes.

### *3.5 Pastoral Ministry*

Bearing in mind that the young are the foundation upon which a strong local Church is built, the religious painstakingly organize catechism classes for children and even adults in order to give them moral instructions and inculcate in them sound religious discipline. They engage in Religious Education program, Retreats, Workshops, Parish and prison ministries. They meticulously care for the spiritual well-being of all without discrimination. The consecrated persons settle family disputes – between husbands and wives or between parents and the children. Through the teaching of catechism/moral instruction, the faith of families is deepened and the moral life of the family is affected positively. They help to prepare couples for marriage by doing marriage counseling for them. Some young men bring their intended brides to the sisters in the convent. She remains there until the wedding day. The Priests among the Consecrated persons administer the sacrament of Matrimony. The role of the consecrated persons is to unite families and not to divide them.

### *3.6 Social Services*

Through crucial social services, consecrated persons imitate and actualize the love, sympathy, and concern of Christ as they serve the under-privileged, the orphans, the widows, single parents, unwanted babies, teenage

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<sup>213</sup> For example, Sr. L. McSweeney, *Facts of Life*, Ibadan 1990; B. Azide – L. McSweeney, *Pastoral Care of HIV/AIDS*, Faith and Life Series 7; Abuja 2001.

pregnant girls, parishioners, the physically and mentally challenged and other marginalized persons. Notably, consecrated persons engage in economic empowerment of women at all levels and encourage personal and community efforts for self-help. They engage in agricultural programs, small-scale industries for self-reliance and creation of job opportunities for the unemployed poor of the society. They seek for the material well-being of all without discrimination.

Consecrated persons intervene as a body at crisis situations. They help in humanitarian development and disaster relief. They have offered capacity building and training as well as technical assistance to the poor, suffering and the less privileged. In situations of war, they distribute materials to the people. They assist the wounded and help the dying to die a good death. For instance the consecrated persons rallied round and assisted the Ghanaian illegal aliens when they were expelled from Nigeria in 1983. The same is true during the famous “Bomb blast” in Lagos on the 27<sup>th</sup> of January 2002. Again during the middle belt crisis in 2004, they collected food, clothing, drugs and other items for the refugees in Makurdi. They shared material resources to the displaced people in Benue, Ebonyi, Warri and Uyo. They made a contribution towards helping the victims of Tsunami disaster in 2005. They made contributions to the Bishops of Maiduguri and Kotangora when Muslims destroyed their homes during a religious riot in March 2006.

In 1999 the women religious formed a Committee for the Support of the Dignity of Women (COSUDOW).<sup>214</sup> Through this committee, the NCWR has been able to give aid to many national victims and brought back many women sold to prostitution in foreign countries. Some individual religious and their particular congregations have made much input towards the emancipation of women. For instance: Sr. Rose Uchem MSHR started the *Ifendu for Women's Development* at Enugu; the HHCJs are running *The Centre for Women Studies and Intervention (CWSI)*. The consecrated women as a body and most female religious congregations rehabilitate those rejected by the society and help them to realize their dignity as human beings and as God's children. The Consecrated persons through working in orphanages/motherless babies help families. They also run Old People's homes by helping families to care for their elderly ones when there is otherwise no one to do that.

#### **4. Challenges to Family Apostolate**

It is unfortunate that some members of the clergy perceive the church as their "own proper heritage" and the consecrated persons as mere helpers that operate to the extent that the clergy allow them. On the other hand, some religious see themselves as supra-diocesan persons. Again some congregations that have pontifical status take themselves as only directly accountable to Rome, and so "have little stake in the particular Church where they are assigned; their real allegiance is no more than that of

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<sup>214</sup> Osiyemi, A History of the Nigeria Conference of Women Religious, 20-21.

tenants, hirelings, birds of passage, who are here today, gone tomorrow”.<sup>215</sup>

On the one hand are consecrated persons who are “loose”. Such religious go too close to any of the couples to the risk of his/her consecrated life or endangering the marriage fidelity of the couples. Some consecrated persons interfere with family issues which they may not want him/her to know in the name of family apostolate. On the other hand are the couples themselves suspecting the Consecrated persons – unnecessary suspicion to the point of not wanting to be helped.

**Cultural Bias/Tribalism.** Cultural bias has caused much harm than good in the lives and works of the consecrated persons. Some Consecrated persons are so culturally biased that they find it difficult to accept and work with those who have other cultural backgrounds. In some instances no provision is made for teaching of the local language. Some do not care to learn the language of the locality where they are working thus making communication, mission and evangelization difficult.

**Lack of Means of Communication/Transportation** has made the family apostolate difficult for the consecrated persons. Coupled with this is financial restraint. It is usually said that “anointing without cash is annoying”. Sometimes there is outright rejection of the Consecrated persons which is usually caused by shallow spirituality among the family members. Consecrated persons sometimes experience lack of openness by the family members or some of them.

In some instances, the role of consecrated persons in family problems is undermined. One hears comments

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<sup>215</sup> J. Aniagwu, Collaborative Ministry, 20.

like: “you are not married, so you don’t know what it is all about, you won’t understand”. In some instances, the consecrated persons demonstrate lack of proper understanding of relationship/family. At other times some clergy and lay faithful depict ignorance of the consecrated life and refuse to be enlightened.

When some clergy want to assert their authority over the Consecrated persons (particularly the sisters), they easily quote that “the church is hierarchical”. But they forget this when they want to cause division among the sisters and when they want to accomplish a selfish aim. You can imagine a Parish priest wanting a sister to work in a particular family apostolate, ignores the superior of the community and liaises with the particular sister. The superior would have known better the person that would be more suitable for the apostolate. Some Catholic clergy simply portray dislike/hatred for the consecrated life. They prefer the lay faithful to the consecrated men and women even in situations where the consecrated persons would have been more appropriate.

Without adequate religious formation and proper education, the family apostolate by the Consecrated person yields little or no positive result. Lack of exposure can be counterproductive in the family apostolate. There is no doubt that globalization has both positive and negative impacts on the family. It is necessary to harmonize and integrate globalization and the use of modern technology and means of communication in family.

## **5. The Way Forward**

There is an urgent need of a new orientation. There is need of a complete change of attitude and mind-set on the

part of both the clergy and the lay faithful regarding the role of consecrated life in the family apostolate. They should be able to discard those age-old prejudices that have neither basis in Scripture, in ecclesiology nor in the authentic traditions of the Catholic Church. Every segment of the church is important and adds to the completeness of the whole. To enhance the needed cooperation between the religious and particular Churches, it is acknowledged that:

*Better reciprocal knowledge will result if the theology and spirituality of the consecrated life are made part of the theological preparation of diocesan priests, and if adequate attention to the theology of the particular Church and the spirituality of the diocesan clergy is included in the formation of consecrated persons.”<sup>216</sup>*

A genuine formation of consecrated women starting from the moment of their admission through initial formation period on to the on-going formation levels is imperative. In order to be appropriate, productive collaborators of the clergy in the ministry, they require adequate and relevant formation both in doctrinal, apostolic and practical disciplines (can. 660). Therefore “superiors should devote great care to the formation, especially the spiritual formation, of their subjects, and also to the promotion of their higher studies”.<sup>217</sup> The Catholic clergy and even the lay faithful would be reluctant to confer or share sensitive pastoral responsibilities with consecrated

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<sup>216</sup> John Paul II, *The Consecrated Life: Post –Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Vita Consacrata*, Vatican City 1996, no. 50.

<sup>217</sup> A. Flannery, ed., *The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, Vatican Council II, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 617.

persons who are not well equipped to handle them. Most priests and laity readily accept to collaborate with well trained, competent consecrated persons. The clergy, consecrated persons and the laity are called upon to develop the culture of reading meaningful and spiritual books to update themselves. Regrettably, this culture is gradually dying off.

We want to emphasize that consecrated persons still have a lot of work to do in the church. They are to strive to be more committed and dedicated to their various duties and apostolate. There is no need to waste time and talents aspiring to other duties that could derive from ordination of women; nor engage in unhealthy competition and rivalry with the clergy and the lay faithful. Rather it is more beneficial to appreciate their privileged position in the church and be proud of it. Even when they are conceived as good for nothing, when their work is not appreciated or undermined, consecrated persons are called upon to remain focused. The work they are doing is God's work and He who sees the heart will certainly reward them. There is need for them to purify their intentions before taking up any ministry or apostolate so that any disappointment or ingratitude will not leave them downcast and shattered. They are required to be serene at difficult moments bearing in mind that "...what is required of each individual is not *success, but commitment to faithfulness*".<sup>218</sup> Furthermore, for a better mode of witnessing to their consecration, it is much appreciated when consecrated persons wear their proper habit in their places of work and apostolate.

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<sup>218</sup> John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, The Consecrated Life (*Vita Consecrata*), Vatican City 1996, no.63.

## 6. Conclusion

Consecrated persons are those who have responded to the special invitation of God to love him more dearly and to follow him more closely. There are different forms of consecrated life recognized by the Church today. Some consecrated persons live contemplative life i.e. a life lived in monasteries, totally dedicated to asceticism, prayer and contemplation. They do not engage in active apostolate but in works carried out within the monastic walls. Some others engage in active life while not neglecting the interior life which is the essence of their consecration. Some live in communities and take the evangelical counsels of Obedience Poverty and Chastity. Although they live in the world, they do not conform to the worldly manner of living in the society. Rather, they consecrate themselves to God and dedicate themselves entirely to the selfless service of God and humanity through the Church.

This year would not only encourage new vocations but also would allow people to see our commitment with fresh eyes and open their hearts to support us with a renewed energy that stirs us all to embrace our pope's ongoing call for the new evangelization. Although the year's events are intended to give lay people a deeper understanding of consecrated life, the men and women religious also will most likely benefit. I hope that consecrated persons experience a renewed joy in their vocation and that by simply explaining their Order's charisms to others should give them a deeper understanding and appreciation of their ministries. According to Pope Francis *"wherever consecrated people are, there is always joy!"* I conclude with his words: *"in the world there is often a lack of joy. We are not called to accomplish epic feats or to proclaim high-sounding words,*



*but to give witness to the joy that arises from the certainty of knowing we are loved, from the confidence that we are saved”.*<sup>219</sup>

The Year of Consecrated Life is just beginning; may we and all People of Good Will enjoy the blessings and graces of this Year!

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<sup>219</sup> Pope Francis, *Letter in Preparation for the Year of Consecrated Life*, n. 3

## **AUTHORITY IN RELIGIOUS LIFE: ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF NONVIOLENT LEADERSHIP STYLE**

*Mary Lilian Akhere Ehidihamhen, DDL<sup>220</sup>*

### **Abstract**

The question of authority in religious life has been widely debated in the Church. Scholars as Franc Card. Rode and Gianfranco A. Gardin assert that authority from religious/consecrated leaders “must seek the face of God”: “Persons in authority will have to cultivate first in themselves an openness to listening to others and to the signs of the times and promote the dignity of the person.” Also Gerald McConnell argues that the authority of religious superiors must differ from a legal authority. It could never be an authority for power over, but it should be a Christ-like authority rooted in the power of the Holy

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Spirit. Authority in the Church is not for domination but for service. However, this perspective of service has not been adequately addressed after the second Vatican council. In our article, we will pay attention to the issue of how to listen (dialogue) and to communicate in a nonviolent way, inspired by the idea that authority is meant as service.

Our research addresses the issue of the use of authority for service, focusing on listening and dialoguing with special attention to nonviolent communication. In our research, we will be exploring Marshall Rosenberg's principles of nonviolent communication because they could help us in exercising authority in religious life. We will juxtapose them against violent communication that blocks compassion and supports "power over" and disservice, to reveal the traditionally misunderstood connections between authority for service and domination. We argue that authority is for meeting the needs of people by observing carefully their situation, getting in touch with their feelings to identify their needs and together explore positive strategies to meet the needs by making a doable request. Marshall Rosenberg's principles of nonviolent communication offer practical tools for dialogue, leadership, and promotion of the dignity of the human person. His principles are learnable and could be embodied.

**Key Words:** Authority, Religious Life, Nonviolent Communication, Leadership and Service.

### **Introduction**

The Exercise of authority in religious life in the church calls for attention. Scholars like Franc Card, Rode and

Gianfranco A. Gardin<sup>221</sup> assert that authority from religious/consecrated leaders “must seek the face of God”: “Persons in authority will have to cultivate first in themselves an openness to listening to others and to the signs of the times and promote the dignity of the person.”<sup>222</sup> Also, Gerald McConnell argues that the authority of religious superiors must differ from a legal authority. It could never be an authority for “power over”, but it should be a Christ-like authority rooted in the Holy Spirit's power. Authority in the Church is not for domination but service.<sup>223</sup> The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life has addressed this perspective of service in the document “The Service of Authority and Obedience.”<sup>224</sup> However, it is still difficult to translate the document's suggestions into action in the religious communities. Our research addresses the use of authority for service, focusing on listening and dialoguing with particular attention to nonviolent communication (NVC). In our research, we will be exploring Marshall Rosenberg’s principles of NVC<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> Franc Card. Rode and Gianfranco A. Gardin, Congregation for Institute of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, “The Service of Authority and Obedience,” [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccsrlife/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccsrlife\\_doc\\_20080511\\_autorita-obbedienza\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccsrlife/documents/rc_con_ccsrlife_doc_20080511_autorita-obbedienza_en.html) [accessed May 18, 2020].

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 13a paragraphs two and 13c.

<sup>223</sup> Gerald McConnell, “Authority in Religious Life,” *The Furrow* vol. 18, no. 8 (1967): 437.

<sup>224</sup> Franc Card. Rode and Gianfranco A. Gardin, Congregation for Institute of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, “The Service of Authority and Obedience,” [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccsrlife/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccsrlife\\_doc\\_20080511\\_autorita-obbedienza\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccsrlife/documents/rc_con_ccsrlife_doc_20080511_autorita-obbedienza_en.html) [accessed May 18, 2020].

<sup>225</sup> Marshall B. Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life* 3rd ed. (Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer Press, 2015).

because they could help us exercise authority in religious life. We will juxtapose them against violent communication that blocks compassion and supports “power over” and disservice, to reveal the traditionally misunderstood connections between authority for service and domination. We argue that authority is for meeting people's needs by observing their situation, getting in touch with their feelings to identify their needs, and exploring positive strategies to meet the needs by making a doable request. This research aims to examine how NVC can enhance the use of authority and a nonviolent leadership style. To achieve our goal, we will examine the meaning of religious life, authority in the religious life, and NVC.

### **Religious Life**

In this section, we will examine the meaning of religious life and what it entails. Religious life is a way of life in the Church, through which members witness to Christ by dedicating themselves to God through the profession of the three evangelical counsels, live and share in a community<sup>226</sup>.

Religious life is a commitment to the service of the Church through the commitment to a particular charism. The religious live a life of poverty, chastity, and obedience.<sup>227</sup>

Religious life, "the life consecrated through the profession of the evangelical counsels is a stable form of living by which the faithful, following

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<sup>226</sup> Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious, "What is Religious Life?" <https://cmswr.org/about/religious-life/> [accessed May 17, 2020].

<sup>227</sup> "Vocation Brisbane," <http://www.vocationbrisbane.com/religious-life> [accessed May 17, 2020].

Christ more closely under the action of the Holy Spirit, is 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, 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. The Christian faithful freely assumes this form of living in institutes of consecrated life canonically erected by the competent authority of the Church. Pronouncing vows or other sacred bonds according to the proper laws of the institutes, they profess the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience and, through the charity to which the counsels lead, are joined in a special way to the Church and its mystery."<sup>228</sup> From this, one can deduce that, Religious life has Christological, pneumatological, ecclesiological, and soteriological dimensions and the life of the religious is rooted in the evangelical counsels.

According to the “Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life *Perfectae Caritatis*,”<sup>229</sup> the evangelical counsels at the heart of consecrated life do not end in themselves, but they point towards perfect charity.<sup>230</sup> The

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<sup>228</sup> Canon Law Society, Code of Canon Law: Latin – English Translation, New English Translation (Washington DC. Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 1989), 189-190.

<sup>229</sup> “Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life *Perfectae Caritatis* Proclaimed by His Holiness Pope Paul VI on October 28, 1965,” [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat\\_ii\\_decree\\_19651028\\_perfectae-caritatis\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat_ii_decree_19651028_perfectae-caritatis_en.html) [accessed May 18, 2020].

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience found their maximum expression in God's love and neighbour. Consecration is the foundation of religious life. God inspires one and supplies the grace and freedom to answer. It is a gift given to the Church by God, and a life lived in the imitation of Christ.<sup>231</sup> Religious are prophets endowed with God's special wisdom to scrutinize occurrences according to the signs of the times. They are prophets because they follow Christ in a unique way.<sup>232</sup> The various religious orders have their special charism and spirituality, given to them by their founders. The charism of a religious congregation is the distinguishing mark of one congregation from the other. The charism is the spirit that propels the actions of the members of the particular religious congregation.<sup>233</sup> The religious bring Christ to people through their charism expressed in their various apostolates. Some religious are contemplatives, while some are dedicated to active apostolate.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> "Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Vita Consecrata of the Holy Father John Paul II to the Bishops and Clergy Religious Orders and Congregations Societies of Apostolic Life Secular Institutes and all the Faithful on the Consecrated Life and Its Mission in the Church and in the World" [http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_25031996\\_vita-consecrata.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_25031996_vita-consecrata.html) [accessed May 18, 2020].

<sup>232</sup> "Apostolic Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to all Consecrated People, on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life," [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_letters/documents/papa-francesco\\_lettera-ap\\_20141121\\_lettera-consacraati.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco_lettera-ap_20141121_lettera-consacraati.html) [accessed June 9, 2020].

<sup>233</sup> "Forms of Consecrated Life: The Spreading Branches of Different Forms," <https://www.vocationcentre.org.au/home/what-is-a-vocation/consecrated-life/forms-of-consecrated-life/> [accessed June 9, 2020].

<sup>234</sup> "Vocation Brisbane," <https://www.vocationbrisbane.com/religious-life> [accessed June 9, 2020].

Having explored the meaning of religious life and what it entails, it is clear that religious life is a form of living, which involves a dedication to a particular charism expressed in the spirituality of the members in their way of life and apostolates. The religious profess the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience, which serve as means to perfect love of God and neighbour. Religious life is a call to share in the life of the Trinity through witnessing. Since religious life is a stable form of life, and a way to perfection, there is a need for authority to foster order and realize its goal.

### **Authority in Religious Life**

In the previous section, we examined the meaning of religious life, which provides the context for this study. In this section, we will explore the meaning of authority, purpose, and how religious authority should be exercised. The relevance of authority in any organization is indisputable; such is the need for authority in religious life. An organization without an authorized leader, may not survive. There can be no order or development in any organization without the giving of power to some persons to commit themselves to guard the institutions for everyone's benefit.<sup>235</sup> The word authority comes from the Latin word *authoritas*, which means "cause, sponsor, promoter, surety, refers to the author, a source of something."<sup>236</sup> Authority, in the general sense, means "the

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<sup>235</sup> "Catechism of the Catholic Church," <https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/INDEX.HTM> [accessed May 18, 2020].

<sup>236</sup> Kelly Connors, "The role of the Major Superior with Particular Reference to Apostolic Women's Religious Institutes in the United States: A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Canon Law, Saint Paul University, Ottawa, Canada, in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor



power to determine, adjudicate, or otherwise settle issues or disputes, jurisdiction, the right to control, command, or determine."<sup>237</sup> Authority is a value bestowed, closely related to Justice, and must be executed by the standard sets and appreciated by stakeholders.<sup>238</sup> Authority is essential in an institute to promote the realization of the institute's goals and to support members in their spiritual life and mission in the Church.<sup>239</sup> According to the *Procedural Handbook for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life*, authority and governance are closely related, in consecrated or religious life, as no one can govern without the authority to do so. The purpose of the authority to govern in the institute of consecrated life is for two reasons: first, to "inspire the growth of the institute," as directed by the inspiration, charism, and "sound traditions." Second, to guarantee the collaborative guidance of the patrimony of the institute. To achieve this, "inspiration and oversight " are essential. The absence of inspiration and oversight leads to misuse of authority.<sup>240</sup> The task of authority from the perspective of "Starting Afresh from Christ: A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium," is to promote the purpose of religious life and to support members to remain steadfast in their vocation through listening and

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of Canon Law (2011)," [https://ruor.uottawa.ca/bitstream/10393/20559/1/Connors\\_Kelly\\_2011\\_thesis.pdf](https://ruor.uottawa.ca/bitstream/10393/20559/1/Connors_Kelly_2011_thesis.pdf) [Assessed May 20, 2020].

<sup>237</sup> <https://www.dictionaty.com/browse/authority> [accessed May 18, 2020].

<sup>238</sup> Charlotte Sumbamanu, "Exercising Authority in an Adult Community," XIX Assmblea Plenaria UISG Roma (2013): 2.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>240</sup> Michael Joyce et al., *Procedural Handbook for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life* (Washington D.C: Canon Law Society of America, 2001), 1.

dialogue. From the above views, the dictionary definition of authority is limited because it does not give a full description of authority. Drawing from the views of the procedural handbook and starting afresh from Christ, authority is the power to lead, foster growth and order in the institute, promote dialogue and listening. Authority engages in decision-making not as an individual, but in collaboration with other members of the institute.

McConnell asserts that the authority bestowed on a religious superior is rooted in the Holy Spirit, not the same as the secular sphere's legal and dominative authority. A religious superior is to guide the members of the institute to Christian love. The primary task of religious authority is to promote the love of God and neighbour through the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Christian love is at the heart of community life. Authority used in a dominating/domineering way hinders Christian love and leads to rebellion.<sup>241</sup> For example, Albanesi argues that Jesus manifested His authority through his action and words, which bring healing and knowledge (Mt 28,18). The Church participates in the authority of Jesus through service (Lk 22,26-27). Jesus exemplified authority as service by washing His disciples' feet. Authority in religious communities needs first to be obedient to God's word before compelling others to obey him/her.<sup>242</sup> Authority and obedience involve listening,

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<sup>241</sup> Gerald McConnell, "Authority in Religious Life," 438.

<sup>242</sup> Nicola Albanesi, "Authority and Obedience from an Ecclesial Perspective," Vincentian Encyclopedia (2014). [https://famvin.org/wiki/AuthorityandObedience\\_from\\_an\\_Ecclesial\\_Perspective](https://famvin.org/wiki/AuthorityandObedience_from_an_Ecclesial_Perspective) [accessed May 20, 2020].

and they are for the service of the community.<sup>243</sup> Rose Nkechi Uchem<sup>244</sup> argues that obedience involves dialogue.<sup>245</sup> Lauro Palu<sup>246</sup> asserts that authorities need to listen to their brothers and sisters according to the signs of the times. The superior is to create a conducive environment for spiritual activities, foster charity, support, the dignity of each member by keeping the confidentiality of each member, assist each member to find meaning in the life by giving hope especially in times of suffering, embody and promote the charism of the institute, foster sense of faith among members, and communion with the Church.<sup>247</sup> Authority involves "a very weighty series of services: listening, and dialogue, helping in sharing and co-responsibility, stimulating participation in all, equilibrium in attention to persons and community, discernment and fraternal obedience."<sup>248</sup> Superior is to seek the advice of the members of the congregation in matters that concern the institute's growth.<sup>249</sup> From the foregoing, we agree that domineering style of leadership impedes growth. Religious authority will find its full meaning in Jesus' style of leadership

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<sup>243</sup> Patrick J. Griffin, "Documents of the Church for Consecrated Life," *Vincentiana* (2012): 342.

<sup>244</sup> Rose Nkechi Uchem, "Shifting Perceptions of Mission – Values for Missionary Religious Life Today: Problems and Prospects," *SEDOS* vol. 41, no. 11/12 (2009): 261.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, 264.

<sup>246</sup> Lauro Palu, "The Service of Authority and Obedience," *Vincentiana* (2009): 282.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, 227-288.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, 291.

<sup>249</sup> Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life *Perfectae Caritatis* Proclaimed by His Holiness Pope Paul VI on October 28, 1965," no. 4.

through service, active listening, dialogue, mutual obedience and collaboration.

Authority can sometimes be misused. Misuse of authority embraces the desire to use power over the other.<sup>250</sup> Religious life does not infringe on the fundamental freedom given to the human person by nature, strengthened by the sacrament of baptism. No superior has the right to infringe onto that freedom but instead gives each individual the space to be himself or herself within the bounds of the spirit of the institute. This freedom is strengthened through collaboration between the community and the superior as the superior is not only a repository of knowledge, but every member has something to contribute because it is a mission of collaboration through the Holy Spirit.<sup>251</sup> Authority bestowed on a religious is not exaltation to the heights but for service as described in Mt 20, 25-28.<sup>252</sup> Any superior that puts the love of members at the heart of his/her authority receives more strength. Such superior cannot be so authoritative, "because love is directed to persons, not ideas, or institutions, or things. Unless the administrative office in a religious community is transformed by love, then they have no place in the community. Unless functionaries and members reach each other as persons and as fellow Christians, their relationship remains at an impersonal level and cannot be called fully Christian."<sup>253</sup> Authority for service requires that the community leader must be ready to be a servant

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<sup>250</sup> Mark Haugaard, "What is Authority?" *Journal of Classical Sociology* vol. 18, no. 1 (2017): 10.

<sup>251</sup> Gerald McConnell, "Authority in Religious Life," 438-439.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, 439.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, 440.

to all the members to create a collaborative community that nourishes by love. Authority should find its strength in dialogue, love of God, and the Church.<sup>254</sup> Religious life respects the fundamental rights of persons. Using power-over persons without providing spaces for dialogue, collaboration and love is an abuse of authority.

According to the directives of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, "The Service of Authority and Obedience,"<sup>255</sup> the task of authority is to guide community members as individuals and collectively to search and do God's will.<sup>256</sup> In authenticity, all religious must together pursue God's will as it is what brought them together as sisters and brothers, which is the purpose of religious life. The person in authority is to ensure that the pursuit of God's will involves authenticity. An authority must give instructions in a manner in which the members of his/her community will see the obedience of such instruction as obeying God. A person in authority must seek the will of God through supplication, contemplation, and suggestions from others in order not to represent themselves instead of God. Authority and obedience in religious life are two sides of the same coin, and Christ well embodies them.<sup>257</sup> Authority needs to rely on the Holy Spirit's direction through prayer, service, openness to dialogue with experiences of the people in the light of prayer, and the

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<sup>254</sup> Charlotte Sumbamanu, "Exercising Authority in an Adult Community," 6.

<sup>255</sup> Franc Card. Rode and Gianfranco A. Gardin, Congregation for Institute of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, "The Service of Authority and Obedience," [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccsrlife/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccsrlife\\_doc\\_20080511\\_autorita-obbedienza\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccsrlife/documents/rc_con_ccsrlife_doc_20080511_autorita-obbedienza_en.html) [accessed May 18, 2020].

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., no. 1, paragraph 4.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid., no. 12.

word of God<sup>258</sup> and the way of life of the institute, the person on authority will be able to foster spirituality in the community. One of the authority tasks is to foster the dignity of each member of his/her community through unconditional positive regard, protecting what each member confided on them, and showing authentic love towards each member. Obedience from members is to cooperate with charity. Obedience must go with collaboration. Persons in authority need to be present to the difficulties experienced by each member to give hope, support and help the member to continue to experience meaning. Persons in authority must understand and promote the institute's charism, ensure the communion of the community with the universal Church, and promote on-going formation in the institute.<sup>259</sup> "The authority of the religious must be characterized by the spirit of service, in imitation of Christ who "came not to be served but to serve Mk 10,45." The superior's task is to enliven the sisters/brothers with the love of God, by "avoiding

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<sup>258</sup>. Authority exercised according to the signs of the times needs to be conscious of "the centrality of the human person, viewed from the perspective of the problems involved in growth, the person's doubts and their inevitable weaknesses. At the same time, this element must also consider the complex of attitudes, gifts, abilities, and sensitivities that each person possesses. Frequently, in the past, people submitted to pastoral plans that stifled their legitimate aspirations of individuals; thus, community interests were more important than individual interests. Given the fact that it is individuals who also give life to the community, it is necessary to maintain a good balance between the needs of the individual and the community's demands." Nicola Albanesi, "Authority and Obedience from an Ecclesial Perspective," Vincentian Encyclopedia (2014). [https://famvin.org/wiki/Authority\\_and\\_Obedience\\_from\\_an\\_Ecclesial\\_Perspective](https://famvin.org/wiki/Authority_and_Obedience_from_an_Ecclesial_Perspective) [accessed May 20, 2020].

<sup>259</sup> Franc Card. Rode and Gianfranco A. Gardin, Congregation for Institute of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, "The Service of Authority and Obedience," no. 13.

domination, any form of paternalism or maternalism." The love of God is possible through trusting each member; "promoting the voluntary obedience of their subjects with reverence for the human person, and through dialogue, keeping in mind that bonding must come about in a spirit of faith and love in the following of the obedient Christ and not for other motivation."<sup>260</sup> Drawing from the view of the Institute for Consecrated Life on how authority should be exercised in religious life, one can say that the task of authority is to support members of his/her institute in searching for the will of God through collaboration, genuineness, respect, listening and dialogue. Having examined the views of various authors in this section, we found out that authority is essential in religious life. Religious do not lose their fundamental human rights by their state of life, the voice of every religious matters when taking decisions that concerns the individual and the community. Paying attention to the experiences of individual religious is very important when exercising authority. For religious life to fulfil its purpose, the authority needs to be essential for service through openness to the signs of times, dialogue, and collaboration. To enhance authority for service, we will examine NVC.

### **Nonviolent Communication and Nonviolent Style Leadership**

The previous sections examined the meaning of religious life and the task and purpose of authority in religious life. This section investigates Marshall Rosenberg's nonviolent communication and how it

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<sup>260</sup> Ibid., no. 14.

supports nonviolent leadership style. In studying Rosenberg, we will examine first, his view of violent communication; second, his principles of nonviolent communication, how the principles are applied to listening to others through empathy, and to oneself through self-empathy. We will also apply the principles to violent and nonviolent leadership style through our discussion on the use of power described as power-over and power-with.

Marshall Rosenberg was born on the 6<sup>th</sup> of October 1934 in Ohio to Jean Rosenberg and Fred Rosenberg.<sup>261</sup> Both parents were Jews. In 1943, Rosenberg, in his childhood, experienced racial violence in his neighbourhood that prompted him to begin a reflection on two questions on what makes some people violent and some compassionate, even in violent situations.<sup>262</sup> Perplexed by the question of violence and nonviolence, Rosenberg first studied clinical psychology, yet he could not resolve the question. Second, he studied compassionate people through observation and interaction, in order to find out what kept them connected to themselves and others even in the worst situations. Third, he studied comparative religion and discovered that they all have 'love' as a common denominator, and some elements that supports living a life of nonviolence. Rosenberg was also inspired by his research on Carl

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<sup>261</sup> Marshall Rosenberg, "Biography," [www.fampeople.com/cat-marshall-rosenberg](http://www.fampeople.com/cat-marshall-rosenberg) [accessed June 10, 2020].

<sup>262</sup> Marshall B. Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*, 1.



Rogers' "Characteristics of healing relationships."<sup>263</sup> It was from all the above-named sources that he derived his principles of nonviolent communication.<sup>264</sup> While exploring what supports compassion and nonviolence, "Rosenberg was struck by the crucial role of language and our use of words." From this discovery, he "identified a specific approach to communicating – both speaking and listening that leads us to give from the heart, connecting us with ourselves and with each other in a way that allows our natural compassion to flourish," and he called it, NVC.<sup>265</sup>

### **Violent Communication**

In this part, we will examine violent communication that affects compassion, dialogue, listening, and imposes domination and disservice, namely: moralistic judgment, making comparisons, denial of responsibility for one's action/inaction, and making demands.

*Moralistic judgment:* "moral judgments are evaluations or opinions formed as to whether some action or inaction, intention, motive, character trait, or a person as a whole is (more or less) good or bad as measured against some standard of good."<sup>266</sup> Rosenberg refers to moralistic judgment as evaluation of people who do not behave the way we want, in terms of right or wrong. For instance, we

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<sup>263</sup> "The Characteristics of a Helping Relationship – Rodgers – 1958," <https://www.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/j.2164-4918.1958.tb...> [accessed June 10, 2020].

<sup>264</sup> Marshall Rosenberg, *Speak Peace in a World of Conflict: What You say next will Change Your World* (Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer, 2005)12-14.

<sup>265</sup> Marshall B. Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*, 1-2.

<sup>266</sup> <https://www3.sympatico.ca/saburns/pg.0460.htm> [accessed May 26, 2020].

classify an individual as *she is inconsiderate, she is rude, and he is stupid*. The moralistic judgment includes all forms of "blame, insults, put-downs, labels, criticisms, comparisons, and diagnoses."<sup>267</sup> Moralistic judgment focuses more on criticizing the other, which implies "shoulds." For example, *he/she should* or *should not* perform a particular action.<sup>268</sup> Through moralistic judgment, we evaluate "our actions and the actions of others" in form of "right/wrong," "correct/incorrect," "good/bad," "normal/abnormal," "appropriate/inappropriate."<sup>269</sup> Moralistic judgments mean seeing others as inadequate or incorrect because their actions differ from our standard. For example, *She is snobbish*. Sometimes, I make a moralistic judgment of myself when I see myself as a wrong person because I did not act according to my value. Instead of such evaluations, it is more nourishing to express how an action affects us.<sup>270</sup> For example, when you pass by without saying a word to me, I feel angry because I want to connect with you. Moralistic judgment implies labelling people. Such labelling affects their self-esteem and dignity. For instance, when someone is labelled *selfish*, he/she tends to behave that way.<sup>271</sup> From the description of moralistic

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<sup>267</sup> Marshall B. Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*, 15.

<sup>268</sup> Marshall B. Rosenberg, *A Model for Nonviolent Communication* 2nd ed. (Baltimore, MD: New Society Publishers, 1983), 5.

<sup>269</sup> Marshall B. Rosenberg, *Life-Enriching Education: Nonviolent Communication Help Schools Improve Performance, Reduce Conflicts, and Enhance Relationships* (Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer, 2003), 11.

<sup>270</sup> Mary Mackenzie, *Peaceful Living: Daily Meditations for Living with Love, Healing, and Compassion* (Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer, 2005), 16.

<sup>271</sup> Gary Baran, "Nonviolent Communication: An Important Component in Personal and Nonviolent Social Change," *The Arcon* vol.10, no. 2 (2000): 42.

judgements, one can agree that our daily interactions with oneself and others are full of evaluations and criticisms of one another. When persons in authority use such language on their members, the result is disconnection, and inadequate disposition to listen and dialogue. Instead, the person will feel dehumanized and strive to defend himself/herself.

*Making Comparisons:* comparisons imply viewing two things together to determine which one is better, more significant, higher, or more than the other. It refers to contrasting one thing with another. It involves juxtaposing a person's achievements with that of another. Comparative thinking, though useful sometimes, has a negative effect especially when it inflicts misery on people.<sup>272</sup> Inappropriate Comparism of oneself with others or one person with another disconnects one from the others, leading to pain.<sup>273</sup> People do not have the same ability, and opportunity as their experiences are different. When we compare people, we create space for low self-esteem and unhealthy competition. Some persons in authority compare one member to another forgetting the uniqueness of each individual. When persons in authority engage in such comparison, members of the communities are exposed to rivalry and unhealthy competition, which result to hatred, envy, enmity, loss of identity and meaning.

*Denial of Responsibility for One's Action/Inaction:* Denial of responsibility implies projecting one's action/inaction to an external force. It is a situation that makes an

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<sup>272</sup> Marshall B. Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*, 18-19.

<sup>273</sup> Mary Mackenzie, *Peaceful Living: Daily Meditations for Living with Love, Healing, and Compassion*, 31.

individual feel that the pressure from another person causes his/her action/inaction. He/she, therefore, blames the other person for the action/inaction.<sup>274</sup> Rosenberg asserts that one denies responsibility for his/her action/inaction by using the word "have to," *you make me feel guilty*. He argues that "we deny responsibility for our actions/inactions when we attribute their cause to factors outside ourselves." For instance, *I ate the food because I had to, I smoke because I am addicted to it, I punished her because she disobeyed me, I failed my exams because of my teacher, I left the house because my superior scolded me, I expelled her because the council asked me to do so, you annoyed me, you make me happy*. Denial of responsibility implies that one has no choice instead to engage in a particular action/inaction. We take responsibility for our actions/inactions when we use such language as "I choose to" instead of "I have to."<sup>275</sup> Denial of responsibility involves using words that portray a person as one who is not liable to his/her emotions, behaviour, and manner of thinking.<sup>276</sup> As a result of inadequate space for dialogue in religious communities, some religious feel compelled to comply to certain decisions that deny their freedom of choice. Often you hear such language *I have to; I have no choice than to do it*. Some religious authority sometimes takes decisions they cannot take responsibility for and they push the blame to others.

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<https://www.scienzepostmoderne.org/DiversiAutori/Matza/TechniquesOfNeutralization.html> [accessed May 26, 2020].

<sup>275</sup> Marshall B. Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*, 19-21.

<sup>276</sup> Marshall B. Rosenberg, *A Model for Nonviolent Communication*, 5.

*Making Demands:* Demand means asking for what one wants in a manner that implies obligation. When people hear demands, they feel compelled to grant the command. Rosenberg argues that those in authority feel that they have the duty to change people and make them act according to their will. Therefore, when people hear a demand, they make efforts to resist it or comply.<sup>277</sup> Demand is different from request, in making a demand, one is not disposed to accept a *no* while request creates space for the receiver to say no or yes. A request disposes the requester to hear and receive a 'yes' or a 'no'.<sup>278</sup> Some religious authority place demands on their members on the ground that they took the vow of obedience and they must obey. Members comply to such demands out of fear, instead of respect for authority. Making demands endangers voluntary obedience. Some religious authority even tells their members *I command you by your vow of obedience*. When authority makes request of his/her members instead of demand, he/she creates space for dialogue, and members are more willing to support in granting the request. Having examined violent communication, we discovered that the way we evaluate, criticize, blame, make comparisons of persons, and place demands on one another, are terrible ways of expressing our unmet needs. Such a method of communication implies domination; hinders compassion, listening, and dialogue. The result is hatred, rebellion, lack of understanding, sullied relationships and lack of peace in religious communities.

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<sup>277</sup> Marshall B. Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*, 22.

<sup>278</sup> Mary Mackenzie, *Peaceful Living: Daily Meditations for Living with Love, Healing, and Compassion*, 21.

## **The Basic Principles of Nonviolent Communication (NVC)**

In this part, we will examine the meaning of NVC, the four basic principles of nonviolent communication that support compassion, dialogue, listening, collaboration and service, namely: making observation, expressing feelings, identifying needs and making request. NVC is a way of communication, "a way of being, thinking, and living in the world." NVC "is to inspire heartfelt connections between ourselves and other people," to meet everybody's needs "through compassionate giving. NVC inspires us and others to give from the heart and connect to our inner divinity and to what is alive in us moment to moment."<sup>279</sup> NVC is a way of life that enables people to relate with one another compassionately, from the energy of their feelings and needs. NVC asserts that persons' actions/inactions are motivated by their needs. Unfortunately, the strategies individuals choose to meet their needs result in violence.<sup>280</sup> NVC is a way of speaking and listening that promotes mutual understanding.

*Making observation:* observation is the first step to NVC. Observation involves the use of one's sense organs of sight, hear, smell, taste, and touch to identify what is happening around someone exclusive of judgment. When we add judgment to what we observe, people find it challenging to connect with what we are saying; instead,

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<sup>279</sup> Marshall Rosenberg, *Living Nonviolent Communication: Practical Tools to Connect and Communicate Skillfully in Every Situation* (Boulder, Colorado: Sounds True, 2012), vii.

<sup>280</sup> Dennis Sullivan, "Nonviolence Begins with Speech: An Interview with Emily Gaarder on the practice of Nonviolent Communication," *Contemporary Justice Review* vol. 10, no. 1 (2007), 131-132.

they "hear criticisms" and fight back or defend themselves. Time and place are crucial when making observations because experience changes with time.<sup>281</sup> Observation implies describing what we see, hear, and touch rather than making a moralistic judgment of what we see, hear, and touch. Observation is context and time-specific as it avoids the use of words like: "never, always, whenever, everyone and no one." The relevance of observation lies in the intention to connect with the other.<sup>282</sup> Observation entails describing what one sees when focusing a camera on an object, while evaluation refers to what one deduces from what one observed in terms of whether what one observed "is right or wrong, good or bad, just or unjust."<sup>283</sup> NVC supports distinguishing observations from judgments (evaluation). When people act, it is better to describe their actions rather than making evaluations. For example, *she is selfish* is an evaluation. NVC requires one to describe the action that makes him/her evaluate others as *selfish*.<sup>284</sup> From the views expressed above, observation means describing an action instead of drawing inference. From personal experience, the use of observation language is not common in religious community due to the mode of communication individuals have been used to from their various culture.

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<sup>281</sup> Marshall B. Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*, 26.

<sup>282</sup> Theresa F. Latini, "Nonviolent Communication: A Humanizing Ecclesial and Educational Practice," *JE&CB* 13:1 (2009): 22.

<sup>283</sup> Liv Larsson & Katarina Hoffmann, *Cracking the Communication Code: Nonviolent Communication by 42 Key Differentiations* (Svensby, Sweden: Friare Liv, 2011), 13.

<sup>284</sup> Marshall B. Rosenberg, *A Model for Nonviolent Communication*, 11.

*Expressing feelings:* feelings are the bodily sensations experienced by a person.<sup>285</sup> Feelings are emotions that are in a person's consciousness. The feeling is from one's attitude to one's thoughts.<sup>286</sup> The feeling is what one encounters in the body before, during, and after an experience. According to Rosenberg, feelings enable us to be aware of what is happening within us and empower us to name the experience. Feelings provide a language for us to alert others about the state of our being.<sup>287</sup> From childhood, our learning and attention focus on what happens in other people, while turning our attention away from our inner world and our own experiences. Sometimes, we use vocabularies that do not convey how we feel but sounds like a criticism of ourselves or the other person. Such criticism is because we lack the vocabulary to express our feelings. People can understand what we are going through when we express our feelings.<sup>288</sup> On some occasions, we use the word "feeling" to express our thoughts and how others see us. For example, *I feel good, I feel bad, I feel used, I feel inadequate as a teacher, I feel abused, and I feel disappointed.* Such a manner of expressing feelings does not foster connection and understanding. When we express our feelings in a way the other person will understand us, we use such words as *Sad, joyful, enthusiastic, heard, relaxed, upset, hopeful.* Expressing our feelings helps us to express our

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<sup>285</sup> "Merriam Webster Dictionary," <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/feeling> [accessed May 27, 2020].

<sup>286</sup> "Collins Dictionary," <https://www.collinsdictionary/english/feeling> [accessed May 26, 2020].

<sup>287</sup> Marshall B. Rosenberg, *A Model for Nonviolent Communication*, 18-19.

<sup>288</sup> Marshall B. Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*, 37-41.



vulnerability.<sup>289</sup> Not expressing how we feel can block our connection with others. When we express how we feel, others can identify our needs and know how to support us. However we make efforts to hide our feelings, our body language reveals what is going on.<sup>290</sup> Drawing from the various explanation on feelings, we understand that feelings concerns our individual dispositions and what is happening in our body(internal and external) from the information we received from what we see, hear, taste, and touch. In religious communities, emotional intelligence has not received much attention. As a result, some are not able to connect their experiences to how they feel, even when they are able to make the connection, they lack the language to express it. To a large extent, it affects the relationship between persons in authority and members. The ability to identify one's feelings remains a problem as our feelings point us to our needs.

*Identifying needs:* Needs refer to “a motivating force that compels action for its satisfaction.” There are some needs that aid survival and are the same for all human beings. People meet needs according to an order of importance, culture, awareness, social context, and age.<sup>291</sup> Rosenberg asserts that there is a connection between our feelings and our needs. Getting in touch with what is happening within us enables us to identify the need behind how we are feeling. We blame others for our feelings when we are unable to identify the needs

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<sup>289</sup> Ibid., 41-46.

<sup>290</sup> Liv Larsson, *A Helping Hand: Mediation with nonviolent Communication* 2nd ed. (Svensbyn, Sweden: Frare Liv Konsult, 2010), 67.

<sup>291</sup> "Business Dictionary," <https://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/need.html> [accessed May 28, 2020].

underlying how we feel. In blaming people for our feelings, we compel them to take responsibility that does not belong to them, and they feel guilty with inadequate compassion to support us. We connect our feelings to our needs; thus, *I feel angry because I need respect, I am happy because I received some care, I am worried because I need assurance, I am tired because I need rest*. Such expressions portray taking responsibility for one's feelings rather than blaming another person for one's anger, failure, and worries.<sup>292</sup> Need is the “why” to all our actions/inactions (feelings). Needs are the basic principles that motivate all we do. Awareness of our needs foster group collaboration, brings empathic healing, dispels conflicts, bring freedom, and foster cooperation in organizations. Needs promote well-being and a sense of meaning.<sup>293</sup> All human endeavours are efforts to attend to human needs. Whether we are eating, drinking, playing, quarrelling, reading, crying, and angry are all attempts to meet our needs for satisfaction, fun, knowledge, respect, and consideration.<sup>294</sup> Our efforts to refrain from doing something are an attempt to meet a need.<sup>295</sup> Criticizing, analysing, and judging other people are strange ways of making our needs known. For example, if someone says, *you snubbed me*, the person is expressing her/his need for connection and attention. Anyone who hears, *you snubbed me*, will immediately begin to defend herself/himself.

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<sup>292</sup> Marshall B. Rosenberg, *A Model for Nonviolent Communication*, 26-27.

<sup>293</sup> Miki Kashtan, *Reweaving Our Human Fabric: Working Together to Create a Nonviolent Future* (Oakland, CA: Fearless Heart Publications, 2014), 10-11.

<sup>294</sup> Thom Bond, *The Compassionate Book: Lessons from the Compassion Course* (Orange Lake, NY: One Human Publishing, 2018), 1.

<sup>295</sup> Theresa F. Latini, “Nonviolent Communication: A Humanizing Ecclesial and Educational Practice, 7.

Others find it easier to understand when we can identify and express the need behind how we feel at any moment.<sup>296</sup> Needs are energy that drives us into action/inaction. They are part of our being, and they are common to all human beings, no matter the background or culture. Strategies are the actions we take to meet our needs. The strategy provides the "how" we choose to meet our needs. Conflicts arise from the strategies we choose to meet a particular need.<sup>297</sup> From the foregoing, we understand that needs are what motivates one's action. It is the energy that drives all a human being does. In religious communities identifying needs is the root of the problems with oneself, others, and persons in authority. In religious communities, some religious understand that they are not supposed to have needs. Such understanding has led many into denying their needs and some into incomprehensible crises. From experience, several religious are sick (both physical and emotional), unhappy, and unfulfilled as a result of unmet needs. The strategies to meet identified needs is a problem. NVC provides a strategy for meeting need. The strategy is by making requests.

*Making a request:* when we observe a situation without mixing it with judgment, we express how we feel about it, identify the needs underlying our feelings, then we make a specific, explicit and doable request of how to meet the identified need.<sup>298</sup> When making a request, it is essential to say what we want, not what we do not want. For

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<sup>296</sup> Marshall B. Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*, 52-53.

<sup>297</sup> Liv Larsson & Katarina Hoffmann, *Cracking the Communication Code*, 21.

<sup>298</sup> Marshall B. Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*, 67.

example, *we do not want to eat rice every day*, instead say what you want. The above statement is not a request. Use positive words by saying, *we want to eat rice twice a week*. Such request is more specific and can quickly receive attention. Sometimes we hear a request as *please help me* this kind of request is vague because it is not specific.<sup>299</sup> Making request with the NVC process, we give space to the person receiving our request to say *yes or no* to the request. When someone says no to our request, we try to understand the need of the person saying no, is trying to meet, thus empathize with our unmet needs. The disposition to accept a *yes or no* is what differentiates a request from a demand. When we perceive the *no* as a rejection or denial, it is no longer a request but a demand because we were not disposed to receive a *no*.<sup>300</sup> From the explanation of request, we understand that request creates space for the receiver of the request to accept or refuse to grant the request. It disposes the person making the request to receive a yes or a no. Making request involves using *would you be willing*. When people hear a demand, they try to resist because it seems as if it is a pressure to grant the demand. In religious community, religious make request to persons in authority for their needs, while authority makes demand of their members. Such approach creates power imbalance in the relationship between members and persons in authority. Having studied the four basic principles of NVC, we discovered that making observations, identifying the feelings ensuing from the observation, and getting in touch with the needs underlying the feelings, one can

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<sup>299</sup> Ibid., 68-70.

<sup>300</sup> Marshall B. Rosenberg, *A Model for Nonviolent Communication*, 36-37.

meet the needs by making a request. We also found out that from culture and the formation of religious, making observation, identifying feelings and needs and making request have not been as such explored and applied. This leads us to how the four basic steps of NVC could be applied.

### **Application of the Four Steps of the NVC Process**

In this part, the four steps that has been discussed will be applied to empathy, self-empathy and how it will support authority.

*Empathy*: In empathy, we use observation, feelings, needs, and request to understand what others are going through. "Empathy is a respectful understanding of what others are experiencing." Empathy goes beyond listening with one's ears to embrace listening with attention and the whole being.<sup>301</sup> Empathy requires full presence, devoid of advice, reassurance, consoling, sympathizing, explanations, and questioning, just be there with the person.<sup>302</sup> Empathy involves listening to the other person's feelings needs and reflecting them to the person for confirmation. For example, "are you upset because you need support?" the person may confirm with a yes or no. Listening to feelings and needs enables us to understand what the other person is going through even when the person cannot name the feelings and needs explicitly. Paying attention to the person's body language enables us to connect with what is going on within the

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<sup>301</sup> Marshall B. Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*, 91.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*, 92-93.

person.<sup>303</sup> When we turn our attention to what is going on within the other person, we only hear his/her feelings and needs instead of criticisms and moralistic judgments. For example, when someone says, “you are selfish,” instead of hearing that as criticism, with your empathic ear, you can hear the person's need for consideration. That will support in not taking what the person said personally. Instead, one will understand the person's expression as his/her unmet need for consideration.<sup>304</sup> Anything said by someone is an expression of the person's feelings and needs, even the silence of another person is also an expression of the person's feelings and needs. Whatever message someone communicates, the person is asking the other to see him/her beautiful no matter how odious the message may sound. One can see the beauty in the other with the help of empathic listening to feelings and needs.<sup>305</sup> In empathy with another person, there is a need to give empathy to oneself by connecting with one's feelings and needs. Empathy to oneself will give one the disposition, clarity, understanding, and inner peace to step into the world and experience of the other.<sup>306</sup> In empathy, we meet the other where he/she is, with “unconditional positive regard.”<sup>307</sup> Empathy supports active listening; without empathy, we will not

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<sup>303</sup> Theresa F. Latini, “Nonviolent Communication: A Humanizing Ecclesial and Educational Practice, 83.

<sup>304</sup> Marshall B. Rosenberg, *A Model for Nonviolent Communication*, 45.

<sup>305</sup> Marshall B. Rosenberg, *Teaching Children Compassionately: How Students and Teachers Can Succeed with Mutual Understanding* (Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer, 2004), 22-23.

<sup>306</sup> Marshall B. Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*, 103.

<sup>307</sup> Howard Kirschenbaum, *The Life and Work of Carl Rodgers* (Herefordshire: Ross-on-Wye, 2007), 193-194.

understand the other and ourselves. Self-empathy helps us to understand what is going on within us.

*Self-Empathy:* self-empathy enables us to look inward and evaluate ourselves in a nonviolent way. We need self-empathy when we act against our values. Instead of giving in to guilt and self-hatred, self-empathy helps us to engage constructively with the situation. When we engage ourselves with the words “should” “I should have done it this/that way,” “must” “I must put more effort,” “have to” “I have to do it,” we endanger our happiness because they deprive us of our choice and freedom to enjoy our natural autonomy.<sup>308</sup> Self-empathy enables us to get in touch with the feelings and needs arising from an action/inaction that implies guilt/shame. Instead of giving in to self-criticisms and guilt, we connect with how we feel at the moment and identify unmet needs. Through self-connection to our feelings and needs, we can explore more positive strategies to meet the needs at stake. When we remain at the level of self-criticism, we remain violent to ourselves. When one can identify one's feelings and needs through self-empathy, it is easier to achieve self-forgiveness.<sup>309</sup> NVC supports our relationship with one another and ourselves. To be loving and compassionate to others, we need to be compassionate to ourselves first. Such commandment is exemplified in Mt. 22, 37-39, when Jesus commanded us to love our neighbour as ourselves. By loving myself, I learn how to love my neighbour. If I cannot love myself, I cannot love my neighbour, and I cannot love God. Through self-empathy, I can gain self-

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<sup>308</sup> Marshall B. Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*, 131.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*, 132-133.

forgiveness, which is a demonstration of loving myself. Jesus wants me to love the other person the same way I love myself. What is good for me is also good for the other. The need of the other person is as important as my own need.<sup>310</sup>

For those in authority to give quality attention, listening, and dialogue with their brothers/sisters, self-empathy is very important. Before engaging in dialogue, it is necessary to, first of all, get in touch with one's feelings and needs. Self-connection with one's feelings and needs will enable one to understand what one needs from the dialogue. Self-empathy continues to support and nourish us when we have unmet needs. Empathy enables those in authority to get in touch with the feelings and needs of their members. Empathy is an essential tool in decision making, supports leaders to use their authority for service. Decision-making is possible by getting in touch with one's needs and the needs of members of the institute and together explore positive strategies to meet the needs. Authority becomes domineering when one is not willing to engage in dialogue and share power with members. We will further examine the meaning of power-over and power-with to understand power-sharing and nonviolent leadership style.

### **Violent and Nonviolent Leadership Style (Using Power to Care for the Needs of All)**

This investigation places unique importance on power-over and power-with, claiming that power-over paradigm is a self-centered way of using power, which does not care

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<sup>310</sup> Deborah Van Deusen Hunsinger & Theresa F. Latinin, *Transforming Church Conflict: Compassionate Leadership in Action* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 96.



for the needs of all. It renders people powerless, and it leads people to rebellion and violence, while the power-with paradigm, which is a nonviolent leadership style, shares power with others by valuing the feelings and needs of all, and its hallmark is collaboration. Power-with is very important for social change in the domination system, which is the order of the day in some religious communities and our contemporary society. Sharing power with others is a necessity for peaceful coexistence. Rosenberg asserts that power plays an important role in human survival, and people need education on how to use power. Throughout the ages, people have learned to use power over others. People in the domination system received training on how to use "power-over tactics" in their dealings. "Power-over tactics include the use of punishment<sup>311</sup> Reward,<sup>312</sup> Guilt,<sup>313</sup> Shame,<sup>314</sup> duty, and

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<sup>311</sup> Punishment means coercing people to do what we want. Punishment takes different forms. It could be by using blame to discredit another person, labeling someone as wrong, immature, selfish, and so on when the person does not behave in a certain way. The highest way to punish people is to deprive them of respect and care. Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*, 187. Rosenberg further argues that punishment forms the basis of all the violence in the world. Law and order in the society can be preserved without punishment, mainly when we help people understand their rights and obligations. The clarity in this regard is vital; it helps us to see the limitations of punishment. Rosenberg, *Teaching Children Compassionately*, 12.

<sup>312</sup> Reflecting on reward as another means of violence, Rosenberg argues that reward has the same effect as punishment. The two are identical because they both provide an avenue for people with more power to lord it over those with less power in a way that the excellent person deserves a reward, while the bad deserves punishment. Marshall Rosenberg, *Raising Children Compassionately: Parenting the Nonviolent Communication Way* (Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer, 2004), 5.

<sup>313</sup> Guilt manifests itself when people believe that they are the cause of the other person's feelings or responsible for what the other person is going

obligation. In power-over systems, the authorities reward good people and punish the bad people.<sup>315</sup> Power-over does not allow others to contribute; rather, it focuses on meeting one's needs without considering others.<sup>316</sup> Structural power enables people in power to enrich themselves with more resources while limiting other people's access to resources. "Unless we change our relationship with power internally, we are then likely to use it over others, often not even realizing that we are."<sup>317</sup> For instance, religious authorities who use their power to make a law that profits them, parents who intimidate, punish their children and subject them to their instructions.<sup>318</sup> Drawing from the assertions of Rosenberg and Larsson, we understand that a domination system is marked by the style of leadership rooted in punishment, reward, shame, duty and obligation. Some religious authorities punish and shame some of their members who refused to comply to their demands. Such members

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through. Projecting guilt to the other is another form of violence. Rosenberg, *Teaching Children Compassionately*, 13-14.

<sup>314</sup> "Another form of violence is an attempt to get people to do things out of shame. It involves using labels so that if people do not do what you want, you put labels on them like "lazy," "inconsiderate," or "stupid." Any label that implies wrongness is a violent act. It's trying to get people to do things out of shame," *Ibid.*, 14. Liv Larsson, *Anger, Guilt & Shame: Reclaiming Power and Choice* (Sweden: Friare Liv, 2012), 95.

<sup>315</sup> Marshall Rosenberg, *The Heart of Social Change: How You Can Make a Difference in your world* (Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer, 2004), 15. "When we are raised with reward and punishment, we learn to act based on extrinsic motivation: fear of punishment, desire for reward, obligation, shame, or guilt." Kashtan, *Reweaving Our Human Fabric*, 96. Lasley, *Facilitating with Heart: Awakening Personal Transformation and Social Change*, 314.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>318</sup> Mackenzie, *Peaceful Living*, 259.

are termed disobedient, without proper dialogue because the persons in authority lack dialogue skills. Sometimes, the authority sends such members to communities where they will reap the fruits if their refusal to comply to the authority's demands, or the authority deny such members the opportunities that will contribute to their development. Members that comply to the demands of the authority, the authority regard them as obedient, and reward them with more opportunities. A religious authority falls into the trap of power-over when he/she does not have dialogue skills, not ready to listen and identify the needs of his/her members. Instead, such authority focuses only on his/her own needs without considering the other.

Furthermore, Rosenberg describes the positive way we can use power to influence others in a nonviolent way; this he refers to as "Power-with," allowing people to act in a manner that enhances their lives and allows them to act from their inner drive.<sup>319</sup> Power-with enables people to express their feelings and needs without fear of judgment. We allow this by making a simple request from others and allowing others to request from us. We do not command them but rather give them the space to choose whether to do or not to do what we are requesting.<sup>320</sup> Power-with strives to meet the need of everyone. It involves everyone who will be affected by a decision in the decision-making.<sup>321</sup> The power-with system values the needs of all, and the resources, initiative, and strength of those

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<sup>319</sup> Rosenberg, *Teaching Children Compassionately*, 12.

<sup>320</sup> Rosenberg, *Raising Children Compassionately*, 8.

<sup>321</sup> Mackenzie, *Peaceful Living*, 260.

involved pull together to achieve specific objectives.<sup>322</sup> Besides, "Using power with others, is about attending to more needs of more people, thereby adding to their power (their capacity to mobilize resources to meet their own needs) and to the whole – time and time again I am astonished by seeing that bringing in more needs results in solutions that tend to be more creative and more robust."<sup>323</sup> Valuing the needs of others enables them to be aware of their capabilities, autonomy, and worth. Power-with enables us to cultivate the power within us and connect with ourselves, others, and the whole ecosystem. The power within us complements power-with, and we can experience deep connection within ourselves and with others. When we share power with others, we can collaborate with them, relate empathically with them, take care of our needs and others' needs, and yield fruitful results. People who share power with others are not afraid to express their vulnerability, embrace their shadow, and their eagerness for transformation. A power-with system appreciates each individual's uniqueness and gives him or her the space to thrive to the apex.<sup>324</sup> Rosenberg's concepts of power-over and power-with present a view of how to use power nonviolently to enrich life. In his power-over, he x-rayed how power serves as a means to punish the bad ones and reward those who are considered the good ones. In his description of power-with-sharing power with others, he suggests some practical tools that could enhance sharing power. He emphasizes connecting with the feelings and needs of all.

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<sup>322</sup> Larsson and Hoffmann, *Cracking the Communication Code*, 105.

<sup>323</sup> Kashtan, *Reweaving Our Human Fabric*, 155.

<sup>324</sup> Lasley, *Facilitating with Heart: Awakening Personal Transformation and Social Change*, 314.

When people can connect with their feelings and needs, and that of others, they find it easy to collaborate. In sum, power is no longer a tool for coercion and control, but rather a practice that inspires all to care for one another's needs.

### **Conclusion**

Religious life is lived in the imitation of Christ, and it is a call to a way of life consecrated to God through the evangelical counsel of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The evangelical counsels are not an end in themselves, but a means to perfect love of oneself, fellow human beings, and God. Religious life is a gift to the Church, lived in a community of believers. Each religious institute has a specific charism and spirituality. Authority is essential in the promotion of the inspiration and oversight of the religious community. The exercise of authority in a religious community is for service. The members of the religious community and the persons in authority are to collaborate in seeking the will of God. The responsibility of maintaining order within the community calls for the exercise of authority. The administration of the authority invites the individual administering the authority to imitate the Lord Jesus Christ who has come not to be served but to serve and give his life for all. However, in some contemporary religious communities, authority serves as a tool for domination and dehumanization. Such misuse of authority could be due to either an inadequate understanding of the vow of obedience, lack of dialogue skills or a deliberate attempt to lord it over the members of the community. This misuse is what Marshall Rosenberg calls violent communication. In this situation, the exercise of authority is not in the spirit of Christ who

is the chief shepherd of our faith. In her publication, *“The Service of Authority”*, the Institution for Consecrated Life reminds religious superiors that their authority is not for domination, but the community's service through listening dialogue, and collaboration. However, the "how" to listen, dialogue, and collaborate remains a challenge. The challenging process of dialogue can be addressed with Rosenberg NVC approach. The principle developed by Rosenberg becomes relevant in helping in the administrative process of maintaining order and empowering the religious superiors to be less authoritative, more empathic, sisterly/brotherly, in the administration of their authority with the goal of attaining perfect charity through the evangelical counsel.

The act of listening in Rosenberg enables the listener to articulate the inner depth of what has been communicated in such a fashion that no judgement is made on what is heard. That which is communicated is played back to the communicator to ensure that the listener heard correctly the message that is communicated in its pure state. This leadership style in Rosenberg promotes mutual understanding. Therefore, the religious superior is to imbibe the intensity of listening and avoid being judgemental on what is heard or experienced. The process of listening attentively helps the religious superior not to morally pass judgement on the action of his/her members. It enables the religious superior not to pre-judge or to compare the action of the speaker with some others.

Dialogue involves identifying the feelings and needs of those involved in the situation that calls for communication and together explores strategies to meet the needs. A dialogue culminates in an agreement by both

parties involved. To promote productive dialogue and a nonviolent leadership style, Rosenberg enlightened us on how we communicate in a violent manner that affects our relationship with ourselves and others. He argues that when we use moralistic judgments, criticisms, comparisons, denial of responsibility, and make demands in a way that dispose people to resist what we are asking for, we promote rebellion, violence and endanger our relationship with ourselves and others. Rosenberg offered us four NVC steps that support peaceful relationships and nonviolent leadership styles: observation, feelings, needs, and requests. When we observe situations without mixing it with evaluations, connect with our feelings and needs, we explore positive strategies to meet the needs by making a specific and doable request, we can connect in a nonviolent way. Through the four steps, we can empathize with others, listen and dialogue with them, and understand their needs by giving them unconditional positive regard. For productive dialogue, we listen for feelings and needs and search for positive strategies to meet the needs. When our needs are not met, instead of resorting to self-blame and self-criticisms, we employ self-empathy by reflecting on what happened, how we feel about it, identify the unmet needs emanating from the feelings, and we examine positive strategies to meet the needs and move on. Rosenberg further demonstrated how power-over supports domination when the authority punishes the members, he/she considers disobedient and reward the members he/she termed obedient and good. Such authority does not care about the feelings and needs of his/her brothers and sisters. He showed how power-with supports dialogue and collaboration by paying attention to the feelings and needs of every religious. NVC

holds a high prospect for nonviolent leadership style, and it requires training.

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## **THE LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE OF THE EDITORIAL BOARD OF THE CATHOLIC VOYAGE JOURNAL: A CRITIQUE**

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### **Abstract**

*The author presents a critique of the leadership and governance of the editorial Board of the Catholic Voyage journal" with the intention of "bettering the board and its output constructively". Thus, he reviews some of the old articles published by the journal work and shows that the Journal is a worthy text for educating Consecrated persons and the public at large, and that it "is a journal with a difference". The author, consequently, proposes, among other things, a wider distribution of the journal, convinced that The Catholic Voyage is "a must-read for everyone."*

### **Introduction**

Critiquing this Journal at this moment in time when it is obvious that self-critique is the best way of self-enrichment is a move in a right direction. It was said of Dr Martin Luther that he would have made a better critique of the church if he had done it within the church. But instead he critiqued the church from outside and ended up making mess of his beautiful thought. Critiquing from inside helps the body critiqued to mend itself for good.

Hence this work aims at bettering the board and its output constructively.

### **A Journal with a difference**

By way of reviewing some of the old articles, in the journal, this work wants to re-represent the Journal – i.e., “*The Catholic Voyage: African Journal of Consecrated Life*” - as a worthy text for educating the religious and the public at large. Wherefore, the Catholic Voyage Journal is a journal with a difference because it totally targets the wholeness of religion and from all human dimensional reasoning and sees all human activities from religious point of view. That is why we can say that from all indications, this Journal is the eye of the entire membership of the Catholic community in Nigeria and indeed the entire Africa as a whole and beyond. It is the eye with which to see both the good and the bad in the world. It is the eye with which to interpret the world’s morality to the religious community. As such it has to make diligent effort to see clearly in order to interpret correctly. Faithful to its vision and mission, the journal has remained focused on its declared aims and objectives:

“The journal seeks to educate, inform and form. In the message it transmits, the *Catholic Voyage* strives to propagate “the good, the true and the beautiful.” (John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, n.124). Its aims, in particular, are to:

- (1) Provide a forum for the cultivation, development and promotion of philosophy, theology, Canon law, spirituality insofar as they treat matters clearly relating to Consecrated Life;
- (2) Become a medium for debate, dialogue and reflection on historical, contemporary, topical issues and

- challenges concerning consecrated life and its mission in the church and in the world;
- (3) Contribute to the local and universal Church's mandate for evangelization by proclaiming the Gospel through dialogue, inculturation, the strive for justice, peace and integral human development of peoples;
  - 4) And make Christ's message relevant and credible through the dissemination of serious studies, reflections, apostolates or ministries, documents and texts, and sharing pertinent experiences and testimonies of witnesses and experts relating to Consecrated life and Society of Apostolic Life."

From what we have seen from the previous productions of the journal, it unequivocally unlocks the wisdom of God on faith and morals in the world around us. It is arguably the best published work on religion and morality in our time.

### **Kindness and Charitable Works**

In its teaching ministry, the journal stresses the motivation for Christian duties as totally designed by God to fit within the doing economy of faith. In this respect then, kindness and charitable works to people and particularly to the poor and needy are the punch marks. That is why the Lord Jesus presses us in the parable of the Unrighteous Servant, (Lk. 16:1-18), for instance, to understand the fact that we are the stewards of his manifold graces; and since we have in many instances been unfaithful, and have forfeited the favour of his grace, it is correct wisdom to think how we may, in some other way, make amends for what we humans have done wrong in the world to turn to a good cause. Hence, we must unceasingly be motivated to lay out what we have in

works of piety and charity to assist the poor and needy. And that by so doing we may meet our good deeds again on the other side of life when death separates us from this world as we know it. Thus, if we would act wisely in the sight of God, we must be diligent and industrious to employ our riches in the acts of piety and charity, in order to promote our future and eternal welfare, as worldly men are in laying them out to the greatest temporal profit, in making to themselves friends with them, and securing other secular interests.

### **Works of Mercy**

Thus, the works of mercy in this regard, says the Journal, are understood to be such charitable actions by which we assist our neighbours in their bodily and spiritual needs. In practice, they are known, in part, as spiritual works of mercy which translate to mean: instructing, advising, consoling and comforting as well as forgiving and bearing wrongs of the targeted neighbours patiently. When they are executed as corporal works of mercy they literally consist of feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead. Among all these, giving alms to the poor is one of the chief witnesses to fraternal charity: it is also a work of justice pleasing to God. These are considered very necessary by this essay since they are the fundamental sense of taking care of other people for the sake of their wellbeing. When people's welfare are taken care of they are happy and live at peace with one another. When people live happily in peace they savour the original grace of God demonstrating progress and development of the nation. But this noble goal obviously starts with unalloyed right attitude.



## Concepts of family

The *Catholic Voyage* is also the conscience and the voice of the people. As a conscience it guides people on right things to do and as a voice, it says: what it sees about the Catholic community and gives direction on how things should be directed. For instance, in one of the articles carried by the journal on family, it clearly spelt out the Christian family, what it should be, how it should run in detailed plan of God. The Journal assumes the image of the hearth-hold of God to redefine the family of God. In this regard, it borrows from Bronstein et al, who in their journal, 'Family Relations Journal,' explain that there is no particular definition of family.<sup>325</sup> This is because there is no single correct definition of what a family is. Rather, there are multiple definitions in the literature, and these are necessarily related to the values of those who supply the definitions. That is why Burnett and Lewis adopted a pedifocal definition, which includes as family members, all individuals who are involved in the nurturance and support of a child, regardless of where the child lives. This point is similar to the African perspective on the (extended) family. Their inclusive definition says the Journal, suggests that families may include nonrelatives and may have flexible boundaries. Moreover, the former tendency to treat individuals in the study of family type as homogenous has changed since Hare and Richards studied lesbian mothers with children. The Journal maintains that the heterogeneity that is inevitably present

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<sup>325</sup>Bronstein, P. et al. (1993, July). *Family Relations. National Council on Family Relations*. Vol. 42, p. 66. As cited in *Catholic Family and the Slothful Attitude towards the Sacraments*. In *The Catholic Voyage*, 2016, vol. 12, pp.13-30

in any large grouping of people clearly emerged. The study demonstrated that the experiences of these women may differ depending on how the child was conceived.<sup>326</sup> Similarly, by studying gay stepfathers, Crosbie, Burnett and Helmercht cast light on the varying experiences of both gay men and stepfathers and therefore it affected the definition. The foregoing is an effort by the Journal to say that the concept of family is no more what it used to be - i.e. a socially constructed phenomenon with fixed norms, values, and behaviors that vary widely and are formed or created by several processes.<sup>327</sup> Furthermore, Eshleman argues that viewing selected patterns of behavior as fixed has led a number of scholars to question if the word family is even a meaningful concept, since it implies images of married couples, love, permanence, children, sexual exclusivity, home makers, legal unions, and intergenerational continuity. Such scholars have questioned whether these images are more than perceived idealism that is inconsistent with the realities of today's relationships: remarriages, dual careers, childless couples, one-parent households, same sex unions, gender inequalities, abusive partners and

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<sup>326</sup>Cited in *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Human Services*, Volume 80,

Family Service America, 1999 - Social service Page 265. Also cited in Catholic Family and the Slothful Attitude towards the Sacraments. In *The Catholic Voyage*, 2016, vol. 12, pp.13-30

<sup>327</sup> For example, Margaret Crosbie-Burnett and Edith Lewis (1993) utilize a situational definition of family in working with families where alcohol is abused. The term pedifocal, defined as "all those involved in the nurturance and support of an identified child, regardless of household membership [where the child lives]" (p. 244), expands the definition of the family from being only family members to include those working with the family.

intergenerational disruptions.<sup>328</sup> Some writers, according to Eshleman, have asked if it is time yet to begin thinking about the family and families less in terms of traditional images and standards by which everything else is judged and more in terms of close relationships and sexually bonded primary relationships. The former term, he explains, suggests a traditional view held by a small segment of the population, while the later suggests a broader, comprehensive, more accurate portrayal of the reality of human close, primary, sexually bonded relationships.<sup>329</sup>

Nevertheless, Eshleman accepts that it is difficult to find terms or concepts that differentiate family from nonfamily relationships and experiences. He quoted Ivan et al as suggesting the term sexually bonded as a characteristic. According to him, other scholars have suggested family realm as a term that differentiates familial types of human relationships from nonfamilial types, such as political, economic, medical, educational, military, and artistic relationships, among others. The family realm establishes ties across generations and includes characteristics of permanence, a comprehensive concern for all members, a process orientation that grows out of caregiving, unique and intense emotions, an emphasis on qualitative purposes and processes, an altruistic orientation, and a nurturing form of governance.<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>328</sup>Eshleman, J.R. (1994). *Family*. Boston. Allyn and Bacon Press. Also cited in *Catholic Family and the Slothful Attitude towards the Sacraments*. In *The Catholic Voyage*, 2016, vol. 12, pp.13-30

<sup>329</sup> Ibid.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid.

Consequently, all the preceding shades of family definitions fall within the adopted children of the church. Thus, the church as the hearth-hold presents all her children before the Throne of Mercy at this moment in time, to purify them and adopt them as the children of God. Moreover, it is from this perspective then that the Church is theologically conceived as mother who provides advocates and deeply cares for her children. This will bring the mystical church within the concept of African philosophy and religion where all human beings are construed as children of God. All these children of God belong to the household of God within which many hearth-holds exist. This means that all human beings belong to visible and invisible realms of God's world. It also follows not only that 'all of creation is cared for by God, the source of our being' but that 'the whole cosmos constitutes the *oikonomia* of God'<sup>331</sup>

Thus, if we are to compartment ourselves (*sic!*)<sup>332</sup> within the church's understanding of the family, says the Journal, then the question will be what shall happen to those creatures of God arising from the above statistics whom by all counts are the poorest members of the human society? For according to the USA Catholic Bishop's Pastoral "women raising children alone as well as women with inadequate income following divorce, widowhood or retirement,"<sup>333</sup> are the poorest sets of human society. Coupled with this, are tensions among the divorced people, children from all categories of poor families and incongruent men and women of the world

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<sup>331</sup>Oduyoye, 2001, p. 79

<sup>332</sup> *Editor's note:* "compartment ourselves" is unclear.

<sup>333</sup> P.18 1987

make the existence of the family ministry inevitable. Connected with the awareness of the ever increasing families are the problems of divorce, abortion, low self-esteem, and many other family problems contribute to make the family ministry unavoidable. Perhaps, this must be the discrepancy that inspired the American Bishop's Pastoral "A Vision and Strategy" to include "the engaged, newly marrieds, those in the middle and later years of married life, extended families and young singles searching together for Christian understanding of sexuality and marital commitment...military, minority, particular racial, cultural and ethnic heritages. The widowed, separated and divorced Catholics and one-parent families,"<sup>334</sup> in their new plan for family ministry. Hence, Joann Heaney-Hunter rightly suggested that all categories of families should be regarded as "God's people, united by their belief in Christ across time and space."<sup>335</sup> Both the Bishops' amendment and the Hunter's idea bring relief to Catholic ministers who would have been distracted by the conservative moral innuendoes highlighted by the earlier teachings of the Catholic Church. The ministers and indeed the entire catholic community will now see the generality of human persons as the image of God who need human relationship and service and then carry on their work with equanimity.

It is under this then that this work examines the family system method as one of the ways of bringing the message of hope to embattled people of God. As the life of the Church and society are attacked by the avalanche of science and technology so is the science of tackling the

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<sup>334</sup> P.18 1987

<sup>335</sup> P.61

problems are developing. Latest in the scene is the systems theory. "Family systems theory is based on the belief that the family is a natural social grouping. Every individual functions within some larger ecological unit, and for most people it is the family."<sup>336</sup> In this case "family members are studied in terms of their interactions and not merely their intrinsic personal attributes."<sup>337</sup> The strength of this theory is on the ability of each member to resolve to change roles and respect the boundaries at any given period of the life of the family. The theory, which sees the family life as cyclic, is also based on the flow of unhindered communication within the family. In this method the entire family is conceived as a whole. The members are also individual wholes in the sense that each member will be a unique individual who autonomously acts but then relates with maturity to the entire family that is now the larger whole. This works within the understanding of "we—we" principle. This understanding holds the unity of the family in this strategic paradox that makes many and one at the same time. All of us exist because we exist as individuals and yet together as one family. Each member of the family will be saying to each other "without me you are not, and without you I am not. So together we stand but alone, I fall." This is similar to African concept of interdependence. If something happens to one member of the family another member will be genuinely affected and concerned. This means that if one person is sick all will be sick and all will together search for the healing. If that one person gets well the whole family will be well.

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<sup>336</sup> Durka, 1986, p. 81

<sup>337</sup> Goldenberg and Goldenberg, p. 21

Thus it means in the words of Goldenberg and Goldenberg, “More than the sum that each family member adds to the whole, what we should attend to is the ongoing relationship between and among the members, their mutual impact.<sup>338</sup>” Because it is destined to educate, the learners will then study the piece and acquire knowledge about the Christian family and follow as directed.

### **Celibacy**

In another article on celibacy the Journal made an effort to educate the audience on the importance of priestly celibacy. It went ahead to explain that celibacy is a unique way of living in this world. That it runs totally parallel to married life. It explained that since a celibate is a eunuch it has nothing to do with bearing children, which is the main preoccupation of marriage. So to be a celibate is to steer clear of sexual intercourse. In other words, celibacy is a direct opposite of marriage. However, this caveat is not out of hatred for marriage rather it is out of choice. For as Christ said in Mt 19:12, those who would like to accept the suggestion on celibacy should do so but those who are not capable of accepting it should leave it. From here then we understand that staying in this world has only two ways which is either very well married or become a eunuch for the kingdom and remain like that for ever. No room for looking askance on either of them. This article then teaches the eternal resolution of the ambiguity clustering the celibate and married life.

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<sup>338</sup> Ibid. P.21,

### **Formation of Young Priests and Nuns**

This Journal again carried a scintillating article on formation of young priests and nuns. The article was obviously set for novice masters and mistresses, but even those who have made their final religious vows for many years back, when finished reading it will discover that the article is a masterpiece. You would have renewed your novitiate years over and above and refreshed your mind on what you did many years ago. If you have the copy, you discover that you have a notebook which will refresh your memories every now and then. And if you are called to guide a group of people on one day or one week or so retreat, you have a workbook in your hand from the journal. In this way you form and educate the people through the aid of the Journal. Just imagine that somebody has charitably put out that nice piece for the education of fellow Christians and because of highhandedness of the board all these knowledge will be locked up and talked away. It is not good. Let the board have a change of heart and fulfil what they have challenged themselves to do.

### **Charity and Patience**

Moreover, on the theme of charity, in major Pauline writings, the Journal noted especially in 1 Cor 13:1-3, where Paul demonstrates that charity is more than what people generally understood as almsgiving. Here he explains charity or agape or love as love in its fullest and most extensive meaning, calling it true love to God and man, adding that it is a benevolent disposition of mind towards our fellow-Christians, growing out of sincere and fervent devotion to God. This living principle of all duty



and obedience is the more excellent way of which the apostle speaks, preferable to all gifts. Nay, without this the most glorious gifts are nothing, are of no account to us, and are of no esteem in the sight of God.

In this regard, Charity is translated to be “long suffering” *makrothyme* meaning that it can endure evil, injury, and provocation, without being filled with resentment, indignation or revenge. Charity makes the mind firm, it gives the mind power over the angry passions, and furnishes it with a persevering patience. Such a patience that would rather wait and wish for the reformation of a brother than fly out in resentment of his conduct. Charity puts up with many slights and rejects from the person it loves, and wait long to see the kindly effects of such patience on him

Its meaning is further clarified by the Greek translation of the Old Testament, where we read that God is “slow to anger” (Ex 34:6; Numb 14:18). It refers then to the quality of one who does not act on impulse and avoids giving offense. We find this quality in the God of the Covenant, who calls us to imitate him also within the life of the family. St Paul’s texts using this word need to be read in the light of the Book of Wisdom (cf. 11:23; 12:2, 15-18), which extols God’s restraint, as leaving open the possibility of repentance, yet insists on his power, as revealed in his acts of mercy. God’s “patience,” shown in his mercy towards sinners, is a sign of his real power.

The Journal further explains that being patient does not mean letting ourselves be constantly, tolerating physical aggression or allowing other people to use us. Continuing, it says that we encounter problems whenever we think that relationships or people ought to be perfect, or when we put ourselves at the centre and expect things

to turn our way. Then everything makes us impatient, everything makes us react aggressively. It advises that we should cultivate the virtue of patience, in order to avoid finding excuses for responding angrily. Otherwise we would end up incapable of living together, antisocial, unable to control our impulses and our families will become battlegrounds...Patience takes root when we recognise that other people also have a right to live in this world, just as they are. It does not matter if they hold me back, if they unsettle my plans, or annoy me by the way they think or if they are not everything we want them to be. Love always has an aspect of deep compassion that leads to accepting the other person as part of this world, even when he or she acts differently than we would like.

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### **An Image of Consecrated People**

Moreover, the Journal is the image of the religious people in Nigeria: as an image, the Journal makes reasonable effort to do better than usual. It buckles up daily to do something better. If the members are struggling to bring to the table very refined works as I have tried to demonstrate, it is only good that we the board members should embellish the works with good outing. The leadership composition needs to be revamped. The leadership board needs to be gender sensitive and more learned writers should be added to form a larger and balanced consortium

### **The Ailments**

Above all, the highest ailment of this beautiful Journal is poor distribution. Following the extensive, readership

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<sup>339</sup> *Amoris Laetitia*, 2016, 50-51

mapped out by the board, in page 4, volume 12, 2014 of the Journal, it appears that the distribution we are getting at moment is to say the least very scanty. If you take that the journal is published every January every year, every well-meaning friend of the Journal would presume to least by March of every year, to have got their copies. But as I am writing now in May, many including my very self have not got anything called their own copies. What could be adduced as the reason cogent enough to warrant this delay, I wonder? The major superiors who are very few owing to the very slim selective number invited for the meeting take one or a few copies each as the entitlement copies and go back to their communities to share amongst themselves. What if say ten copies are sent to each community of about fifty nuns? That is in case of women religious? My point here is that since this is the only local text for dynamically educating the membership of the religious community in Nigeria, each religious should possess at least one copy to enable the religious to read and digest and even underline the topic, where necessary. In this regard, a total head count of all the religious in Nigeria should be submitted to the board. After each publication, the journal should be shared according to the number of religious in each community, and the community will bear the cost. In this way each religious should possess one copy of the journal every year. In this way we are assured of providing each religious a tool to educate oneself from the local source. This is not to say that even when each religious is forced to take one copy, yet some will never dare to open it not to talk of reading it, but one thing will be certain: the board will heave a sigh of relief that they have tried their best to 'educate and form' the religious as they claimed in the first

chapters of volume 12 of the Journal. When it is supplied in abundance, in parishes people who think like the religious will avail of the journal and purchase them and read and acquire knowledge the board is packaging in the Journal.

If it is mass produced or produce in large quantities, the price of a copy is reduced and the journal will be both affordable and accessible to all our projected consumers.

Finally, houses of formation and/or Seminaries should possess as many copies as possible so as to serve the desired readership purpose. As you know in the seminaries thesis or long essays are written by final year students as a partial fulfilment of the requirement for their graduation. These long essays are designed to contain very well researched works in which citations are required from works of authors relevant to each topic. The Catholic Voyage is a well-researched work that should form some of the citations. But it rarely appears. When asked, some say that they have never heard about the Journal, some say that they have heard but not available. Why are the Journal not available in the Seminaries, and or the houses of formation? Who is to be blamed here? The Rector, Librarian or the lecturers? It is the responsibility of the board of editors to see that all the named consumers are served with adequate copies. The readership includes the lay people who share the same ideas with the religious men and women. By all standard these group of people are far larger than the professed religious, in fact you can call them the rest of the church. When the known number is not catered for what becomes of the uncounted number of the membership of the church, is anybody's guess. By the way, why is the distribution so scanty and hush-hush as if it is contraband

goods? The Journal is a public material and so should be distributed without fear. It should be widely distributed so that our desired consumers should be properly served. In my own opinion, if this poor distribution continues like this, it will seriously undermine the lofty aim of the Journal. Come to think of it, when the designed audience does not get the Journal as and when due, what becomes the fate of the larger audience? Or you mean the Journal, say that of one copy a major superior say in Jos is educating the whole Jos community, the seminary and the laity with his/her own single copy? Impossible! My suggestion is that more copies should be printed and more distributors should be appointed, a survey of bookshops say in Jos should be made and copies given to them with some percentage discount. Major superiors should disseminate the journals in their areas of jurisdiction. Seminaries and houses of formation should become partners. And as the seminarians sell their Journals and magazines so they will carry our Journals and market for us. The bishops should be made aware of the Journal and the need to support it financially. The parishes through the parish priests should know of it and participate in selling and reading the Journal. Since this is the main religious journal in Nigeria, every faithful should be glad to support it!

It is also noted that the Journal is on its way to broader circulation by publishing in different media outlets. While I am happy for that singular feat, I am only arguing here for the sufficiency of local consumption, where it is badly needed now: However, there is nothing bad in the two of them growing together. The news that the Journal is online is even a very great news but if I may ask. How

many people of the local consumers can access it online?<sup>340</sup>

## **Conclusion**

These and many other salient points packaged in this journal make the Journal a must-read for everyone.

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<sup>340</sup> *Editor's note:* As a matter of fact, first, before this article was received on July 19,2020 and since then, and based on prior communications of the Editor-in-Chief with the authorities at the General Secretariat of publishers of the journal, the Office of the Editorial board has been examining most of the suggestions presented in this article as well as other important related matters. This is in view of coming up with more innovative, creative and inclusive approaches to the several and complex challenges - not excluding matters of the distribution/marketing of the printed editions - faced by the journal. Secondly, normally about 95.5% of all the (albeit limited) copies *printed* annually are regularly distributed (at joint *Annual General Meeting* of the NCWR and CMSN in January) to consecrated persons and to contributing authors in each printed edition. Thirdly, The Catholic Voyage is gender sensitive. Hence, at various times, communicating with those in-charge, the Editorial Board appealed for an increase in the members of editorial Board such that it should include more women. It must be honestly recognized that some of the women religious contacted declined invitation; in the meantime, there were resignation and death among already active female members of Board, which awaits the conclusion of the process of appointment of more members who are scholars and competent. Fourthly, the current number of local consumers of the online editions of the journal in Africa, including Nigeria, is significant and encouraging (in spite of the general internet accessibility challenges). We foresee that the number of online users will continue to grow and the accessibility challenges will not necessarily be permanent or eternal in Africa.

EXPERIENCES★WITNESS  
INTERVIEW★REPORT

**CHALLENGES AND LESSONS OF BEING A CHURCH AND  
LIVING THE CONSECRATED LIFE DURING THE COVID-  
19 PANDEMIC**

*REV. SR. AGNES ADEPOJU, OLA<sup>341</sup>*



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## **Abstract**

This paper aims at addressing the challenges posed by the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) especially to people in consecrated life. The advent of this disease that is threatening the existence human life took ,the world by surprise with its easy and rapid rate of infection, high mortality rate and the fact that there is no known cure or medication to curb its spread. The effect of this new killer disease was so tremendous that on the 30th of January 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) declared it a Public Health Emergency of International Concern, in other words, a global pandemic. Four months down the line, the effect of this novel killer-disease has taken its toll on every sphere of the human existence. Life as we know it has changed with the emergence of the new normal. Businesses, Schools and even religious bodies have had to make drastic decisions in compliance and solidarity with civil authorities to stem the spread of this killer disease. The extent of how this will affect individuals, the Church, School, Consecrated Persons, the World economy and the world at large both in the short-term and long-term effects are not completely clear yet.

While many are discussing the wide-ranging effects on world and national economies and on both physical and mental health of individuals, one key question to ask is how the COVID-19 pandemic will impact on the church and in particular the priests and those in the religious life. How can we be a church without congregating to worship as a family of God's children because of the regulations banning social and/or religious gatherings? What are the effects of this on priests and consecrated persons who have been impeded from carrying out their regular pastoral duties and how is the Church, in spite of all odds,



making conscious effect to Shepherd the souls entrusted to her care? How can consecrated persons live out their call, mandate and mission in these devastating times. This paper seeks to address these issues in a pedagogical manner.

## **1.0 Preamble**

The Corona virus has swiftly and rapidly brought the world to its knees with its infectious and high mortality rate. The world, with all its scientific advancement and experts, was thrown into a conundrum as it was rendered helpless while the novel virus ravaged every nation of the world, affecting the lives of everyone. Since its inception till date, the world has not been the same. Slowly, as one woken from a long sound sleep, world leaders began to take actions. Lockdowns and restrictions were imposed, more centers for testing and treating were created, economies and businesses were shutdown, social gatherings were prohibited, schools and other related institutions were equally shutdown. Even the religious sphere was not spared. Religious gatherings were banned all in a desperate bid to at least contain the spread of the virus.

As Newton's third law asserts "every action has an equal and opposite reaction" so also these moves and actions by world leaders brought about, I dare say, unequal and adverse reactions. The economy all over the world has experienced and still experiencing a rapid decline which analyst aver would take a while before recovery, schools and other related institutions with a pre-planned curriculum have had to make serious adjustments the same for businesses and indeed everyone. In the midst of the crisis, the Church is faced yet

with a direr trauma- the inability to gather and celebrate the sacraments<sup>342</sup>. These have presented the church, particularly the church in Nigeria; with serious challenges as to how best to rise up to the situation.

It is on this backdrop that we shall discuss the Challenges and Lessons of being a Church and living the Consecrated Life during the Covid-19 pandemic.

## **2.0 The Challenges of being a Church during the Covid-19 Pandemic**

Estimably, the Corona virus pandemic has left over twelve million persons infected and more than five hundred thousand persons dead globally. It is one of the toughest challenges confronting the globe currently, while its effects can be said to be far worse than the effects of a war situation.

The Corona virus pandemic like other pandemics before it has posed a number of challenges to the Church and especially the faith of the people who are already getting used to what I may refer to as a, new normal way of worship. This new normal way of worship has seen the suspension of public Masses around the world, while people are encouraged to follow the Mass virtually, what the Church has always censure is now a new normal way of worship. Notably, this devastating time have denied Catholics access to sacraments in the Church and the events which led to the great celebration of the centrality of our faith and beyond was celebrated around the world without the presence of the faithful. This pandemic has cut short the lives of over a hundred priests in Italy, while

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<sup>342</sup>Stephen Bullivant, "Catholicism in the time of Coronavirus" Word on fire Park Ridge, Los Angeles, 2020, ii.

Catholic faithfuls who trusted God on behalf of their loved ones who contacted the virus and died may be on the verge of losing their faith in God and the Church. The plight of Catholics at this time, can be described in the words of Bishop Robert Barron in his Foreword to Stephen Bullivant's short book titled, "Catholicism in the time of Corona virus" which says, *"Plunged into the darkness of uncertainty, illness and death, and separated from the life giving power of the sacraments and the support of their parish communities, Catholics are feeling, understandably enough, quite disheartened."*<sup>343</sup> Catholics are not only disheartened as Bishop Barron describes it, but are also thrown into a deep crisis of faith which if ignored, or not properly addressed by the Church through adequate Catechesis, may lead to many Catholics losing their Catholic faith. The Church at this time, as maybe never before, has challenge of re-catechesizing lapse and fallen Catholics who have lost their faith as a result of the pandemic.

However, what may now appear as a new normal way of worship is nothing but an attestation of the undying love of the Church for her children, who will always make provision to nourish her children even in the most difficult conditions of life. The same was the case in 1575 when an epidemic broke out in Milan, With the Churches closed and people confined in their homes, St. Charles Borromeo who was the Bishop of Milan then did not only cater for the physical needs of the people but their spiritual needs as well. St. Charles Borromeo had altars set up around the town where Masses were celebrated daily and people participated from their homes. He also

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<sup>343</sup>Stephen Bullivant, "Catholicism in the time of Coronavirus" ii.

started door to door confessions and the practice of taking the Holy Eucharist to people in their homes on Sundays.<sup>344</sup>As such, what may be referred to as the new normal is never to replace the normal liturgical way of celebrating the sacraments, it is only a provision made for a particular need.

### **3.0 The Lessons of being a Church during the Covid-19 Pandemic**

The Church as implied here is not to be narrowed to the physical structures, but to us as a people who make up the Church. The Church, despite the perilous times that we have been bedeviled with has learnt some viable lessons from this pandemic. The pandemic as it were, has been for us a time to compulsorily retreat from all our work and introspects on what really matter, that is, life and the contingency of beings. Both the super-rich and the poorest of the poor have been victims of this pandemic and even the best of hospitals could not save them. Many persons in Europe and other parts of the world have suddenly discovered that they can do without soccer league matches, going to picnics and malls, visiting friends and travelling for business and vacations. We have come to realize that food, water and medicine are essentials we cannot do without, while other things we take so seriously can always be suspended and the needful done.

With families confined in their homes because of this pandemic, there is revival of family life and values as families have more time to pray and study the word of God together.

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<sup>344</sup>Stephen Bullivant, "Catholicism in the time of Coronavirus" 31.

For all it's worth, this period poses a blessing to the Church as well. While the faithful were used to congregating as a Church on parish or likewise level, this period offers them the opportunity to gather as a Church within the family bearing in mind that the family is the domestic Church and her members are called to live out Christ's love (*familiaris consortio* 49, 56-64).<sup>345</sup> Hence while she could not gather at the larger level, the domestic Church has been solid and seen impressive growth during this period

The period of this pandemic has instilled in many of the faithful who before now take the sacraments for levity to a more appreciation of the sacraments, especially the Mass, a strong yearning for them, they are starved of the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist and they strongly desire to return to it.

The Church at this period of pandemic has also come to appreciate the more use of the media as a pivotal tool of fostering evangelization. So many Catholic groups, association and societies are having their prayers and meetings online. With this, even non-Catholics may come to appreciate the richness of our faith and be evangelized.

#### **4.0 Living the Consecrated Life during the Covid-19 Pandemic**

There is indeed no better time to live out the consecrated life than in the period of crisis like the current pandemic. This life is to be lived out by all Christians who by the very nature of their baptism have been consecrated to God. More particularly, as Pope John Paul II described

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<sup>345</sup>John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*( November 22, 1981)

consecrated persons in his Apostolic Exhortation, “*Vita Consecrata*”, as men and women in every age, who obedient to the Father’s call and the promptings of the Holy Spirit, have chosen this special way of following Christ in order to devote themselves to him with an undivided heart. Consecrated Life according to this Apostolic Exhortation is a Life rooted in the teaching and example of Christ the Lord, a gift of God the Father to his Church through the Holy Spirit. By the profession of evangelical counsels, the consecrated persons bear the characteristic features of Jesus, the chaste, poor and obedient one.<sup>346</sup> The consecrated persons are therefore expected to be the face of Christ in the world especially in periods of great crisis and pandemic. In his message to the Consecrated Virgins, on the 31<sup>st</sup> of May, 2020, the Holy Father Pope Francis exhorts the Consecrated Virgins to love everyone especially those in need. He reminds them that their consecration dedicates them to God without separating them from the setting in which they live and in which they have been called to bear personal witness by a lifestyle of evangelical closeness. By such closeness to the men and women of our times the Holy Father continues, your virginal consecration helps the Church to love the poor, to discern forms of material and spiritual poverty, to help those who are weak and vulnerable, those suffering from physical and mental illness, the young and the elderly, and all those in danger of being marginalized or discarded.<sup>347</sup> Christians and the Consecrated persons have always sacrificed their lives in helping people during pandemics. In 240 A.D. when a

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<sup>346</sup>John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata* ( March 25, 1996)

<sup>347</sup>Francis, Message to Consecrated Virgins ( May 31, 2020)

pandemic broke out in the Roman Empire, Christians in the city alongside with St. Pontius stayed behind to nurse those in need irrespective of their faith while others fled the city. St. Dionysius describes the Christian gestures as follows, "Most of our brethren were unsparing in their exceeding love and brotherly kindness. They held fast to each other and visited the sick fearlessly, and ministered to them continually, serving Christ them."<sup>348</sup> To this end during this period of the pandemic more than ever consecrated persons have been generous dispensers of charity and beacons of hope to those abandoned and discarded, the weakest, the voiceless, and the most vulnerable irrespective of language difference, culture and religion. In more practical ways, they have taken some time out more than an instance to feed the indigent and hungry people around them. They have also rendered help to those in need and have seen to that fact that they were incapacitated to come to work and not considering that the fact that they have recorded no income since the emergence of the lockdown and its gradual lifting.

This period also has led so many consecrated lives to a greater appreciation of fraternal communion which is part of the nucleus of consecrated life. With the advent of the pandemic, the bond within consecrated persons has been further strengthened, especially in areas of loving, listening and accepting, promoting, supporting, understanding, cooperating, participating, sharing, bearing wrongs, forgiving and fraternizing. It has also been a time to communicate, a time to show kindness, sympathy and concern and an effective participation in

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<sup>348</sup>Stephen Bullivant, "Catholicism in the time of Coronavirus", 7.

the communal life of prayer and the Eucharist which are the locus of communal or consecrated living.

Finally during this period consecrated persons have intensified prayers for the affected persons and for those who are going through difficult moments of their lives especially those who find it difficult to meet up with the basic amenities of life, that God will raise generous magnanimous men and women to grant soothing relief to their plight, also prayers being offered for the health workers and eradication of this deadly virus.

## **5.0 Conclusion**

The Covid-19 pandemic has no doubt affected the life and activities of the Church and there have been speculations as to the ripple effects of this pandemic on humanity. The end of the pandemic may be attended by a decline or an increase in faith of Catholic faithfuls. Whichever, happens to be the case, the Church more than ever needs to re-strategize new ways of evangelization to enable the people heal gradually from the psychological trauma that may have been caused by the pandemic.





**CONSECRATED LIFE MATTERS**



**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF *DEUS CARITAS EST* AND  
*CARITAS IN VERITATE* OF POPE BENEDICT XVI IN OUR  
CONTEMPORARY WORLD: A PRAGMATIC  
CORRELATION BETWEEN LOVE, JUSTICE  
AND PEACE**

*Rev. Sr. Nnachebem Veronica Osuji DMMM<sup>349</sup>*

**Abstract**

*Catholic Social Teaching (CST) is one of the most powerful and essential ethical tradition around the world. This tradition of social doctrine is looking for a way to form people who are passionate about global justice and peace*

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*and are sensitive to the well-being of their neighbour as well. The Social Teaching of the Church centres on human dignity, value of human life as well as caring and sharing of our common good on earth. This teaching touches all aspects of human life: personal, spiritual, economic, and political dimension. The paper focuses on the significance of Deus Caritas Est and Caritas in Veritate of Pope Benedict XVI. His first and second Encyclicals have been used in this inquiry to ground and control the investigation process. The study includes primary and secondary sources and author's personal experiences for data analyses. The concepts of Love, Justice and Peace were analysed and used to offer insights to the whole probe. The results indicate that the on-going crisis in our contemporary world will get worst if the world leaders do not give attention to Catholic Social Teachings for decades now.*

## **1. Background**

Catholic Social Teaching (CST) is one of the ethical traditions. The fundamental principle of this Social Teaching is respect for human dignity. According to Massaro 2012, people all over the world constantly derive precious advantages from this habitual teaching of the Church, both the past and present-day generation. Generally, the Social Teaching of the Church is a doctrine that focuses centrally on human dignity, value of human life as well as the caring and sharing of our common good on earth. It is based on the belief that triune God is the creator and has purpose for his creation. The social doctrine of the church teaches that God has a plan to establish his kingdom of love, peace, and justice on earth. It teaches that each person born into this world is unique and has a distinctive purpose. This social thinking of the

Catholic Church touches all aspects of human life; personal, spiritual, economic as well as political dimension. The social principles of the Church regarding social justice are not to identify abuses of laws and to evaluate who is to blame and who not to. instead, “this tradition of teaching seeks to form people who are committed to proper order, passionate about global justice, and sensitive to the well-being of their neighbours, beyond the strictures of the letter of the law” (Massaro 4, p. 58).

Additionally, regardless of numerous international relations, collaborations, and mutual aids among states, the world appears to be more in crisis now than ever. Despite the numerous international charitable organizations in our present-day, the poor people and nations around the globe seem to be getting poorer. These are some of the questions that provoke me to investigate the topic of this study. Why? Because, I have been in the field of teaching Catholic doctrine for some years now, and these three concepts: love, justice, and peace remain an important question of interrelationships between the most fundamental issues of the Catholic Social Teaching (CST).

This paper however sets out to check whether there can be Justice without True charity? Or sustainable Peace attained without Justice? This inquiry starts-off in section one by highlighting the background of the topic, its origin and why it is important in our contemporary world. The second part will discuss about the origin of Christian love, and it will also demonstrate charity to mean love as Church’s language. Section three explains the relations between Charity- (love) and Justice. The fourth unit will present detailed discussions and analyses on practical

relationship between the three major concepts of this paper: love, justice, and peace. Followed by the fifth segment that will bring all the parts of this study to a meaningful link, together with author's own reflection and suggestions about the findings. This investigation uses both primary and secondary sources for data analyses.

Meanwhile, two encyclicals will be the major focus: *Deus Caritas Est* and *Caritas in Veritate* of Pope Benedict XVI. Other related articles, books and thoughts will be employed as well to fortify the paper. "The church searches for truth, proclaims it tirelessly and recognizes it wherever it is manifested. This mission of truth is something that the Church can never renounce. Her social doctrine is a particular dimension of this proclamation: it is a service to the truth which sets us free" (*Caritas in Veritate*, 9).

Pope Benedict XVI, in his first encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (God is love), writes to remind the Christians and all men of good will around the world that 'God's love is very central to Christian life. In the follow up of his encyclical titled *Caritas in Veritate* (Charity in truth), the holy father teaches us that charity- love of neighbour is more than offering or giving away from one's excess possession. Consequently, these two encyclicals sound appropriate in the 21st century context. These two encyclicals represent an indispensable and valuable positive message of the Catholic Social Teaching (CST), particularly in our contemporary fragmented world. These documents are concrete, because, they raise some important questions of interrelationship between the most fundamental issues of the Catholic Social Teaching, such as mentioned in the title of this paper. The Catholic Church will continue to

say and defend the truth in season and out of season. Many have given up their lives to defend the authentic teachings in the Gospel. Jesus said, "you will come to know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (Jn 8:32). It is this undiluted truth in the Gospel that pope Benedict contend to highlight in his papal messages; *Deus Caritas Est* and *Caritas in Veritate*.

Observing what is going on around the globe today, one is made to affirm the significance these encyclicals vis-à-vis its practical link between love, justice, and peace. The analyses of the three concepts attest its strong relationship. These specific encyclicals of Pope Benedict have substantial positive impact on the reader concerning the prophetic mission and social teaching of the Church. The truth about these three concepts is that they are highly interrelated in such a way that if one is neglected, the other seems more likely to fail. And if one is positively implemented, inevitably the other can follow as well. However, Love is the key and the greatest of the three. Why? Because, if true love is lacking, certainly there will be no room for justice, and in the presence of injustice, sustainable peace will never be attained. The only thing that remains will be (crisis and wars) precisely what is happening in our present-day world. It is on this ground therefore that we are calling upon all men of good will, believers, and non-believers to a change of attitude to a new way of thinking towards our dealings with our fellow human-beings and other God's creatures as well. In the letter of St. Paul to Corinthians, he writes, "as it is, these remain; faith, hope, and love, the three of them; and the greatest of them is love" (1 Cor 13:13).

## **2. God's love is the origin of Christian Charity**

Benedict XVI begins his first encyclical with two important and indispensable words in the Christian hemisphere; 'God' and 'love'. He writes, "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him" (1). The language of God is love, and this expression in 1Jn 4:16 clearly reveals the meaning and source of Christian charity. Besides, since love has been perceived as God's language, what does to speak the language of love signify? To speak the language of God unveils that every human being is called to learn this language, because it is the only language that will lead humanity to live and experience true happiness and what is known as sustainable peace on earth. . We are greatly in need of this knowledge of true love, specifically in our contemporary troubled world. The love that we are talking about is the love which God disclosed to humanity through his son Jesus Christ. It is this type of charity that pope Benedict calls 'Deus Caritas Est' (the love of God). It is known as agape type of love which Christians are called to imitate and engage upon. And not vice versa.

In the letter to Colossians, St. Paul says, "above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony" (Colossians 3:14). Similarly, in his message to the Corinthians he writes, "let all that you do be done in love" (1Corinthians 16:14). Based on this revelation regarding love, it becomes quite logical to claim that possessing 'true love' is the highest gift that makes every other gift possible. It may sound contradictory to say that I love God, while disregarding my neighbour. But, the question remains, who is one's neighbour? The holy father answers this interrogation by illustrating the parable of the Good Samaritan. Mark and Louise Zwick in

their comment on their reflection states that the “love of God and love of neighbour have become one: in the least of the brethren we find Jesus himself, and in Jesus we find God” (15). In the papal reflection about love and its Scriptural meaning, he states, “if anyone says, I love God; and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen” (16). The pope’s reflection of the story of the Good Samaritan describes one’s neighbour as your fellow human being, disregarding wherever the person comes from. To that end, my neighbour exemplifies anyone that needs my assistance and I am in the position to help. Love of neighbour therefore is globalized in this sense, though, its practical application remains. The holy father goes further to say that it is only with God, and through His grace that I can love someone that I do not know or even like. But, through deep personal encounter with God, this intimate relationship with God can begin to affect my personal feelings towards another. Love grows as it is being nurtured. It is only Love that unifies us to God; “through this unifying process it makes us a ‘we’ which transcends our divisions and makes us one, until in the end God is ‘all in all’ (18). As Christians, Thomas Aquinas tells us that the things we love tells whom we are. And St. Augustine goes deeper to say that the beauty of our soul is love. And it is only love that unites us to (God) our creator. Therefore, our hearts will never have rest until they rest in God, because, God made us in His own image and for Himself. According to Augustin, if you believe only what you like in the Gospel, and reject the ones you do not like, it is not the Gospel then that you believe, but rather you believe in yourself.

According to Thomas Aquinas, evidence is not necessary for those with faith, and for those without faith, no amount of evidence will be sufficient. He added; we should be aware that it is only God that creates, man simply rearranges.

### **3. Relationship between Charity and Justice**

To live as it should be is to act as it should be. There is nothing greater to demonstrate God's goodness than to love and to act justly, because, the language of God is love. The Scripture tells us that "God is love, and he who abides in love, abides in God and God abides in him" (1Jn 4:16). When one professes Christian faith, it is assumed that the person has come to believe in the love of God, which means that the person meant what he/she has professed.

But, the question remains, do those who profess Christian faith really understand what Christian language of love (agape) entails? In line with Christian understanding of love, the Pope emphasizes strongly these indispensable concepts of charity, truth, and integral human development which in turn generates authentic Christian love. According to Benedict XVI, charity and justice interplay each other in different ways. Firstly, justice and charity cannot be separated, and you can only give because you love. But charity goes beyond justice.

Therefore, "I cannot give what is mine to the other, without first giving him what pertains to him in justice" (6). Doing justice is a primary way of rendering charity to others. Hence, charity goes beyond and completes justice. In *Octogesima Adveniens* of Pope Paul VI 1971, he says that "legislation is necessary, but, it is not sufficient for setting up true relationships of justice and equity. In



teaching us charity, the Gospel instructs us in the preferential respect due to the poor and the special situation they have in society” (23).

In *Caritas in Veritate*, our holy father states, “love – caritas – is an extraordinary force which leads people to opt for courageous and generous engagement in the field of justice and peace” (1). Benedict XVI believed that the origin of Christian charity is from God, and that God is an eternal love itself. Therefore, “anyone who wishes to give love must also receive love as a gift. Certainly, as the Lord tells us, one can become a source from which rivers of living water flow” (7). This is to suggest that one must always attach himself to Jesus Christ who is the visible origin of our being, from whom the love of God through grace enriches us.

And so, to offer an authentic charity, one needs to possess the right Spirit, free from any kind of intoxication and selfish interest. It is nothing but the truth because you cannot give what you do not have. You can only give what you have. This is where the Church’s understanding and intentions about true charity differs from other forms of Charity organizations around the world. Jesus Christ, the son of God is the visible truth. And so, for one to claim to be in the field of true charity, the application of the true gospel of Jesus Christ is indispensable. Therefore, whosoever wants to defend true love must receive it as a vocation from the author of life to be able to love our sisters and brothers with an authentic gospel truth according to God’s plan. It is not the same as using charity organizations to achieve either joint or individual ideology and interest as well at the expense of other human sufferings.

The Pope says that “Charity is at the heart of the Church’s social doctrine” (2). All the social teaching of the Church concerning charity are derived from the teachings of Jesus in the gospel. The entire law that Jesus taught us in the Gospels are summarized in the love of God and love of neighbour. The social teaching of the Church regarding charity is not based only on families, friends, ethnic, and country relationships. It communicates also other macro important aspects of human relations such as economic, social as well as political domain.

The social doctrine of the Church moves beyond micro relationships, it teaches as Jesus commanded us in the Gospel to put love first in everything we do, because, love comes from God and that God himself is love. The Pope reminded us here in his first encyclical: *Deus caritas Est* that “everything has its origin in God’s love, everything is shaped by it, everything is directed towards it. Love is God’s greatest gift to humanity” (2). He added that it is God’s promise to humanity, and we hope and trust in His word.

According to Pope Benedict XVI, “charity is love received and given” (5). And so, the meaning of charity is love. We recognize this fact by God’s love to humanity through the suffering, death, and resurrection of his son Jesus Christ. This is a typical example of love which the holy father is illuminating and emphasizing upon in his encyclical (*Caritas in Veritate*). The teaching is about the service to charity, but his main driving purpose is to draw our attention to ‘truth’. Our charity work must be given with sincere act of love. This statement signifies that to offer charity in love is a gift through the Grace of God. Any expression of charity to one’s neighbour should be done in such a way that demonstrates honest love. Charity is a

good thing, but it must be done with genuine love. “Only in truth does charity shine forth, only in truth can charity be authentically lived. Truth is the light that gives meaning and value to charity” (3).

What does it really mean to love someone? Pope Benedict XVI has this response to this question, “To love someone is to desire that person’s good and to take effective steps to secure it. Besides the good of the individuals, there is a good that is linked to living in society: the common good” (7). This is to elucidate the fact that we should not stress only about individual rights, but also do remember that we are living together in one common society, and therefore has common human value and dignity to put into consideration as well.

The Bible tells us that faith without good work is dead. Consequently, by virtue of our Christian faith, we are bound to show love to people who need our help. But then, it depends on what type of charity service to render in the name of humanitarian assistance to either individuals or group of persons? The important question is whether that aid can provide effective outcome in developing all aspects of human person to those receiving the aid?

#### **4. Strong link between Charity, Justice and Peace**

What does it mean to be poor? Of course, there are different kinds of poverty; material, moral, and spiritual. Unfortunately, our contemporary world recognises only possession of affluent material things as being rich. While disregarding spiritual and moral dimensions of human life. Materialism has blind folded this generation from recognizing the richness of spiritual and moral attributes towards human life. “Love in truth according to our holy

father “is a great challenge for the church in a world that is becoming progressively and pervasively globalized” (9). The current chaos around the world today is a big challenge that calls for urgent attention to Catholic doctrine from many decades ago. Globally speaking, the present-day society is seen as highly corrupt and deceitful. Subsequently, Benedict’s encyclical on charity in ‘truth’ is an outstanding message which conforms to our contemporary context.

His first two papal encyclicals are seen to be indispensable document in resolving current violent situation in our fragmented society.

As we have seen so far, Love, Justice and Peace is like a Cyclical chain that connects each other to attain its full potential. It is particularly important to recognize that among these three words emphasized in the Benedict’s message, love is the key that vindicates the other two (justice and peace). Nevertheless, we should not forget the major point that Pope is emphasizing about love in his message: charity in TRUTH. Not just any type of love. It is only in a genuine charity that certainly justice and peace can prevail as this paper is trying to demonstrate. Otherwise, without true love justice and peace will not be achieved despite all the multiplications and numerous charitable organizations rendering charity aids in our present time.

In the treatment of true charity and integral human development, the Pope emphasizes that “knowledge is never purely the work of the intellect. It can certainly be reduced to calculation and experiment, but if it aspires to be wisdom capable of directing man in the light of his first beginnings and his final ends, it must be seasoned with the salt of charity” (30). He added that action without

knowledge is blind, while knowledge without charity is unproductive.

Love in truth necessitates that we must recognize and respect other field of specialized competence of every level of knowledge. Benedict says that “human knowledge is insufficient, and the conclusions of science cannot indicate by themselves the path towards integral human development” (30). He suggests that scientific research and moral evaluation need to go hand in hand in balanced interdisciplinary whole that stirs from charity.

The holy father further cautioned that “the dignity of the individual and the demands of justice require, particularly today, that economic choices do not cause disparities in wealth to increase in an excessive and morally unacceptable manner” (32). The global economic situation in our modern world is indeed unacceptable to many nations and individuals. It is so clear that many people right now are suffering in silence because they have no other option left for them to choose. Consequently, the only choice is to accept whatever that is offered to them. And so, people are struggling just to earn their daily living, not more than that. As a result, many questions arise, why globalization? What is the essence of the United Nations? What is the meaning of international relations? What does democracy, human right and freedom mean? Does it mean that the social teaching of the church on human dignity is restricted to some people, and not to other? Do international laws designed to seek for justice or to establish more injustice?

All these questions have been raised and addressed by several shared teachings of the church at various times and in different contexts. For instance, pope John Paul II indicates clearly during the celebration of the World Day

of Peace that peace without justice is impossible, and he reveals also that another name for peace is justice, and that there is no justice without forgiveness. John Paul II says that World Day of Peace is to offer humankind, and mainly “the leaders of nations, the opportunity to reflect upon the demands of justice and the call to forgiveness in the face of the grave problems which continue to afflict the world, not the least of which is the new level of violence introduced by organized terrorism” (John Paul II 2002). Charity in truth says pope Benedict XVI brings all nations and races together without imposing any obstacle or control (34). The Church for instance “has always held that economic action is not to be regarded as something opposed to society. In and of itself, the market is not, and must not become, the place where the strong subdue the weak” (36).

In line with this elucidation, the CST of the pastoral message of the U.S bishops conference 1986 also state that we all are called by our faith to measure the economy “not only by what it produces, but also by how it touches human life and whether it protects or undermines the dignity of the human person. Economic decisions have human consequences and moral content; they help or hurt people, strengthen or weaken family life, advance or diminish the quality of justice in our land” (1). Dorr in his *Option for the Poor and for the Earth* commented on the outcome of the bishops synod 1971 that the main problem in our today’s world is that the modern technology and new industrial path favours the concentration of power and wealth as well as decision-making which makes it difficult to take necessary action to correct the inherent propensity of the global system. This situation results in the marginalization of many

people and nations around the world. In the same synod titled 'Justice in the World' the participants clarified that "to be in a marginal situation is not simply to be economically deprived but perhaps more basically to be deprived of the political power to change one's situation" (Dorr 2016, p.186). But then, this section also highlights the fact that the Church leaders themselves must go through an examination of conscience about the modes of actions and personal effects within the Church. Though, this idea raised by Philip Land that the Church herself needs to scrutinize her conscience regarding the issue of justice was not accepted by all the assembly. However, the synod participants emphasize that we cannot separate our close friendship to God from our relationship to one's neighbour. Consequently, "action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel" (Dorr 2016, p.191).

Pope Benedict XVI assumed that distances between peoples have been almost eradicated due to our global era, and so, charitable action should encompass all people with all their needs.

He goes further to say that Christian charity is found in the parable of the Good Samaritan which shows that "Christian charity is first of all a simple response to immediate needs and specific situations: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked..." (Deus Caritas Est, 31 a). And so, the Church in similar situation does everything within her power to offer humanitarian assistance to those in need. For that reason, need for urgent charity becomes part and parcel of Church's mission on earth. This act of love resonates what Jesus thought us concerning the last judgement saying, "for I was hungry

and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you made me welcome, lacking clothes and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me” (Matt 25:35-36).

Looking at the current social, economic, and political realities of our time, the important question is, how can the Christians, especially Catholics respond to challenges presented by *Deus Caritas Est* and *Caritas in Veritate* of pope Benedict XVI? The best response is taken from the Mark and Louise Zwick commentary on *Deus Caritas Est* which states that “the challenge is to go beyond mediocrity, beyond living like everyone else in our secular society, a bourgeois, middle-class lifestyle, or the desire for such a lifestyle, to the call of Jesus in the Gospels and thus to a Christian response to those most in need” (Mark and Louise Zwick 2006). They went further to say that the problem is not how the rich will help the poor to become rich, thereby getting richer through that means. But rather, how can the rich do justice to the poor? Or more precisely, how can we give back to the poor what belong to them? This is the meaning of true charity and being just to one’s neighbour as well as love of God.

It is also crucial to understand and acknowledge human injustice against (God), the creator of universe. The high degradation and violation of dignity and value of human life, social injustices, and all sorts of abuse in the way in which our common good is being distributed. Open denial of both human and divine nature of man. Besides, the spiritual aspect of human being so to say is not only neglected but has been driven out of our present world order. And So, it is worth saying that ecology is not the only thing that our contemporary world needs to



work together on. Togetherness should be all inclusive; economic, social, and political. This is particularly important, because it has its direct connection to all the de-humanization, inequality, injustice, and suppression of different kinds. In line with these illuminations, our present world will find it difficult, even impossible to enjoy peace anywhere on earth.

## **5. Conclusion**

Based on my previous experience as a Catholic religious who has been in the field of Catholic teaching for 25 years coupled with the knowledge acquired in the current study, I conclude that the on-going crisis in our contemporary world will get worst if the world leaders in particular continue to neglect, and do not give attention to Catholic social teaching (CST) for decades now. Its consequence is that there can never be peace among people and nations on earth due to the reality and the effect of globalization. The truth about Catholic social teaching is that it is the best hidden secret and treasure in the Church. As we can see presently that removing religion out of our society and public square has done and will still do worst in human life. And so, the persistence of the voice of the Church through CST deepens people's faith as well as my own belief in the truth of the Catholic social doctrine.

The findings of this study reveal that the prophetic mission of the Catholic Church is divine and not human, and that those who are passive in the face of injustice are unjust themselves.

This is important to know, because as Martin Luther King Jr made it clear that it is hatred and greed in human nature that is our number one problem. The findings yet

again confirm that Christian charity in the first place is to respond to urgent needs at a precise situation, I can as well suggest that those charitable organizations and individuals should go beyond some other assistance than just immediate service. It is more charitable to look for some more durable solutions for example what are the root causes of people's poverty? Is their situation caused by any kind of marginalization, oppression, or suppression? If so, we are bound by our Christian virtue to look for a way to liberate those poor from their helpless situation instead of knowing the truth of the status quo and pretending not to but rather prefer to come to their aid whenever they have need. This is not a Christian charity (true love) according to pope Benedict XVI in his *Caritas in Veritate*. The holy father teaches us not to compromise our Christian charity by perpetuating injustice to others through this means. In this case, we are contributing to this act of injustice through action or being silence.

The results of this paper also reveal that justice is another name for peace, and peace without justice is impossible says John Paul II. He added, that the World Day of Peace is to offer mankind, and mainly "the leaders of nations, the opportunity to reflect upon the demands of justice and the call for forgiveness in the face of the grave problems which continue to afflict the world, not the least of which is the new level of violence introduced by organized terrorism" (John Paul II 2002). In line with this illumination, there is an urgent need for the issue of global East and global West to be acknowledged by those in power both in the state and the Church. This is important because, the fall in human nature and lack of common language as well as desire for human power

coupled with differences in laws and religion around the world needs verification once more. Again, the outcome of this investigation also proves that there is no justice without forgiveness. So, my suggestion is that those in power needs to look back and make sure that the relations between justice and peace have not been distorted. This is to maintain that durable peace is not possible without justice. Today, our societies are highly fragmented with lots of historical complexities. For that reason, those in authorities of both state and the Church need to think again and initiate sincere dialog among peoples, nations, and religious groups to resolve some historical issues if we are aiming to achieve universal peace in truth.

To sum it up, this paper discovered that peace is the work of love and justice. The results vindicate the title of this paper as a pragmatic correlation between love, justice, and peace. It has demonstrated the significance of *Deus caritas Est* and *Caritas in Veritate*: specifically, in our contemporary time. Finally, it is indisputably proven that there can be no justice without true love, and without justice sustainable peace cannot be achieved.

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## **XENOPHOBIA AND THE AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY OF THE OTHER**

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### **Abstract**

*The United Nations Report on Migration in 2019, observes that the number of international migrants worldwide has continued to grow over the past seventeen years, reaching 272 million in 2019, up from 258 million in 2018, 248 million in 2015, 220 million in 2010, 191 million in 2005 and 173 million in 2000. Between 2000 and 2005, the international migrant stock grew by an average of 2 per cent per year. During the period 2005-2010, the annual growth rate accelerated, reaching 2.9 per cent. With the growth in the number of migrants, issues such as xenophobia have emerged on the front pages of human relationship at the international level, raising questions such as: How does my relationship with another affect my humanity? Does the issue of origin and identity affect and supersede the question of equality and dignity? Is the migrant less human than those who are not migrants? Is it possible to strike a balance between “what is good” and the “politics of fear”? The present work carves it niche by studying the phenomenon of xenophobia within the ecology of African philosophy of migration. For the purpose of this*

*study, the complementary approach, which marks the identity of African philosophy, would be employed. Contrary to popular perspectives, to explain the phenomenon of xenophobia, the scape-goating theory would be patronized as a sociological theory for dissection of prejudice in a period of change and social transition.*

**Keywords:** Xenophobia, African, Philosophy, Migration, Complementarity, Ecology

### **Introduction**

A cursory glance at the historical evolution of philosophy reveals that for centuries, philosophers from Kant to Walzer have raised questions about the freedom of movement, state coercion, liberty, citizenship and belonging. Recent discourses in the area of Migration have continued to attract the attention of philosophers of different schools of thought and affiliations. And gradually, philosophers are beginning to find points of convergence between philosophy and migration. The questions that these thinkers have attempted at borders on identity, ethics and anthropology. Questions such as: what do these situations tell us about human dignity and the value of human life? How does my relationship with another affect my humanity? Does the issue of origin and identity affect and supersede the question of equality and dignity? Is the migrant less human than those who are not migrants? Is it possible to strike a balance between “what is good” and the “politics of fear”? On what values would a fairer migration policy be based? How can thinking help to break down existing paradigms of 'us and them'? Are there inconsistencies and inhumanities in the current approach to migration? These are fundamental questions

that go beyond the twitter and facebook responses to the phenomenon of migration, usually responses of a pragmatic fashion or after the usual persuasive political rhetoric, instead of one that delivers with philosophical insight (Kanu 2019).

In the 1950s, when African states started gaining independence from their colonial masters, their antidote to the destructive Balkanisation of their continent under colonialism was pan-Africanism. Pan-Africanism was a movement which began in the 1920s that emphasized the unity and strength of Africans and people of African descent around the world. Thus, it held that Africans had a common history and that their destiny belonged together. In Africa, it was championed by leaders such as Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah, Nigeria's Nnamdi Azikiwe, Tanzania's Julius Nyerere, among others. This pan-African movement notwithstanding, a new spirit has emerged in Africa: xenophobia. The present work carves out its niche by studying the phenomenon of xenophobia within the ecology of African philosophy. In the face of the rising phenomenon of xenophobia, what can the African philosophical perspective contribute to the on-going discussions? For the purpose of this study, the complementary approach, which marks the identity of African philosophy, would be employed. Contrary to popular perspectives, to explain the phenomenon of xenophobia, the scape-goating theory would be patronized as a sociological theory for dissection of prejudice in a period of change and social transition. However, what is xenophobia?

## **Xenophobia: Questions of Meaning, Theory and Causes**

The word *xenophobia* is taken from the Greek words *xénos*, meaning 'the stranger' and 'the guest' and *phóbos*, meaning 'fear'. Thus, Smelser and Baltes (2001) speak of xenophobia as 'fear of the stranger', but usually the term is taken to mean 'hatred of strangers'. It is also within this parameter that Klaude (2001) understands xenophobia as "an attitudinal orientation of hostility against non-natives in a given population" (p.2). However, at the International level, no universally accepted definition of xenophobia exists, though it can be described as attitudes, attributes, prejudices and behaviors that reject, exclude and often vilify persons, based on the perception that they are outsiders or foreigners to the community, society or national identity.

There is a close link between racism and xenophobia. In fact, they are two terms that can hardly be differentiated from each other (UNESCO 2019; Kanu 2019a). However, while xenophobia and racism often overlap, they are distinct phenomena. Whereas racism usually entails distinction based on physical characteristic differences, such as skin colour, hair type, facial features, etc., xenophobia implies behavior based on the idea that the other is foreign to or originates from outside the community or nation (UNESCO 2019). The difficulty in differentiating the two concepts or experiences is often based on the fact that differences in physical characteristics are often taken to distinguish the 'other' from the common community. It is often difficult to differentiate between racism and xenophobia as motivations for behaviour.



After the 2008 xenophobic attack in South Africa, their government blamed it on the criminal elements, opposition and sinister forces. At the time, the Minister of Intelligence blamed both criminals for playing a role in the attack, and foreigners for instigating the xenophobic violence. After the 2019 xenophobic attacks, Mozambicans and Nigerians who were the key targets were considered by the media as the cause because they were alleged the key perpetrators of illegal immigration and drug dealing. These perspectives notwithstanding, to explain the phenomenon of xenophobia, the scapegoating theory is employed as a sociological theory for the interpretation of the phenomenon (Allport 1961). The theory believes that it is frustration that leads to prejudice, mainly from marginalized local groups who identify foreigners as scapegoats. People displace their frustration onto convenient targets, thereby obscuring the actual causes of their anxiety. Hostile attitudes are formed in relation to unmet promises and limited resources, such as housing, education, healthcare and employment, coupled with high expectations during transition (Morris 1998; Tshitereke 1999). Thus, a 'frustration scapegoat' is created, who is perceived as the key reason for the local population's continuous poverty and deprivation (Tshitereke 1999:4). Connected to this theory are the following causes:

- a. the perspectives of Fungurai (2015) and Soyombo (2008) that xenophobic violence is caused by poverty and unemployment, especially amongst the youth. South Africa's unemployment rate has risen significantly. The unemployment rate in 1995, a year after transitioning to democracy, stood at 15%. In 2014 year-

end unemployment rate was 24.3%. Recently, it has hit 34.6%.

- b. xenophobia is also associated with jealousy on the part of locals in respect of job opportunities, foreigners agreeing to lower salaries and foreign business successes (Clark 2011:5; Khosa & Malitani 2014)
- c. foreigners' attraction to local girls as they can afford to take care of them more than the local men (Dodson & Oelofse 2002:134; Mnyaka 2003)
- d. the perception of foreigners as cheap laborers who 'steal' jobs from the locals (Nyamnjoh 2006:2; Steinberg 2010).
- e. Charman and Piper (2012) espoused the belief that local shopkeepers whose businesses had suffered because of foreign competition become both hostile and bitter with foreign competition, thus leading to xenophobia.
- f. using a plethora of derogatory names, characterized by stigmatization and stereotypes in reference to immigrants, have been used by the print media, which has had an influence on the human behaviour of groups of foreign Africans (Ngcamu and Mantzaris 2019).
- g. The position of the government on immigrants; before the 2008 xenophobic attack in South Africa, it was alleged that the state organs were already geared towards hounding African immigrants while the highest leadership had declared it a state of emergency (Ngcamu and Mantzaris 2019).
- h. New migration patterns that have developed as an effect of the gradual internationalization of the labor market during the post-colonial era (UNESCO 2019).
- i. The increasing reality of globalization, gradually transforming us into cosmopolitans on a global conference table (UNESCO 2019).

## **Selected Xenophobic Activities in Human History**

The discourse on selected xenophobic activities in human history is meant to concretize our understanding of xenophobia. The selected xenophobic activities would begin from the international dimensions, which would be narrowed down to concrete experiences of xenophobia in the African context.

### *1. Early Greeks (8 BCE - 2 BCE)*

Early indices of xenophobia can be traced to the denigration of foreigners by ancient Greece as 'Barbarians'. This was based on the belief that the Greek people and culture were superior to all others, and the subsequent conclusion that barbarians were naturally meant to be enslaved (Harrison 2002).

### *2. Early Roman (2 BCE - 5 ACE)*

Xenophobic sentiments were also present among the ancient Romans who held notions of superiority over all other peoples. In the speech of Manius Acilius that: 'There, as you know, there were Macedonians and Thracians and Illyrians, all most warlike nations, here Syrians and Asiatic Greeks, the most worthless peoples among mankind and born for slavery' (Isaac 2006, p.317).

### *3. Germany- Nazi Racial Policy*

After the First World War, there emerged an increased use of anti-Semitism and other racial thoughts in political discourse in Germany, which culminated in the ascent of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party in 1933. The Nazi racial policy and the Nuremberg Race Laws against Jews and other non-Aryans represented the most explicit racist policies in Europe in the twentieth century. These laws

deprived all Jews as well as other non-Aryans from German citizenship. The official title of the Jews became: 'Subject of the State'. The Nuremberg Race Laws forbade racially mixed sexual relations and marriage between Aryans and Jews, Gypsies, Negroes or their bastard offspring. Such interracial relations became a criminal and punishable offence under the race laws known as 'racial pollution' (Burleigh 1991 and Milton 2001).

#### *4. Saudi Arabia*

Cases of xenophobia against labor workers who are foreigners, mostly from developing countries have been recorded in Saudi Arabia. Human Rights Watch (2004) observes that African and Asian maids have been persecuted, raped, exploited, under- or unpaid, physically abused, overworked, locked in their places of employment and discriminated. In many of these cases, Parekh (2006) and Gethin (2013) report that the workers are unwilling to report their employers for fear of losing their jobs or further abuse.

#### *5. Trans-Sahara Slave Trade*

The Arabs were engaged in the purchase of slaves, which were transported through the Sahara to North Africa and Arabia between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. It was principally between North Africa and the empires of Sudan. The misery of these slaves was enormous (Kanu 2013).

#### *6. Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade*

The end of 16<sup>th</sup> century saw the decline of the Trans-Sahara Slave Trade and the emergence of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, which shifted attention from the

desert to the coasts. The European slave trade was more sophistication than that of the Arab's. During this trade, about 12 million Africans were transported to Europe and America, where they lived very horrible conditions (Kanu 2013).

#### *7. Aliens Compliance Order of 1969*

Kofi Busia, the then Prime Minister of Ghana asked Nigerians and other African nationals in the country to leave Ghana. This was born out of the rising economic hardship in Ghana and the increase in the population of non nationals who were then about 20% of Ghana's total population. About 3 million non nationals left the country at the time as a result of the Aliens Compliance Order.

#### *8. Ghana Must Go of 1983*

In 1870, with the discovery of oil, Nigeria accommodated the Ghanians among other non nationals, who did so many jobs that Nigerians couldn't do at the time. In 1980, when the economy went bad, Nigerians blamed the Ghanians and other non nationals for their joblessness. Shehu Shagari gave them few weeks to leave, and if they fail to leave, they would be tried. Power would also be given to Nigerians to deal with any of them after the deadline. During this period, almost 2.5 million none nationals left the country.

#### *9. 1994 Genocide*

In just 100 days in 1994, about 800,000 people were slaughtered in Rwanda by ethnic Hutu extremists who were 85% of Rwanda at the time. They were targeting members of the minority Tutsi community, as well as their political opponents. In 1959, the Hutus overthrew the Tutsi monarchy and tens of thousands of Tutsis fled to

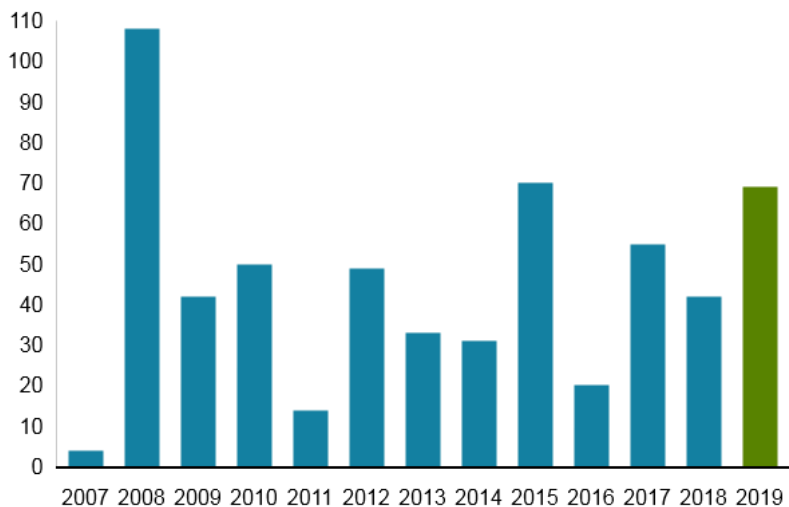
neighbouring countries, including Uganda. The Hutu extremists set up a radio station, RTLM, and newspapers which circulated hate propaganda, urging people to "weed out the cockroaches" meaning kill the Tutsis. The names of prominent people to be killed were read out on radio. This spread hatred and led to the death of many.

### *10. The South Africa Experience*

The overall population of South Africa is well over 50 million, however, there are an estimated 3.6 million migrants in the country. About 70% of its foreigners come from neighboring Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Lesotho. The remaining 30% are from Malawi, UK, Namibia, eSwatini, previously known as Swaziland, India and other countries.

The issue of discrimination and even violence against immigrants was already in South Africa before 1994. However, after majority rule in 1994, contrary to expectations, the incidence of xenophobia increased. Between 2000 and March 2008, at least 67 people died in what were identified as xenophobic attacks. In May 2008, a series of xenophobic attacks left 62 people dead. In 2015, there was another nationwide spike in xenophobic attacks against immigrants which prompted a number of foreign governments to repatriate their citizens. The 2019 experience of xenophobic attacks in South Africa has been referred to as the worst in South African history (*Nyamnjoh 2014 and Budiman 2019*).

### Threats, attacks and killings against foreigners in South Africa



Source: Xenowatch, African Centre for Migration and Society 2019

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### Xenophobic violence incidents by Province, 1994-2018

|               |     |
|---------------|-----|
| Gauteng       | 212 |
| Western Cape  | 111 |
| KwaZulu-Natal | 67  |
| Limpopo       | 40  |
| Eastern Cape  | 33  |
| Mpumalanga    | 22  |
| North West    | 20  |
| Free State    | 19  |
| Northern Cape | 5   |

Source: Xenowatch, African Centre for Migration & Society 2018

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## **Xenophobia and being in African Thought**

The African philosophy of migration is anchored on the inherent principle of complementary in the African Cosmos. The African cosmos is an ontological horizon that presents being as that which possesses a relational character of mutual relations. Thus, 'to be' is to live in solidarity and complementarity, and to live outside the parameters of solidarity and complementarity is to suffer alienation. 'To be' is 'to be with the other', in a community of beings. According to Iroegbu (1995), this African manner of being is characterized by a common origin, common world-view, common language, shared culture, shared race, colour and habits, common historical experience and a common destiny. Mbiti (1970) classically proverbializes this relationship thus: "I am because we are and since we are, therefore, I am" (p. 108). The African worldview, therefore, is governed by the principle of complementarity, which seeks the conglomeration, the unification, the summation of fragments. It maintains that by the coming together of the individual or parts, a viable and sustainable whole will emerge, and by this, the parts will get to the brim purpose of their existence (Asouzu 2004).

This sense of harmony, community, complementarity and solidarity among the community of beings finds expression right from the philosophy of Tempels (1959). He argues that in Bantu Ontology:

'Beings forces' of the universe are not a multiple of independent forces placed in juxtaposition from being to being. All creatures are found in relationship according to the law of hierarchy... Nothing moves in this universe of forces without influencing other forces by its movement. The world of forces is held like a



spider's web of which no single thread can be caused to vibrate without shaking the whole network. (p. 29).

Kagame (1951) agrees with Tempels that reality is force. It is not a force independent of the other, but forces that are in a relationship. He categorized reality into *Muntu* (human beings), *Kintu* (things), *Hantu* (place and time), and *Kuntu* (modality). In Jahn (1958), NTU becomes the rallying point of being, outside which no being can exist.

The nationalistic movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Africa, now grouped into National Ideological School of African philosophy, was linked by their emphasis on belongingness. For instance, the Social negritude of Senghor which places the family at the centre of the social structure, thus, man as a person realizes his being in the family structure, and the society has meaning from what the family is. It was on this same principle of complementarity that Nyerere bases his principle of Ujamaa. The choice of socialism over capitalism by Awolowo and the promotion of Pan-Africanism by Nkrumah were based on the distinctive complementary character of African ontology.

Mbiti (1970) in his work on African religion and philosophy also speaks of African ontology as complementary:

The anthropocentric ontology is a complete unity or solidarity which nothing can break up or destroy. To destroy or remove one of these categories is to destroy the whole existence including the destruction of the creator, which is impossible. One mode of existence presupposes all the others, and a balance must be maintained so that these modes neither drift too far apart from one another nor get too close to one another. (p. 16).

Gyekye (1987) in his work on Akan philosophy avers that the individual depends on the community:

The individual's life depends on identifying oneself with the group.... It is also the ground of the overriding emphasis on the individual's obligation to the members of the group; it enjoins upon him or her the obligation to think and act in terms of the survival of the group as a whole. In fact one's personal sense of responsibility is measured in terms of responsiveness and sensitivity to the needs and demands of the group. (p. 156).

Iroegbu (1995) describes being in African ontology as belongingness. In response to the questions, 'what makes being, being?', 'what does it mean to be in the world?' Iroegbu argues that it is belongingness, thus *Being* is *Belongingness*. What then is belongingness? Belongingness is a special noun from the verb 'to belong'. It means to be part of, Daisein-with or to be a member of a group. Thus Nkemnkia (1999) write that in African ontology, the self is the other:

The meaning of an individual's life is found in and through his relationship with the Other or Others. In fact it is meaningless to ask oneself "who am I" without having a complete knowledge of the Other, from whom, in the final analysis, one expects the answer. When we say 'I', in reality one means 'You', that is, the Other. By saying 'We' one is essentially saying 'man'. If this is how things stand, then each 'I', is always mediated by 'the Other', who is none other than 'oneself'. In this dialectic each one of us contains exclusively the Other. (pp. 111-112).

Thus, being is located within the context of mutual complementarity of all possible relations in the sense of an existent reality.

### **On the Question of 'Otherness'**

Life in African ontology is a life of *sharedness*; one in which another is part thereof. A relationship, though of separate and separated entities or individuals but with a joining of the same whole (Kanu 2015c). A relationship in which case the two or more coming together make each of them a complete whole; it is a diversity of being one with each other. To put the other away removes the balance of being. Kanu (2015d) avers that this presupposes a tailor-made-cloth, measured, cut and sewn to fit into the curves, contours, shape and size, peculiarities and particularities of a being. Thus, every being has a missing part and is at the same time, a missing part. Ewulu (2010), therefore, writes that:

If the other is my part or a piece of me, it means that I need him for me to be complete, for me to be what I really am. The other completes rather than diminishes me. His language and culture make my own stand out and at the same time, they enrich and complement my own. In the presence of his language and culture, the riches and poverty of my language and culture become clear and I see that his own and my own when put together form a richer whole when compared to any of them in isolation... I realize myself in the other because it is in the 'Thou-ness' of the Thou that my 'Is-ness' is realized. I am 'I' because you are 'You'. Without Thou there is no I. We are 'We' because they are 'They', and without 'They', there is no 'We'. (p. 189).

As a result of the dynamics of the relationship between the *I* and the *thou*, the Igbo would refer to the 'Other' as *Ibe*, which means 'a piece of' or 'a part of', as in *ibe anu* (a piece of meat) or *ibe ede* (a piece of cocoyam). The Igbo would, therefore, refer to the 'other person' as *ibe m*

which means 'my piece' or *mmadu ibe m* (my fellow human being). This is the concept also employed in reference to relationships and reciprocity: love one another (*hunu ibe unu n'anya*), help one another (*nyere nu ibe unu aka*), respect one another (*sopuru nu ibe unu*), etc. Since the 'other' refers to my own piece, it would, therefore, mean that to love the other is to love oneself, to help the other is to help oneself and to respect the other is to respect oneself. Put the other way round, to hate the other is to hate oneself, to refuse help to the other is to refuse help to oneself and to disrespect the other is to disrespect oneself. From the African perspective, there is a link between the self and the other. This is because the self carries with it the mark of otherness. If reality is one with itself and consistent with itself, that is, different from others, then its uniqueness is always in reference to the other. In the *I* and *the other* relation, both participants exist as polarities of relation. I am, as it were, in the other and the other is in me. He is my piece as i am his piece. That which is different from me is 'my piece' or 'my other'. That which is different from us is part of us.

From the foregoing, one can argue that the differences among human beings is absolved in identity, for that which is different from me is part of me *ibe m*, and, in turn, the identity is absolved in the otherness, because I am part of the other who is different from me. Identity and otherness are in a sense two related concepts, for the one implies the other.

### **Conclusion**

This research is an African philosophical response to the problem of xenophobia in Africa, which suggests a human relationship in terms of the *I* and the *Other*. It strongly

contends that the future of Africa lies in the dialogue between the *I* and *otherness*. In fact, the relationship between migrants and host communities is understood as a dialogical move, which results to increasing expansion, growth and development. To conceptualize the self without the other would be an illusion, as Levinas (1969 & 1981) observes, the other is always irreducibly present as it is implied in the self. The interaction or dialogue between host communities and migrants in Africa leads to a better self-knowledge and understanding.

The self as metaphysical unity forms a thesis that is negated by the diversity of the other, which stands to the self as an antithesis, however, with dialogue and relationship emerges a synthesis, a complementary whole, a situation where the self sees itself as part of the whole, and sees the other as part of the self. Wenger (1998) sees the dialogue between the self and the other as the beginning of change and growth- for in the process of encounter and dialogue, the other changes my ethical being and I change that of the other. The other facilitates the self and grounds the being of the self. As the self relates with the other, the self is not only taught but it also learns from the other; for in the other, the self sees what it is not. Thus, identity is a mark of incompleteness which requires the other and the active participation in the other's identity structure. The idea of complementarity is not in any way a move towards saying that reality is one, or to undermine the need to make a distinction between the self and the other. The fact that reality is interconnected does not in any way mean that reality is one; interconnectedness is not sameness. Any form of inability to identify distinction, is a conceptual weakness. Distinction does not negate separateness.

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**DOCUMENTATION**



*A Communique Issued at the end of the 34th Annual Conference and Meeting of the Catholic Theological Association of Nigeria (CATHAN), on the theme “African Intellectual Heritage And The Church Tomorrow: Trends And Directions,” held at the Catholic Diocese Of Port Harcourt’s Pastoral Centre, Igwuruta, Port Harcourt, Rivers State(Nigeria), 23rd -26th Of April 2019.*

**Preamble**

We, the Catholic Theological Association of Nigeria, having prayerfully reflected on the theme of our Conference, “African Intellectual Heritage and the Church Tomorrow: Trends and Directions”, thank the risen Lord for the gift of the Church in Africa, for her charisms and vocations. In the light of these prayerful reflections, we now issue this communiqué.

**1. African Intellectual Heritage**

African theologians have made and continue to make significant contributions to the life of the Church. The early Church in Africa produced great theological treatises and theologians such as Tertullian and Cyprian of Carthage, Origen, Athanasius, and Clement of Alexandria. There were Africans among the early Christians. The contributions of the early Christians in Africa form part of our intellectual heritage.

## **2. African Theology**

African Theology seeks to interpret the apostolic tradition for an audience that is primarily African. It is a reflection on Scripture and Tradition in the African context. It is the story of our African faith in the light of the story of God who reveals himself to us Africans in the midst of conflicts in Africa. African theology seeks to use the good values of African religions and cultures to proclaim the love of God.

## **3. Trends and Directions**

Many hold the belief that the future of Christianity is in Africa. Yet, there are real challenges to be met: Pentecostalism, religious intolerance, the flourishing of “private ministries”, syncretism, poor Christian (Catholic) education and formation, migration, inadequate pastoral care, cultism and negative media influence. In order to address these challenges there is an imperative for theological education. More especially, the Church should maintain vigilance in education in order to safeguard the content of revealed truth.

The Church in Nigeria will respond to these challenges by investing in theological education. There is need for intellectual, ethical and technical formation; for the truth resides in the intellect, freedom in the will, and the intellect and the will are friends. It is by rightly cultivating the intellect that the will is rightly ordered.

## **4. Inculturation**

Inculturation has been and remains a gift and a task in African Theology. While we seek to tell our story in the light of the story of God who is love, we can develop an African Theological hermeneutics. The content and goal of inculturation must be properly understood. Inculturation

is not entertainment in the liturgy, fashion parade or the simple use of local languages in the liturgy. Inculturation, properly understood, will lead to the development of rites, rubrics, symbols and theologies that give an African character to the Christian message without distorting its content. The early Church Fathers remain models in this noble adventure.

### **Conclusion**

It is the intention and wish of this conference that all Christians and people of goodwill work together to build a civilisation of love using African spiritual and material resources. African Theology must use our intellectual, cultural and religious heritage to proclaim the love of God on a continent where wars and hatred seem to dominate.

Revd. Dr.  
Raymond Olusesan Aina, MSP  
(President)

Revd. Dr.  
Victor Usman Jamahh  
(Secretary )