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GOVERNANCE IN INSTITUTES OF
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CHALLENGES, THE OPPORTUNITIES
AND PROSPECTS OF LEADERSHIP

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Motto: *Witness to Truth and Mercy through
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**GOVERNANCE IN INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED
LIFE IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN AFRICA: CHALLENGES, THE
OPPORTUNITIES AND PROSPECTS OF LEADERSHIP**



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With gratitude to God *The Catholic Voyage*:

Commemorates and Celebrates:

THE SILVER JUBILEE ANNIVERSARY of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *ECCLESIA IN AFRICA (Church in Africa)*, gathering the fruits of the historic first African Synod, by St. John Paul II (1995 – 2020).

THE GOLDEN JUBILEE of the Foundation of the *Conference of Major Superiors Of Nigeria (Men)*, (1970 – 2020).

Congratulates and rejoices with the members of the Editorial Board and long- time contributors to *The Catholic Voyage*:

Rev. Fr. Prof Bartholomew CHIDILI, OSA, on the celebration of his 40th Anniversary of Ordination to the Catholic Priesthood (2020).

Sr. Prof. Sylvia Nwachukwu,DDL, on her elevation as Professor of Biblical Theology and Religious Studies at Godfrey Okoye University Enugu.

Rev. Fr. Prof. Ikechukwu Anthony KANU, OSA, on his election as the Prior Provincial of the Order of St. Augustine in Nigeria (October 2020). To God be glory and praise!

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EDITORIAL

For freedom Christ set us free; so stand firm and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery (Gal.5:1)

“Consecrated life isn't for everyone, nor is everyone made for consecrated life.” (Archbishop José Rodríguez Carballo, Secretary, Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life)

For the Catholic Church and the entire world, particularly for the Consecrated Life, 2020 was an exceptional year. The unique situation of emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic marked most of this year's calendar. In one way or another, it affected practically everyone. In many ways, “the joys and the hopes, the grief and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the grief and anxieties of the followers of Christ” (GS,1) in the various parts of the world. Consecrated Life shares in this attitude and sentiment of the Church in the extraordinary context of Covid-19 pandemic and its impact. In many environments, communities, institutions and organizations people now



talk and tend to assess, plan and prospect their lives and activities in terms of before and after Covid-19 pandemics.

The general theme of the present volume of our journal is “Governance in Institutes of Consecrated Life in the Catholic Church in Africa”. The theme was chosen before the Covid-19 crisis began in most African countries, including Nigeria. The idea was to explore, in particular, the significance, challenges, opportunities and prospects of leadership. The emergence of covid-19 crisis, though a coincidence, turned out to present new challenges and opportunities, and perhaps highlighted other latent challenges, in the governance. The crisis has led consecrated persons to seek or to explore new approaches to living a life in common, open new possibilities of mission, to consider new ways of living out their apostolate. At least, it has called everyone to reflect anew on the ways to lead and live consecrated life in times of worldwide emergency crisis and attendant restrictions such as those caused by this pandemics. Hence, the issue of Covid-19 pandemics is raised in some of the articles.

During this year 2020 the Vatican issued some important church documents and decrees concerning the Consecrated Life. Altogether, they offer angles and insights through which, in my view, one can appreciate more the values of consecrated life and its system of governance. In the following paragraphs, I wish to, first, summarily recall, in chronological order, some of the salient points of the documents in so far as they relate to some aspects of governance in the Consecrated Life. Secondly, I will briefly introduce the particular topics that authors presented in

the present volume. (A few additional articles relating to governance will appear online in a subsequent edition of this journal).

Firstly, the homily of Pope Francis at the Eucharistic Concelebration with members of the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life at the 24th World Day for Consecrated Life (Feb.1, 2020) emphasizes three aspects of this vocation: grace, one's neighbour and hope. Consecrated Life is a grace, a gift freely given by God; the calling is God's initiative. This gift "means seeing what reality matters in life": allowing our consecrated life to revolve around God's grace. It means overcoming the temptation of "seeing things in a worldly way," rather than going off in search of something to substitute for it, for example: a bit of fame, a consoling affection, finally getting to do what I want.¹ In addition to the individual member's own necessary efforts, it is up to the leaders of institutes to encourage, guide and sustain the consecrated life of their members in order to keep the grace alive and active in members. Those called to govern, animate Consecrated life of their members so it does not lose its passion, grow slack and become stagnant.

Consecrated life also demands finding one's neighbour in one's own religious community. This is important always, but this rediscovery is particularly eloquent today where

¹ http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200201_omeli-a-vitaconsacrata.html

many people live in solitude, loneliness, isolation and are incapable of going out as usual for apostolic mission or ministry. So, we are invited to ask God the favour to know how to seek out Jesus in the brothers and sisters we have been given. In this place, we can begin to put charity into practice: in the place where we live, by welcoming brothers and sisters in their poverty. The other people need not all be seen as only hindrances and complications. Consecrated men and women, who live to imitate Jesus, are called to bring their own gaze into the world:

- A gaze of compassion, a gaze that goes in search of those far-off or wounded;
- A gaze that does not condemn, but encourages, frees, consoles.

Those entrusted with leadership positions, as members of a religious community, feel particularly called to lead by example in this Jesus-like gaze into their religious family, expressing this gaze in words, attitudes, gestures and actions.

Looking at the future, the gaze of consecrated men and women is also one of hope. They strive to know how to hope. It is easy to lose hope: when things do not work, when there is decline in vocations or when otherwise overwhelmed with the screening/selection of so many applicants to the religious institute, discouragement sets in. There is always the temptation to have a worldly gaze, one devoid of hope.

But the Gospel teaches us how we must not lose hope.² Spiritual masters, too, -- like St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Theresa of Avila, Venerable Pius Bruno Lanteri³ teach us to trust and hope, and not be discouraged and give up. To achieve hope we must never alienate oneself from the Lord, who is the source of hope. Therefore, we must look to the Lord every day and adore Him.

The governing of religious institutes and their local communities needs to animate hope in members, though it can also lead them to lose it. Prayers and the practice of justice, of truth and mercy, and of transparency, accountability and responsibility in administration contribute to strengthen hope in members of religious family and communities. In sum, Pope Francis appeals to all: “Dear brothers and sisters, let us thank God for the gift of the consecrated life and ask of him a new way of looking, that knows how to see grace, how to look for one’s neighbour, how to hope.”⁴

The Vatican addressed a letter to all Consecrated persons in March 2020 during the Lenten Season when the Covid-19 pandemic has already forced a lockdown in many countries.⁵ The letter is both a reminder and encouragement to consecrated persons. It exhorts that Lenten Season “requires each of us, to daily make a decisive change in our

²http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200201_omelia-vitaconsacrata.html.

³Fr. Timothy Gallagher, O.M.V., *Overcoming Spiritual Discouragement: The Wisdom and Spiritual Power of Venerable Bruno Lanteri*. 2019.

⁴http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200201_omelia-vitaconsacrata.html.

⁵<https://www.cssr.news/2020/03/letter-from-the-congregation-for-institutes-of-consecrated-life-to-all-priests-and-religious/>

style and mode of living”; that is to say, “we are called to live with strong faith, with the same intensity as always, but in completely different ways” such as prayers and closeness to our people. Thus, the faith and values remain intact, “strong”, but the manner of expressing them can (and do) undergo “decisive change”: they have to be lived “in completely different ways”. This involves discernment and adaptation. It implies that we know and appreciate what are the essential (permanent) values, and what are the transitory and changeable elements that historically express those essential values -- though now in the context of the pandemic. This prospect engages the active and creative responsibility of leaders of institute to identify appropriate forms and manners of exercising authority and leadership in the process of discernment and adaptation in communion with the Church and in faithfulness to the spirit of the Institute.

Then, there is the question of the General and Provincial Chapters. In many of the Institutes of Consecrate Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, the Chapter is the highest authority within each institute or its province. The CICLSAL provides “authorization for the postponement of the celebration of General and Provincial Chapters to a date to be determined.”⁶ It published these guidelines “in view of the measures being taken by governments and, in particular, the restrictions on movement and travel as a result of the pandemic emergency caused by Covid-19”. While the

⁶See:<http://www.congregazionevitaconsacrata.va/content/dam/vitaconsacrata/Avvisi/AvisoRinvioCapitoli/COMUNICATO%20RINVIO%20EN.pdf>

restrictions persist, “no general or provincial Chapters could be held by means of telecommunications.”⁷ However, in the case of meeting of Major Superior and his/her council, the CICLSAL exceptionally permits the use of telecommunications. It emphasizes the temporary character of the use of telecommunications: “In fact, once the state of emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is resolved, habitual recourse to telecommunications would render meaningless the service of authority which, in Consecrated Life, calls for personally and responsibly maintaining a network of relationships through correct and effective communications in order to safeguard and promote communion in the institute.”⁸ To use it, authorisation is needed. Consequently Major Superiors, who according to norm “are to have their own council, whose assistance they must use in carrying out their functions” (cf. can.627, par.1), must request from the Vatican the authorisation to make use of telecommunication for a formal meeting with the council, in which case the minutes are drawn up.⁹

The Vatican directives on postponement of chapters and the possibility of use of telecommunications in chapters and in formal meeting of Major Superiors with the council respond to an emergency caused by COVID-19. Ultimately, “The use of telecommunications is based on trust and calls for

⁷Letter of the Congregation for Institute of Consecrated and Society of Apostolic Life, Vatican City, 1 July 2020, no.7. https://www.globalsistersreport.org/sites/default/files/file_attachments/CICLSAL%20letter%20July%2C%201%2C%202020.pdf

⁸Letter of the Congregation for Institute of Consecrated and Society of Apostolic Life, Vatican City, 1 July 2020, no.2. https://www.globalsistersreport.org/sites/default/files/file_attachments/CICLSAL%20letter%20July%2C%201%2C%202020.pdf

⁹Letter of the Congregation for Institute of Consecrated and Society of Apostolic Life, Vatican City, 1 July 2020, no.3. https://www.globalsistersreport.org/sites/default/files/file_attachments/CICLSAL%20letter%20July%2C%201%2C%202020.pdf

everyone's sense of responsibility so that technology can serve discernment and sound governance".¹⁰In all, it is necessary to safeguard and promote, among others, the following principles and values that appear to be at stake: confidentiality, secrecy, and recognition of identity, maintenance of human relationships, synodality, collegiality, communion, and co-responsibility. The general and provincial governments of each religious institute and society of apostolic life are to evaluate anew and draw the implications of the postponement and the impossibility of holding a Chapter for its style and methods of leadership, for its communities and projects, for its administrative plans and for mission.

Another aspect that calls for the attention and care of the leaders of religious institute is vocations. The situation of vocations varies from region to region. For example, they are consistently increasing in some countries, and declining in others. The Church observed the 57th annual World Day of Prayer for Vocations on 3 May 2020. In his message Pope Francis emphasises four aspects about what vocation means and involves:

(a) Vocation demands gratitude to the Lord, because it is a free gift. God who loves us. The Lord points out our destination and grants us the courage to board the boat of

¹⁰Letter of the Congregation for Institute of Consecrated and Society of Apostolic Life, Vatican City, 1 July 2020, no.4. https://www.globalsistersreport.org/sites/default/files/file_attachments/CICLSAL%20letter%20July%2C%201%2C%202020.pdf

life. He accompanies and guides us. More than our own choices, vocation is a response to an unmerited call; to it, we strive to be faithful. We thank God for the responsibility given to us as the consecrated persons, called as we are to fidelity.

(b) Vocation requires encouragement. Jesus encourages his disciples. He reassures them with words that should constantly accompany our lives and our vocational journey: “Take heart, it is I; have no fear (Mt 14:27). The disciples are encouraged to have no fear of the “ghosts” that trouble our hearts. Similarly, vocation calls for courage, for the Lord knows the questions, doubts and difficulties that toss the boat of our heart.

(c) Vocation leads to pain, or fatigue: “Every vocation brings with it a responsibility”. The Lord Jesus calls us because he wants to enable us, like Peter, to “walk on water”, in other words, to take charge of our lives and place them at the service of the Gospel, in the concrete and everyday ways that he shows us, and specifically in the different forms of lay, priestly and consecrated vocation. Yet our desire and enthusiasm coexist with our failings and fears.

We should not let ourselves be daunted by the responsibilities that await us or by the hardships in store for us, but rather continue to maintain the gaze on Jesus so we do not sink. On the other hand, despite our frailty and poverty, faith enables us to walk towards the Risen Lord and to weather every storm. Whenever fatigue or fear make us start to sink, Jesus holds out his hand to us, gives us the enthusiasm we need to live our vocation with joy and

fervour. At times of turbulence and tempest in our lives, Jesus “stills those winds, so that the forces of evil, fear and resignation no longer have power over us.”

(d) And vocation is a call and opportunity to praise God: “Even amid the storm-tossed waters, then, our lives become open to praise.” This is “an invitation to cultivate the interior disposition of the Blessed Virgin Mary”¹¹ who magnifies the Lord.

Therefore, with Pope Francis, we pray:

“May she touch the hearts of the faithful and enable each of them to discover with gratitude God's call in their lives, to find courage to say “yes” to God, to overcome all weariness through faith in Christ, and to make of their lives a song of praise for God, for their brothers and sisters, and for the whole world.”

Finally, the leadership of any religious institute needs to address the issue of the retention and exit rate, or, better still, of the perseverance and abandonment of members of an institute. We cannot ignore particularly the causes and effects of this phenomenon and identify the way forward. To assist those in authority and entrusted with responsibility in religious institutes, the Vatican recently published a book about “persevering in and abandoning religious life”,

¹¹Message Of His Holiness Pope Francis For The 2020 World Day Of Vocations (3 May 2020), in: http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/vocations/documents/papa-francesco_20200308_57-messaggio-giornata-mondiale-vocazioni.html

translated from Spanish. It is titled: “The gift of fidelity. The joy of perseverance”(“El don de la fidelidad. La alegría de la perseverancia”). In 2019, about 1,600 people left the consecrated life, according to reports. Leaving Consecrated Life is due to three main causes: faith crises, community life crises and affective crises. Today fidelity is fluid, and the crisis consecrated life faces is the same one experienced within families. In the face of today's complex reality, the government in a religious institute can invite and motivate, even in creative ways, the members of the institute to take seriously the responsibility of their fidelity and perseverance in their vocation. Thus, the leaders need to honestly assess the present-day crises and accompany the members who may need help. The leaders must strive to ensure a more profound formation and discernment. After all, as Archbishop José Rodríguez Carballo, Secretary, Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life, rightly puts it: “Consecrated life isn't for everyone, nor is everyone made for consecrated life.”

The interested consecrated persons, pondering on remaining in or leaving the Consecrated Life, as well as the leaders of institutes need to be familiar with and prudently apply the Church's orientations and canonical norms of the Church for men and women looking to leave a religious community.

The Apostolic Letter *Authenticum Charismatis* (The authenticity of charism, published Nov.1, 2020), amending canon 579 of the code of canon law, refers to beginning an institute. That is, the amendment offers clear directive to the local ordinary regarding assessing the advisability and

challenges of consumerism, individualism and materialism; the vows of obedience, poverty; communications in religious community.

Sr. Rita Akin-Otiko, SSL, tackles the problem of autonomy, unity in diversity, and collaboration in mission as related to governance of religious institutes in Nigerian context. She discusses the blessings and the challenges involved as leaders who are engaged with one another as co-workers in the mission field of Christ, Who calls us into His service.

From a canonical perspective, Sr. Agnes Okoye, takes into consideration Vatican Council II's *Perfectae Caritatis* 14 (on the office and responsibility of a religious superior) and the current obstacles to free, fair and transparent election and appointment of office-holders in some religious institutes. Consequently, the author examines the canonical principles on the provision of ecclesiastical offices in the Church, with particular focus on the criteria and conditions for the validity of election and appointment of a candidate to the office of a religious superior, with a view to overcoming or radically reducing the obstacles.

One important but often ignored aspect of governance in religious life is the office and the role of the secretary and the archivist of a religious institute. Sr. Nkechinyelu Ezeanyino, DDL brings this to our attention. She investigates the mission of the secretary and the archivist of the religious institute as a service to the truth. In her view, the Secretary is the custodian of the documents of the Institute, and as the public relations officer, while the mission of the Archivist entails that the Archives must be well organized and up to date to

opportunity of establishing new Institutes of Consecrated Life and new Societies of Apostolic Life in the Church. It is no longer sufficient to consult the Holy See in this regard. This new document, *Authenticum charismatis* modifies the stipulation in canon 579 and makes it explicit that Diocesan Bishops can only validly erect institutes of consecrated life or societies of apostolic life by a formal decree, and only when written permission has been given by the Apostolic See.

The question of governance and leadership in Consecrated Life is delicate and innumerable elements of this vocation, mission and way of life. However, this theme is also necessary and urgent. It has many faces and contexts. It is examined from some different perspectives and academic disciplines. The present collection of studies and reflections does not necessarily include all possible angles nor is the treatment of topics always exhaustive. Nevertheless, the topics explored, the questions raised and the recommendations presented deserve the attention.

This edition of *The Catholic Voyage* opens with an exclusive interview graciously given by His Eminence Cardinal João Braz De Aviz, Vatican's Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. He addresses a broad-range of issues of Consecrated Life in Africa today. Among these are, for example, the following matters: the role of national Conferences of Major Superiors; the religious life and COVID-19 Pandemics; inculturation of Consecrated Life; proclamation of the Gospel of truth and mercy; proliferation of Religious institutes and societies of apostolic life; the reception of *Vita Consecrata*; Missionary impetus and African consecrated persons; the

facilitate research. When the Secretary and the Archivist, in her words, “can guarantee accurate and faithful record keeping, they are serving the Truth”; “It is really Good News when people can rely on the Secretary and the Archivist for efficient services”. This raises some questions. For example, in practice, what value do we give to selection/appointment, the training (and acquisition of skills) and mission of the Secretary and archivist in our religious institutes? What is the current state of the Secretariats and the Archives of religious institutes? How can we develop and equip the Secretariats and Archives of our institutes in order to advance them and that they may better serve the truth?

The evangelical counsels of poverty, obedience and chastity are one of the essential elements of religious life. The vows can and must be inculturated, in accordance with the Church's teaching. Sr. Margaret Fagbamigbe, SSMA, investigates the inculturation of the evangelical counsels. She explores the significance and application of inculturation of the evangelical counsels within the framework of African traditional culture and the Roman Catholic context. Her article proposes the transformation of authentic cultural values that have been dusted, purified and integrate them into the lifestyles of the religious state. She makes salient recommendations.

The rights of consecrated persons in institutes of consecrated life is the main concern of the study of a Salesian scholar Olamide Felix Tunde. He explores a central question, namely: As a person who has made profession of the three Evangelical Counsels in his/her institute, what are the underlying rights of consecrated persons that must be

respected? He argues that consecrated life should not be concerned solely with justice for the people they serve, but also ensure justice for the consecrated persons themselves.

Fr. Daniel Mary Onyeayana, CMF emphasizes the present-day relevance and actuality of one of the major Vatican's documents concerning governance and leadership in consecrated life, "The Service of Authority and Obedience" (2008). The document is addressed to all those called to witness to the primacy of God through free obedience to his will, to live their YES to the Lord in joy.

Clifford Ayegwalo, OMV, reflects on the two fundamental values – truth and mercy. These ought to guide the service of those the Lord calls to govern a religious family and lead the members of the institute. In his article, "leading the People of God through witnessing to truth and mercy", the author argues that the people of God cannot be successfully led without the vital attributes of truth and mercy, correctly understood.

In a separate section of this volume, the reader will find a part of the collection of the reflections and messages presented on the inauguration (in 2020) of "The Catholic Voyage-Africa", the YouTube channel edition of this journal. Rev. Bro. Kipoy Pombo, the President of COMSAM, reflects on "Religious life in Africa after Covid-19"; he highlights the challenges of community life, the needed familiarity with the Word of God, charismatic identity, inculturation, the value of unity among religious institutes, and the need for a formation program. On his part, Rev. Bro. Rodrigue Djitrinou, President of RECOMSWA, reflects on consecrated persons as

witnesses of justice and peace who are called to announce, educate and denounce. Fr. Simeon Nwobi, CMF, President of the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria-Men (CMSN), offers an articulated exploration of the theme, “Consecrated life in Nigeria and the call to wake up the world”. What does this call mean and imply for consecrated people and their mission? How and where do we wake up the world? His reflection offers some food-for-thought and practical recommendations. They come at a critical time when consecrated people desire to further appreciate the significance of and respond to the Church's call to “wake up the world”. The contribution of the President of the CMSN-Men is significant for another reason, a documentary and historic value; its presence in this collection symbolically yet meaningfully leaves a mark of testimony, says “a few words” on the occasion of the establishment and inauguration of “The Catholic Voyage-Africa” YouTube Channel of this journal.

Prof. Anthony A. Akinwale, O. P., presents a paper on St. Catherine of Siena as mystic and political activist. The essay addresses the question, what has the 14th Century Dominican mystic, St. Catherine of Siena, have to say to our time marked by cybernetics and artificial intelligence?. In his attempt to answer this question, the author proposes three lessons we can learn from Catherine. He explains why we should strive to live a life where, like in Catherine's life, contemplation and action are a synthesis, not antitheses.

John Paul II asks Africans to appreciate and celebrate their authentic cultural values such as veneration of elders: “the elderly are held in particular veneration. They are not

banished from families or marginalized as in other cultures. On the contrary, they are esteemed and perfectly integrated within their families, of which they are indeed the pinnacle.”¹² Alluding to this request, Fr. Valentine Anaweokhai studies the question of respect for elders and ancestor veneration. The question is: “If we do not celebrate and venerate our elders and ancestors, especially those who exuded heroic virtues and greatness as Africans, who will do it for us. If we keep vilifying and blaming them, how would that help? Could they have behaved differently and other wise as we usually expect and think?” The author advocates a rethink, moving “from denigration to ancestral veneration.”

Sr. Josephine Nwaogwugwu, HFSN offers a brief and lucid commentary on the new Apostolic Letter of Pope Francis, *The Authenticity of a Charism (Authenticum Charismatis)*. She explains the necessity and implications of this document for the Church in Africa. Originally presented for this journal's YouTube channel, her reflection explains that this document modifies the stipulation in canon 579 and makes it explicit that Diocesan Bishops can only validly erect institutes of consecrated life or societies of apostolic life by a formal decree, and only when written permission has been given by the Apostolic See. Not all pious associations are destined to be a religious institute.

¹²John Paul II, *Church in Africa*, n. 47.

The associations that are to be recognised as religious institute or society of apostolic life ought to have a stable form of government. For it to be established as a religious institute it is important to keep in mind, among other elements:

- (a) Its usefulness in the church;
- (b) Whether it meets conditions to regularly conduct religious life according to the aims and spirit of the association; and
- (c) Whether the prospective institute is able to provide in an adequate way for the needs, not excluding economic needs, of its members.

As an information and a reminder about the stand of the Major Superiors of member institutes of CMSN and NCWR on issues of faith and life, this edition offers a complete chronological list of the communiqués that the Conference of the Major Superiors of Nigeria issued at the joint Annual General Meeting (AGM) from 1998 to January 2020. The list of themes addressed takes us through memory lane, to remind us, as it were, of an important part of the significant journey the CMSN and NCWR have jointly made so far.

Finally, I wish to invite our readers to subscribe to this journal, and to watch, like, share and subscribe to its YouTube channel, “The Catholic Voyage-Africa”.

FOCUS

CONSECRATED LIFE IN AFRICA TODAY: A JOURNEY TOGETHER AS WITNESSES OF THE GOSPEL

AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL JOÃO BRAZ DE AVIZ

(Prefect of the Congregation for the Institute of Consecrated life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Vatican City) by

Fr. Oseni J. Ogunu, O.M.V.

Editor-in-Chief, The Catholic Voyage: African Journal of Consecrated Life

In the months of October and November 2020 The Editor-in-Chief of The Catholic Voyage: African Journal Of Consecrated Life, Fr. Oseni Ogunu, O.M.V, had interview with his Eminence Cardinal João Braz De Aviz, the Prefect of the Vatican Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. It was historic, being the first time this journal had an interview with the prefect of the Vatican dicastery responsible for Consecrated life. Naturally, the attention was focused on issues of Consecrated Life in



Africa, particularly Nigeria. In spite of his busy schedule, patiently and carefully responded to the many questions presented, The Catholic Voyage is thankful to his Eminence for the opportunity given for this dialogue, and to all in the TC Voyage's Social Media Team who contributed to the initial preparations for this interview.

The dialogue with his Eminence dwelt on many issues, such as: the role of national Conferences of Major Superiors; the challenges and opportunity of COVID-19 Pandemics; religious persecutions; the continuity of the spirit of the Year of Consecrated Life; the document *Mutuae Relationes* (Mutual Relations); social communications media; inculturation of Consecrated Life; proclamation of the Gospel of truth and mercy; proliferation of Religious institutes and societies of apostolic life; The relationship between the Vatican Dicastery for Consecrated life and the Institutes of Consecrated Life in Africa since the first African Synod(1994); the reception of *Vita Consecrata*; Mission challenges and African consecrated persons; the challenges of consumerism, individualism and materialism; the vows of obedience, poverty; communications in religious community; Gratitude, joy and hope in Consecrated Life. The written interview was originally given in Italian language. The title and subtitles are provided by editors for easy reading. For a video edition of the interview, watch "The Catholic Voyage-Africa" YouTube channel.

You can read, in English translation, the full TC Voyage interview with His Eminence Card. Braz de Aviz below:

THE ROLE OF THE NATIONAL CONFERENCES OF MAJOR SUPERIORS

TCV: The Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria-Men (CMSN) celebrates the 50th Anniversary of its foundation in 2020, at a time when Nigeria faces very serious challenges in religious, social-cultural and economic areas. What is the role of the national Conferences of Major Superiors in the growth of Christianity and in integral development of an African society, like Nigeria, in the face of religious, social-cultural and economic challenges?

Card. João Braz de Aviz: The Conferences of Major Superiors of Religious men and women have multiplied especially since the Second Vatican Council. They were born as concrete instruments of communion between the various charismatic realities of consecrated life in the Church. In fact, religious Orders and Congregations, as well as the Order of Virgins, Secular Institutes and Societies of Apostolic life, form a single body in the Church. This consciousness of being all members of the Church, the people of God, also gave birth and growth to the Conferences of Religious. Furthermore, evangelization is possible only if we Christians are united: *"By this all will know that you are my disciples: if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35).*

For 50 years the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria has been trying to be this point of reference, of communion, for the whole consecrated life of the country. This is a great gift that invigorates the presence of the charisms and stimulates them to produce many fruits.

This presence is even more necessary at this moment in the history of the country with the very serious challenges for its people. The witness of evangelical values, the courage of consecrated persons, their complete availability to live for the Kingdom of God in any concrete situation, generates hope and gives certainty that God, despite all the difficulties, indeed, right in the midst of them, is present with his faithful love.

THE CHALLENGES OF THE COVID AND THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF CONSECRATED PEOPLE

TCV: The crisis of COVID-19 Pandemic as a global crisis affects Nigeria and other Africa countries and the churches there. It presents many challenges, especially for evangelization and the way of being a Church family and carrying out ministries. From your vantage point, what has been the major challenges of the COVID for, and responses of Institutes of Consecrated life and Societies of Apostolic Life? What have been the major contributions of Consecrated people in Africa in addressing the challenges? What do you expect from Consecrated people in the Catholic Church after COVID emergency?

Card. João Braz de Aviz: The current COVID-19 pandemic has given many of us in the Church and society an opportunity to review some convictions of today's culture. Technological capability had made us forget our vulnerability. So even death and situations of great pain have come much closer to each of us in this time.

The signs have grown that we cannot solve on our own: either we will all be saved together or we will not be saved, as Pope Francis reminds us. In the same way, in order for us to

be safe we must also protect the other as well. And in the same conviction, if we do not take care of nature, creation, its cry will come in various ways, more and more pressing to us, since nature too will continue to die and make us die too.

Furthermore, in recent times we are forced to find new ways to express ecclesial life and our identity as believers. It will depend more and more on an authentic experience of witness to the Gospel of Jesus rather than on the repetition of rites, of acquired devotions or of multitudes that carry out great live or media events in the Church.

Now, more and more, it will be following Jesus with the witness of life in all vocations and more and more together, in communion, what will create the conditions for the protection and development of everyone's life and to bring us closer to that happiness to which our heart yearns.

There are many consecrated men and women who have the courage to remain close to the poor, the lonely, the infected and those who die or lose loved ones. This truly fraternal choice based on the Gospel continues and grows in many countries. Some got sick. Others have shared much more generously the necessary goods or been close to those who were lonely and discouraged.

I think that the pandemic is giving us the opportunity to discover and intensely experience fraternity, especially with the least protected, marginalized because they are insignificant. The new encyclical of Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* [On Fraternity and Social Friendship], shows us the path of fraternity for the whole Church. Consecrated life also

needs to restore fraternal life in community. In many communities, we have become bogged down in individualistic attitudes that kill the beauty of family life, where there is always sincere and joyful openness to brothers and sisters in respect and integration of diversity.

CONSECRATED PERSONS AND THE PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS

TCV: There is an on-going religious persecution of Christians and ethnic tension in Nigeria, as has been widely reported. Consecrated persons and the local Church cannot isolate themselves nor ignore these problems, for they experience the negative impact of the crisis. What is the role of Consecrated persons in the face of the problems of persecution of Christians and ethnic conflicts?

Card. João Braz de Aviz: Christians have been persecuted and martyred throughout the twenty centuries of the Church's history to date. In many places it was born from the strength of the testimony of the blood of the martyrs. Among the consecrated men and women there are many who demonstrate "the greatest love for Christ and for the Church". Pope Francis reminds us that today the number of martyrs is even greater than that of the first centuries.

The Gospel lived by them and by us is the most solid basis for respecting the culture of each ethnic group and at the same time favouring the integration of cultures among them, since the Gospel contains the values that are good for all cultures. We must be convinced that no culture is superior to the other. The cultures are different, they are of more numerous or smaller peoples, of more ancient or more recent peoples, but

they all have the same dignity and are all full of authentic values to be respected. How much there is still to be built in relations between peoples and various ethnic groups! The Gospel gives us the hope that this is possible, even if it is difficult.

Both for Christians in Nigeria, or in other countries of the African continent, as well as for Christians from all over the world, what Pope Francis reminded us in the Synod for the Amazon is valid, namely that where there is an "overflow" of the conflict there must also be the "overflow" of mercy.

Surely the Church cannot keep her distance from these pains of our peoples, as she is now in Nigeria. Consecrated men and women are also called to assume them and do everything possible to overcome them. Consecrated men and women in particular, due to their vocation, are inserted in the world in the most varied situations. The community is always very happy when consecrated persons remain in the midst of it demonstrating a love that is greater than love for one's life.

THE CONTINUITY OF THE SPIRIT OF THE HOLY YEAR OF CONSECRATED LIFE

TCV: Haven celebrated the Holy Year of Consecrated Life, how do consecrated persons continue the spirit of the Holy Year and continue to respond to the call to look at the past with gratitude, live the present with passion and joy, and embrace the future with hope?

Card. João Braz de Aviz: The year of consecrated life (2015) remained a beacon for all of us. Pope Francis was at the beginning of his Petrine ministry. He has shown us the

necessary orientation in the Gospel: "new wine in new wineskins!" (Mk 2:22). The new wine is Jesus, for this reason a consecrated person can fulfil his vocation only if he keeps alive the encounter that took place with the loving gaze of Jesus who called him. This joyful relationship with him that has given meaning to our days is the only value that can sustain our commitment throughout our lives, because it supports the gratuitousness of the call and, at the same time, the loving gratuitousness of the response. It is the search for fidelity to him, through the practice of the Word of the Gospel and the light of the charism of the founder or foundress, that is what counts. This fidelity is called to be continually attentive to the signs of the times that change continuously, to be persevering and understood by the man and woman of today.

Without this discipleship, lived as a loving response to God who loves us first, there is no consecrated life. All the rest: goods, structures, habits inherited from one's own history, secondary cultural elements, a theology that has stood still in time, not attentive to the indications of the current Magisterium, all this needs to be constantly reviewed and updated in the proper order of the Constitutions and Regulations.

Looking to the past with gratitude makes us today avoid being judges of those who preceded us and from whom we inherited the charism. It is not healthy, however, to hide the mistakes and deviations that we find in our charismatic history, even if this sometimes affects the founders themselves. In fact, the good among us humans is always mixed with weakness (wheat and weeds, according to Jesus,

grow together). Once identified, mistakes and deviations must be corrected in us children of the charism in the light of the Gospel of Jesus and the current Magisterium of the Church, starting especially from the Second Vatican Council and the subsequent Popes. This process is carried out in a continuous attitude of openness and not of stagnation or resistance, which normally create divisions and isolation.

Many times the lack of this agility in following the impulses of the Spirit has diminished the passion and joy of a life for the Kingdom of God today and consequently has made us lose the attraction of the consecrated life.

In order to carry out the reform of consecrated life well today it seems necessary to give great attention to some dimensions of the life of consecration, such as, for example, continuous and initial formation, fraternal life in community, the profound revision of the experience of obedience and authority in the light of a profoundly fraternal life (also in the light of the Fratelli Tutti [On Fraternity and Social Friendship]), the use and possession of goods according to the Gospel both on a personal, community and structural level. These are certainly some of the new "wineskins" to be built.

UPDATE OF "MUTUAE RELATIONES" (MUTUAL RELATIONS)

TCV: What are the real prospects and hope for the updating of "Mutuae Relationes" (1978) as recommended, for instance, by African bishops (See John Paul II's *Ecclesia in Africa*, n.94)?

Card. João Braz de Aviz: The final draft of the new *Mutuae*

Relationes document is ready. The text is under review. Later it will be delivered to the Holy Father and publication or not will depend solely on him. Two strong points of the text, on which we have already commented on other occasions, are the ecclesiology of communion (the experience of synodality) and the co-essentiality between the hierarchical and charismatic dimensions of the Church (that is, the two dimensions - hierarchy and charisms - are indispensable in the Church). These are perspectives deeply felt by Pope Francis and desired by him for the whole Church today.

If these realities, which are of the Gospel, are put into practice ever more intensely in the life of Christians, the result will be that of the Church with the face of fraternity among all Christians, and it will also result in a true light for all humanity. For this reason, consecrated life also needs to know and live intensely what Pope Francis gave us in the recent Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* on fraternity and social friendship.

CONSECRATED PERSONS' USE OF COMMUNICATIONS MEDIA

TCV: What is your advice to Consecrated persons concerning their presence in communications media in those part of the mission territory where the digital era has not yet taken root for many people?

Card. João Braz de Aviz: The Church has always been attentive to the great value of the means of social communication and has used them in all parts of the world, where possible, to announce and make known the life of the Gospel. We know the current extraordinary development of

these technical means. We can use them for good or for evil, as we see. The use of these means by consecrated persons is a great good. What matters is knowing how to use them according to the values of the Gospel and our charisms of consecrated life. This also applies to consecrated men and women who are present or work in the Communications media. When this presence is the fruit of communion with the Church and with our religious family and is carried out with competence, it bears many fruits. Not all mission territories have all these means at their disposal. We must be aware of developing them also in local churches. Some older means such as radio are very present and very useful, especially where digital ones are missing.

INCULTURATION OF CONSECRATED LIFE

TCV: St. John Paul II's *Vita Consecrata*, and the two African Synods strongly requested for inculturation in all areas of the Church. In the area of Consecrated Life the process of inculturation appears rather slow. What do you see as the main obstacles to the implementation and advancement of the inculturation of consecrated life in Africa today? What do we need to do to overcome these barriers and to implement the inculturation of Consecrated Life in Africa?

Card. João Braz de Aviz: All our cultures in the world - and they are truly numerous - express values and characteristics proper to the being and living of the person and peoples, which have come together over time, to respond to the challenges that have arisen and continue to present themselves to them. It is an identity that is being consolidated and at the same time changing in this life process over time.

The arrival of the Gospel in a culture is a particular gift of God to a people. The proclamation and witness of the Gospel in a new culture gives rise to a twofold movement: a) if it truly brings the Gospel and not only elements of another culture, it brings universal values, which are good in all cultures, because they are written from God in the most intimate of every human person. In this way the culture is enriched and better expresses its own values; b) on the other hand, this process of inculturation leads to incarnating and expressing the Gospel in new forms, with characteristics different from those present in other cultures. Thus, it becomes a fruitful instrument of manifestation of the Kingdom of God to the man and woman of today, because the Gospel is clothed with characteristics that are felt to be their own of that people, of its culture.

In a historical moment like ours, that has led to an acceleration of contacts between cultures, with so many technological means available to many, the experience and conviction of a planetary multi-dependence is expanding, which leads us more and more to think and realize the world in all its realities in a global way. Faced with phenomena such as the current pandemic, for example, we are convinced more quickly about what Pope Francis says: either we will all be saved together or we will not be saved at all. What we as Christians want to promote at this moment in history is not the global hegemony of one culture over others, because wanting to "standardize" all cultures according to a single model destroys the identity and values of other cultures. The Gospel does not do this. I think that among people of consecrated life today this conviction regarding the inculturation of the Gospel, with the consequent

commitment to carry it out, is growing rapidly. This is a thrust that comes from above, from the Spirit, which we cannot ignore with choices of closure in ideological radicalisms.

What can slow down or even prevent inculturation in African nations as well as in any other continent? As the experience of the Church teaches, we know that from those who evangelize, be they Christians of the same people, or missionaries who come from other cultures, the first thing is to know the culture well, to love it in all its values that we know are true if they do not contradict the Gospel. Above all, it will be the witness of men evangelizers and women evangelizers to offer that power of attraction of the Gospel that draws people together because they find what they seek, that is, true human and divine values. In this sense, an evangelization that does not take on the characteristics of culture risks making the Gospel to be considered as a foreign element, to be left aside; on the other hand, an evangelization that fails to transform the counter-values of a culture proves incapable of creating new processes of life and the realization of that culture. In these two directions today it is necessary to deepen personal and community witness.

PROCLAMATION OF TRUTH AND MERCY

TCV: Following the example of Christ, the Church proclaims the Gospel of truth and mercy. How can Consecrated people announce this message harmoniously and serenely to the world, and even within the Christian community, sometimes marked by extremism, ideologies and ecclesiological vision that tend to opt for one value almost as if in opposition to another? How can they sustain Truth and Justice towards

building new bridges of communication and fraternity? What should be the action of African consecrated people who are called to love and serve in times of tensions and conflicts?

Card. João Braz de Aviz: Conflicts are a phenomenon present in all human realities: within the person, in the family, in the community, in a people, in relations between peoples. We Christians also feel that we live and experience conflicts as human persons. In fact, within the Church there are various conflicts taking place. Some of them seem insurmountable to us. The right, left and centre groups are born. In some places they last for years and more, decades and centuries, as is the case with the division between the Churches or the conflicts between religions. The same is true of ideological struggles.

Yet, from the Gospel we understand that there are no two truths. Only Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. We experience that our differences are real and create tensions and divisions. We also know from the Gospel that the wheat and the weeds grow together in this world and that only at the end of history will they be definitively separated. Since we are all immersed in tensions, how can we follow the path that is Jesus to remain in the truth and at the same time in this so necessary experience of mercy with everyone, even in the difficult experience of love and mercy with our enemies near or far?

As Christians we are aware that we have all been marked by sin, but in Christ we also know that by pure grace, by pure gift, we have been saved from sin and its harsh consequences. In this it is the experience of faith that guides us, it is the love

of God who gave his Son for our love that truly convinces us. We can then say that God's love has led us beyond the possible contradiction between truth and mercy, because God's mercy has led us to know the truth of life. And the truth is discovered and assimilated when we are able to do like God, that is to go beyond our truths and assume in ourselves God's way of acting: open ourselves to the truth of the other and with him experience the love of God in our human relationship and in this climate, in this humus, to continue the journey, that is to continue in a true way in the direction of Christ, the way, the truth and the life. Each time this experience becomes true and reciprocal, it brings us closer to each other and reduces or eliminates the spaces of separation and contrast. But it is necessary to have the courage to remain in love. Sometimes this costs us blood.

PROLIFERATION OF RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE

TCV: In the Church today, we witness proliferation and multiplication of religious institutes and societies of Apostolic Life in Nigeria. What has been the response of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life to similar challenges in other regions of Africa, if there had been such a challenge?

Card. João Braz de Aviz: The proliferation and multiplication of Institutes of consecrated life and Societies of apostolic life is a phenomenon that affects the Church throughout the world. Surely, as in the past, today too the Church recognizes the constant action of the Holy Spirit who continues to arouse the charisms destined for the good of the

whole Christian community. The ecclesial Movements that have arisen in our times also show great vivacity in this sense. In particular, after the Second Vatican Council and especially since Pope Saint John Paul II, the Church has drawn up some ecclesial criteria through which a true charism can be recognized.

From experience, we know that a charism needs a long ecclesial process to mature and produce permanent fruit. However, there are founders and foundresses who are not authentic and some are even people with severe personality and behaviour problems. For this, a true discernment is necessary, which passes through the mission of the bishop, but also of the Apostolic See. In fact, a charism needs to express itself first of all in an authentic “sequela Christi”, that is, in a concrete witness to the Gospel, both personal and community. Today we have many tools to activate and develop this process of discernment. Within the Church at the diocesan level, it is important not to leave these new groups alone, not to rush to approve them and not divert them from the purpose for which they were born.

VATICAN'S DICASTERY FOR CONSECRATED LIFE AND THE RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES IN AFRICA; THE VALUE OF VITA CONSECRATA

TCV: What has been the relationship between the Vatican's Dicastery and the Religious Congregations in Africa, especially since the 1994 Synod until now? In addition, what is your general assessment of the reception of the document Vita Consecrata in Nigeria, and in Africa generally?

Card. João Braz de Aviz: The year of consecrated life was a

point of strength and light in reference to consecrated life on the African continent. In addition to the world meetings held in Rome, which were numerous and with the participation of many consecrated persons also from various African countries, we of the Dicastery in Rome have been to various countries. Personally, I was also able to participate in the three General Assemblies of COMSAM-COSMAM (Confederation of Major Superiors of Africa and Madagascar) which is the body approved by the Holy Father to promote communion between all the Conferences of consecrated persons in Africa and Madagascar. We know that these Conferences are more than 50 and some very developed.

In this period of the Covid-19 pandemic we have started a journey (through online links) with all the Conferences of Consecrated Life in Africa and Madagascar. We are trying to understand together, in a journey truly made in a synodal form, what are the needs most felt by consecrated men and women. Together we will try to alleviate this climate of loneliness and isolation that we feel more now that the virus continues to spread. We think that the moment offers a concrete possibility to respond to these life needs that we feel. We have collected, in an attentive and fraternal listening, the voices of the 20 Conferences present at our first two-hour online meeting recently held.

The apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata* had and still has a profound value in the current situation of the life of all the realities of consecrated life present in the Church. It is a document that must always be taken up again in order to proceed along the path of renewal. I hope this will also

happen in Nigeria and in all the countries of Africa and Madagascar. Here we always keep this in mind. It must be combined with all the guidelines given to us by Pope Francis in recent years.

MISSION OF CONSECRATED LIFE

TCV: Mission has been both an important part of religious life and a challenge particularly in war-torn regions and considering the scarcity (of material goods and of priests) in rural communities. Africa is blessed with great witnessing of persons. What best practices could we employ for a better appreciation of mission by and for African consecrated persons outside their continent?

Card. João Braz de Aviz: Jesus crucified and risen, according to his own words, is the One who attracts all people to himself. Christianity, if witnessed by the disciple, has a force of attraction of its own capable of bringing people closer to its universal light which will illuminate in the times and ways desired by God. In fact, the latest Popes remind us that the mission of proclaiming and witnessing the Gospel cannot be achieved by imposition, since our culture today does not accept this method used many times in the past, where the Gospel has arrived alongside the force of arms or political manoeuvres.

The sincere and gratuitous witness of the Gospel generates the fruitful humus on which the seed of the Word of God takes root. In this sense, both for missionaries of other nations, as well as for African missionaries, who are often born as the fruit of witness of the former, the best practices are those that come from the “sequela Christi” of the missionaries and their

joyful witness.

THE CHALLENGES OF CONSUMERISM, INDIVIDUALISM AND MATERIALISM

TCV: How best should the Consecrated person respond to the challenges of consumerism? How could community life undergo revision, or be updated, in order to be more dynamic for its members within the accelerating complexity of contemporary contexts of civilisation, individualism and materialization?

Card. João Braz de Aviz: Consumerism and individualism are the harmful result of choices contrary to the Gospel. From their harmful consequences now present throughout the world, we understand that they lead to a path of death for man, woman and nature. Consecrated life can, it too, also lose the beauty of the witness of a poor life in communion and be trapped by such deviations. In fact, even consecrated persons in practical life can deny the path of the evangelical counsels and want to serve two masters: God and money. The openness of spirit of an Order, a Congregation, a Society of apostolic life, a secular Institute, or any other form of consecrated life, to the spirituality of communion lived among its members and with the other charisms in the Church is the attitude that restores the enchantment of the Christian experience. It is above all a personal decision of conversion. In fact, believing in the Gospel (that is, doing what the Gospel asks) brings the Kingdom of God among us. In this sense, those elements of culture that do not express the values of the Word of God must also be elaborated. The process of inculturation of the Gospel favours the perfecting

of culture.

THE VOW OF OBEDIENCE

TCV: The vow of Obedience in the contemporary world is under the attack of the major obstacles such as pride and self-will. What would be your response to this challenge? There has been a recent development of the new, or at least increasing, understanding of the vow of obedience to include initiative and dialogue. Could we say this is a right and effective path for community life?

Card. João Braz de Aviz: Abuses of authority and the democratization of obedience in consecrated life are creating great difficulties for the necessary fraternal life in the community. The results in the communities where this phenomenon occurs are harmful: divisions, pressures, depressions, isolation, injustices, sadness, a sense of loss. And all this leads many consecrated men and women to abandon their vocation. The authoritarian men superior or women superior are people who confuse authority with power. With a certain frequency they leave aside the decisions justly taken in the Chapter and ignore the necessary synodal path of the work done together and decided with the Council; on the contrary they are placed above the Chapter and the Council. In the Gospel we do not find support for this way of acting. Superiors who act in this way ignore the abundant current guidelines of the Church, which take up the words of Jesus to confirm that authority is service. We can say that superiors who act in this way destroy the most beautiful characteristic of the Christian community and, consequently, of consecrated life, fraternity.

On the other hand, an obedience in which decisions are made simply by the sum of the votes of the majority does not always correspond to the truth. This can be in one person or in a small group. Nor does it seem true the obedience of a religious person who is silent about everything and does not collaborate with the superior in manifesting with courage and maturity what God suggests in his heart.

In order for our authority and our obedience to be according to the Gospel we must look to Jesus. In the most difficult moment of the fulfilment of the experience of the cross, in which he reunited us to the Father and gave us the Holy Spirit, he cries out in an anguished dialogue: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mk 15.34). Even without an immediate response from the Father (this will come later, with the resurrection), Jesus remains united with the Father. Today we must necessarily deepen the mystery of love of this cry in order to be able to enjoy an authority and an obedience that arise from the Mystery and thus be able to allow the community a fruitful construction of fraternity.

VOW OF POVERTY

TCV: What are the major challenges today that face Consecrated men and women in responding to their commitment to poverty, to having nothing?

Card. João Braz de Aviz: Given our human condition of also being a body with its precise needs, it is impossible to live a poverty that has the commitment to have nothing as its perfect model. We need a place to live, food to eat, water to drink, clothes to cover ourselves, medicines for health, to administer the fruit of our work, to look after our places of

worship with taste and sobriety....

What the Word of God asks of us and that Jesus testified is that consecrated men and women, but also all Christians, all the baptized, learn to trust with joy in the Father who is providence and cares for us. It is he who has given us everything in abundance and asked us to administer with care. Having gained this serene trust, the next step is to make sure that the goods serve the community, serve the most needy and not one's whims. Trust in God's providence, lived with naturalness, in detachment from goods to make them available to all, then results in a poverty full of meaning. Today many goods of consecrated persons are lost; they are alienated, without the awareness that those goods are goods of the Church and must serve for communion in the Church.

COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

TCV: The issue of communication in the community has been placed on hold in some places. Sometimes, there is only a monologue. This is due, in part, to unresolved conflict, prejudice and unrepaired breakdown in communication.

Card. João Braz de Aviz: Fraternal life in community is too precious a treasure and must be kept at all costs. Fraternity is the fruit of a sincere vision of faith. It cannot be reduced to the maximum penance of a consecrated person. It is impossible to impose fraternity and it does not exist when one falls into the formalism of complying with cold rules. Fraternal experience is a gift of God lived in gratuitousness, in freedom. Fraternity does not seek to eliminate the differences experienced in the relationship with the other, but finds in

sincere love and in coherence with the truth the continuous path of dialogue and forgiveness to take a step forward or to repair the gestures of rupture or of ambiguity. Those who believe and work for fraternity in the community develop a great and continuous ability to listen, avoid all forms of aggression, speak as delicately as possible, and try to understand the reasons of the other. When fraternal love among the members grows in a community, the possibility arises of creating moments of fraternal correction that are not aimed at seeking the guilty but at recognizing one's weaknesses and also one's strengths and being able to progress together in maturation.

This becomes possible because in charity one of the real presences of Jesus is generated in the community that is confirmed to us by himself: "Where two or more are gathered in my name, there am I among them" (Mt 18:20). I think that this presence, when it occurs, is the presence of the Risen Lord that generates balance, joy, generosity and perseverance.

REASONS FOR GRATITUDE, JOY AND HOPE

TCV: What are your reasons for gratitude, for joy and for hope concerning Consecrated Life in Nigeria?

Card. João Braz de Aviz: I know little about consecrated life in Nigeria. Contacts are made by means of the –COMSAM-COSMAM assemblies and periodic reports from the Conference of Religious. From this long interview to which I replied, I feel that consecrated life in Nigeria lives among the people and seeks a testimony of evangelical life. Your history is marked at this moment by so many pains of your peoples

and your merciful and friendly presence in all concrete situations will favour the construction of a path of peace. At this moment it is important for all of us to make the journey together, helping one another, supporting one another. God does not abandon his people.

Thank you for this opportunity for dialogue.

TCV: Thank you for granting to The Catholic Voyage the opportunity and privilege to have this conversation with you, for the first time, on some important issues of Consecrated life in Africa.

STUDIES & PERSPECTIVES

THE GOVERNANCE OF RELIGIOUS INSTITUTE: AUTONOMY, UNITY IN DIVERSITY, AND COLLABORATION IN MISSION IN THE NIGERIAN CONTEXT

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Abstract

Autonomy, unity in diversity, and collaboration are topical and global issues. Religious institutes are not left out in these all-important contemporary thematic foci. The subject of this article is quite extensive in that it could be approached from many angles. For the purpose of this article the focus is restricted to governance of religious institutes. First, it considers the autonomy which those who hold the rudder of affairs of religious institutes possess in the administration of their territory among their members, and in relation to superiors of other religious institutes. Next, it reflects on



how institutes' leadership, regardless of the distinct character of their institutes, interact with leaders of other religious institutes, and with their members particularly those who are gifted and talented. Finally, it demonstrates the blessings and challenges involved as leaders engage with one another as co-workers in the mission field of Christ Who calls us into His service – both within their institutes and with other religious institutes. To achieve these intents, albeit in no exhaustive way, it discusses the concept of governance; leadership structures in religious institutes vis-à-vis a comparison of leadership structures of some religious institute in Nigeria; examines the themes of autonomy, unity in diversity, and mission collaboration between authorities of religious institutes within the context of the Nigerian milieu.

Preamble

Discourse on these three key relational subject matters - autonomy, unity in diversity, and collaboration is increasingly taking centre stage in all spheres of life raging from politics to sustainability of developing economies, to religious affairs. Within the Church, these topics are contemporary issues that have caught and drawn attention to the need for documentation on mutual relations among the people of God. One of the major documents on this is the Directives for the Mutual Relations Between Bishops and Religious in the Church, *Mutuae Relationes*. There is, however, paucity of literature on relationship between the leadership of religious institutes. Hence, the limiting of the focus of this article to religious institutes. Religious institutes are one of the two categories of what the Church approves as consecrated life. A religious institute is “a society in which, in

accordance with their own law, the members pronounce public vows and live a fraternal life in common...." (c. 607 §2).

A member of a Religious Institute is an individual whose desire is to be freed from the cares of this world so as to be busy pleasing the Lord their God (1 Corinthians 7 verse 33-35). The only reason they chose to be celibate is for the Kingdom of God (Matthew 19:12). Membership of religious institutes comprises of both women and men. Some of male religious also belong to the clerical membership of the Church. A Religious does not live alone, but forms community with others who share the same spirituality, charism, way of life, and similar calling with others within the jurisdiction of their religious institute.

Religious institutes like any civil organisation have their constitutions which provide guidelines for the life and living of its members. Where there are laws guiding people's activities, there is bound to be custodians who would be held accountable for compliance or non-compliance with the laid down rules. These custodians are referred to as Superior, Leader, Rector, Master of the Order, Provincial, Delegate, Regional, Chairman of Unions, Prior etc depending on what is obtainable in each institute. Governance of religious institutes have ranks and they are functional at various levels. Those who govern religious institutes have roles and duties which must be consistent with the charism of their founders. Ensuring the unremitting faithfulness of membership to the founding principles of their Institute is one the most crucial tasks of the leaders (*MR* n. 14).

Concept of Governance

There is a wide acceptance that the concept of governance is as old as human civilization. The *Etymology Online* dictionary dates the origin of the word “governance” to the late 14th century Old French *governance* which meant “government, rule, administration; (rule of) conduct”.

The modern-day French *gouvernance* is derived from the 13th century Old French, *governer*, which means "to govern, rule with authority, steer, be at the helm of, direct, command". *Govern* also has its root in the Latin word, *gubernare*, Spanish, *gobernar*, and Italian *governare* which denote "to direct, rule, guide, govern". From the etymology of the words, “governance” and “govern” it is evident that there is some form of interaction between actors – leader and the led, whose stage of performance is within a specified domain. *Wikipedia* expatiates the description of *governance* to include the process of structuring, sustaining, regulating and putting in place systems for accountability as they pertain to rules, norms and actions in the art of administration. In broad terms, governance among other things focuses on achieving collective goals (Polya, 2016).

The exercise of authority in religious institutes encompasses all necessary administrative procedures required at all levels of management, be it at the general, provincial, regional, zonal, or local levels. Although there are designated leaders who manage the affairs of religious institutes, they are not the sole players in the business of governance.

STRUCTURES OF GOVERNANCE: A MODEST COMPARISON

Every human group, especially the ones geared towards achieving a specific goal, has its peculiar systems of authority and administration. These organisational systems are guided by policies and procedures which are designed to pilot the day-to-day activities of the group. Religious Institutes, which have been known to be steadfast in their prophetic mission in the Church are no exceptions in these organizational characteristics.

Currently and globally, especially in the global north – America and Europe specifically, many Religious Institutes are experiencing closure majorly due to lack of vocation. It is to be understood, therefore, that with ageing, leadership structures would have to change to suit the demands of the realities of affected congregations (Connors, 2011). The story is however different in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly Nigeria, where there is still an increase in vocation to the Religious life, and most persons in leadership positions are Nigerians.

There are instances of religious institutes being able to, or unable to collaborate due to similar or dissimilar leadership structures. Collaboration between an institute whose leadership structure in a particular locale is more autonomous, like a Province, and one whose leadership is under a higher authority may be quite challenging. Opportunity to look into a few leadership structures in Nigeria might facilitate the much-needed understanding of such challenges.

To compare the leadership structures of religious institutes based in Nigeria, a mini-survey was disseminated to 12 randomly (the term is loosely used here) selected religious institutes to gather data on the following: Name of the religious institute, levels of leadership in the institute, process of electing/appointing leaders at each level, type of governing structure they have – Leadership Teams or a Leader and Councillors at each level, designation of their leaders at each level of leadership. Thankfully, nine religious institutes responded – four female and five male groups responded quite openly and swiftly. Their feedback provided valuable data which confirmed some known facts and revealed others about the diverse leadership structures in Religious Institutes. Five of the nine Religious Institutes have only three levels of leadership comprising the General level, the Provincial level, and the Local level of leadership. One Institute has the option of a Delegate in place of a Provincial where necessary, while another Institute has the level of Vice-Provincial before their Regional level of leadership. Three Institutes have the Regional level of leadership following the Provincial level in their hierarchical order with one of them having Zonal leadership as well.

Across board, the process of choosing leaders at the General or Central level (Institute-wide) and Provincial level is by voting at chapters which is attended by delegates from across the institutes. However, for one of the institutes, election to Provincial leadership is done at a discernment assembly where names of nominees in teams of whatever number is agreed upon are surfaced through private balloting. After another prayerful discernment, the Central Leadership Team of the institute comes up with a team of

Sisters from the elected nominees to form the Provincial Leadership Team having in mind the different roles of the members. One of them is appointed as the Provincial Leader who is the named leader for the Team.

In eight of the nine Religious Institutes, the structure of leadership at the General, Provincial, Vice-Provincial (where applicable), Regional and Zonal (where applicable) levels consists of the named leader and a council or counsellors as the case may be. In the ninth Religious Institute, rather than have councillors or counsellors, they have a Leadership Team.

Designations of leadership at various levels also vary from Institute to Institute. At the general level, the title, Superior General/General Superior is employed to address the highest authority in five of the Religious Institutes surveyed. Institute Leader is utilised in one, while two refer to their Institute-wide Leader as Rector Major. The general Leader of the ninth group surveyed is called the Master of the Order. At the Provincial level, the titles in seven of the Religious institutes is, Provincial or Provincial Superior, while in the remaining two, one is designated Provincial Leader and the other Provincial Rector/Delegate. In the religious institutes where they have a Vice-Province, their leader is referred to as the Vice-Provincial. The three religious institutes that have leaders at the Regional level have three different titles for their leaders, namely, Regional Superior, Regional Leader, and Chairman of Unions. The group that has leadership at the Zonal level refer to their leader as Zonal Leader. At community level of leadership, leaders in five of the Religious Institutes refer to their leaders as Local/Community

Superior, while two call theirs, Rectors. In the remaining two groups, they are called Community Leader in one and Prior in the other.

The above comparisons demonstrate the similarities and disparities which generally exist among leadership structures of religious institutes. Sensitivity to these realities is paramount to the understanding of the concepts of autonomy, unity in diversity, and collaboration regarding governance of religious institutes. In addition, hierarchical nature of governance may lead to bottleneck issues, a fact which is not peculiar to religious institutes. Globally, bottleneck concerns abound in both secular and religious administrative activities with Nigeria having not the feeblest immunity against it.

THE NIGERIAN FACTOR

It is pertinent at this juncture to examine, albeit modestly, the Nigerian cultural milieu against which religious institutes are silhouetted. Nigeria is made up of different ethnic groups who were forced into one entity by the whims of colonial masters. The nation has experienced both the autocratic grabbing of power by the military and failed democratic systems of government (Aderibigbe & Olla, 2015). Most of religious institutes in Nigeria have been around for decades, and therefore, have experienced both the military regime and political systems of governance.

Religious institutes have had their missions structured around government policies especially in the educational and health sectors. Those who were around before, and who have been living in the country since 1977 when the government forcefully took over the running of private-

owned schools can attest to the adverse impact the unhelpful leadership styles employed in running the affairs of Nigeria have had on their previously well-guarded educational and health territories. They can relay how they have had to change their institute's organisational policies to accommodate government policies. Even after schools and hospitals were returned to missions to manage, scars of mismanagement spanning decades still leave tell-tale signs all over their property.

Most religious institutes in Nigeria, be they of Pontifical rights or Diocesan rights engage in services which are targeted at the public. Through their teaching, medical, pastoral, and social ministries, religious come in contact with people who with them are bound by the constitutions of the country. The current turbulent climate of lack of security, inadequate electricity, massive retrenchment/unemployment, insurgencies, religious intolerance, unprecedented poverty coupled with covid-19 pandemic makes governance of religious institutes more challenging than ever before as the leaders of this institutes have to be on top of their game so as to gallantly lead their members safely through these storms.

Perfectae Caritatis demands that, similar to “the manner of living, praying and working should be suitably adapted everywhere, but especially in mission territories, to the modern physical and psychological circumstances of the members and also, as required by the nature of each institute, to the necessities of the apostolate, the demands of culture, and social and economic circumstances”, the procedures and policies regarding the governing of religious

institutes must undergo fitting renewal (PC, 3). Religious institutes in Nigeria being part of the universal Church are equally bound to observe, this ecclesiastical injunction which demands suitable modifications. In the contemporary anarchical context of Nigeria, reflections on the subject of autonomy, unity in diversity and collaboration in the governance of religious institutes becomes even more germane in the call for adaptability “in mission territories”.

THE SUPERIOR/ LEADER – WHAT IS IN A NAME?

An evolving phenomenon is the shift, albeit slowly, from employing the appellation, “superior” to “leader” in religious institutes especially those whose membership are both home-grown and international. Some may argue by asking the question, “What's in a name?” The ingenuous response to that inquiry is, “A rose by any other name would smell as sweet”, a popular reference to William Shakespeare's play *Romeo and Juliet*. True, for it is the intrinsic values of a person that truly gives them their identity not the capricious names by which they are branded. However, within the Nigeria context, the word “superior” often means more than a leader. It often denotes “class” disparity, a fact that must not be ignored in a nation where titles are so fundamental to most people's identity such that they have become commercialised. Quite amusing is the fact that among religious, there is actually a big deal about names and designations.

RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES: AUTONOMY WITHIN INTERNAL TIERS OF GOVERNANCE

The etymology of the word, “autonomy” as it relates to states and governments dates back to the early 17th century. It originated from the Greek lexicon, *autonomia*, which means, “independence” and *autonomos* – *auto* which means “self” and *nomos* – “laws” (*Etymonline*). It is almost an effort in futility to attempt to disconnect the concept of autonomy from the environment in which it is perceived. Whatever autonomy may mean, one universal truth is that it connotes independence of some sort. One of the most fundamental distinguishing factors of religious institutes are their “distinctive character” made so by the charisma of their Founders (*Mutual Relations, 11*). This uniqueness which is particularly guarded by those in authority is in itself a feature of autonomy.

Regarding autonomy, Can. 586. §1 states, “A true autonomy of life, especially of governance, is recognised for each institute. This autonomy means that each institute has its own discipline in the Church and can preserve whole and entire the patrimony described in Can. 578”. The patrimony here referenced is, “The mind of the founders and their dispositions concerning nature, purpose, spirit and character of the institute which have been approved by the competent ecclesiastical authority, together with its sound traditions, all of which comprise the patrimony of the institute itself, are to be faithfully observed by all” (c. 578). In all of this, Can. 586. §2 clearly demonstrates the role of Local Ordinaries as being responsible for “preserving and safeguarding this autonomy”.

Coming from a backdrop of education, the analogy of a school's academic organisational chart readily comes to mind in contemplating the various levels of administration in a religious institute. In ensuring students' academic success which is one of the primary reasons of schooling, the highest level of administrative authority is the Principal with a Management Team. Next are the Heads of Department, followed by the authority closest to the students, the classroom teachers. All these leadership groups function autonomously and collaboratively to achieve a common vision.

Most religious institutes have the hierarchical model of leadership with at least three levels of authority. For the purpose of this article, they are tagged, the highest, the intermediary, and the local levels. The first tier of authority is the general tier which is the highest, and also the institute-wide leadership which serves as the largest umbrella of guidance for all the members of the institute. Persons who occupy this position are usually referred to as Major Superiors (c. 620), who are designated as Institute Leader, Superior General, Master General, Rector Major etc. At this level, there is a governing council comprising of the named institute leader and their council. Can. 627 §1 lucidly states the import of a general council by implying their relevance at the highest level of authority, "Superiors are to have their own council, in accordance with the constitutions, and they must make use of it in the exercise of their office".

The next tier of government in religious institutes is the intermediary level. At this level, leadership is closer to membership who are divided into smaller clusters. Most

leaders at this level are titled Provincial superior/leader, Provincial, Vice-Provincial, Regional superior, or zonal leaders. This set of intermediary leaders work with a team or council as well. Provincials oversee “a union of several houses” which “constitutes an immediate part of the same institute, and is canonically established by lawful authority” (c. 621). *In consultation with their membership, they form/review their constitutions with due consideration for the cultural milieu in which they live and work.*

The last tier is the local level which is the most homogenous. At this level, some religious institutes have a team/council participating in the leadership task of their community depending on the dictates of their constitutions and probably, the numerical size of their community. Similar to the relationship between the class teacher and her class student is that of the local superior and her community members. They decide how they want to share life with one another. The permissions that are directly linked with day-to-day activities of the community are granted by the local leader. Ensuring faithfulness to prayer life, joyful community living, healthy welfare of the lived members, conscientious service in mission etc. is the prerogative of the local leader who is charged with the care of the members at that level. In this regard, she is empowered to discharge her duty without undue interference from either of the other two levels of leadership. Same goes for the intermediate tier of leadership.

However, a smooth-sailing, relatively autonomous leadership is not always possible among these three levels. Most of these problems stem from the inadequate adherence to the principle of subsidiarity which posits that functions

which could be performed at lower tiers of leadership should be assigned to them to perform (Pius XI *Quadragesimo Anno*, 1931). For instance, a member of a particular religious institute asked their Local superior permission to do something, but for some reason it was not granted. The member, therefore had recourse to the Provincial who overruled the local superior's decision. It caused quite a stir among the other local superiors who felt their autonomy as community leader had been despised. Same could be said between the highest and the intermediate levels.

The advantages of autonomy in leadership include the opportunity for leaders to use their discretion; wider spectrum of leadership being developed simultaneously across the institute; availability of persons to carry out the tasks that cannot be efficiently undertaken by the highest level of leadership; bringing leadership closer to the grassroots; direct and more expedient engagement with membership etc. Leadership at the local level where the vows are primarily lived out within the boundaries of clusters is as crucial to the life and sustenance of a religious institute as their zenith leadership.

No matter how palatable and empowering autonomy may be in governance, a tree does not make a forest. The allusion to the academic organisational chat of a high school becomes very relevant. Just as the Principal is the face of the school to the outside world, so also is the Superior General. It is important to remember that “the internal governance and discipline of institutes of pontifical rights are subject directly and exclusively to the authority of the Apostolic See...” (c. 593); while that of institutes of diocesan rights are “under

the special care of the diocesan Bishop....” (c. 594). So, there are still external authorities overseeing the governance of religious institutes. This makes for accountability at all levels of leadership. As people want freedom, so also there are obligations especially regarding answerability for their actions or inactions. Having recourse to other levels of leadership should serve as checks and balances, especially in curbing excesses which unfortunately are found in quite a significant number of religious institutes globally.

Autonomous Governance of Religious Institutes in Nigeria

Major Superiors are the ambassadors, so to say, of their religious institutes to the outside world, that is, non-members of their institutes. Major Superiors are persons who may be in charge of “entire institutes, a province of an institute or part equivalent to a province, or an autonomous house”. Vicars are also regarded as Major Superiors (c. 620). In Nigeria, Major Superiors belong to a gender-based group named, Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria (CMSN), and the Joint Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria (JCMSN) comprising both the female and male Major Superiors. The motive for establishing these associations may be likened to the aphorism, “Two heads are better than one.” Their establishment was to form an alliance which would make them more successful in actualizing the vision and mission of the different religious institute without compromising their uniqueness and independence as separate entities (c. 708). In these two conferences, there are no distinctions between superiors of religious institutes of Pontifical rights or Diocesan rights, of international or national membership. What is important are the positions the members hold in their institutes which must be approved

by competent authorities.

Mutuae Relationes (n. 11) is quite articulate about the distinct features and differing gifts of each of the many religious institutes. Comparable to this giftedness of the various groups in the Church which though diverse are given by the same Spirit (1 Cor. 12:4 The New American Standard Bible) are the distinct gifts the different religious institutes bring to the Church (*PC 8*). With a conscious appreciation of social advancement and ecclesial rejuvenation, *Mutuae Relationes* (n. 11) underscores the need for religious institutes to be more intentional in safe-guarding their identities and their foundational ideals lest their existence within the Church attains an equivocal status.

It is veritable that religious institutes have a fundamental right to their autonomy, and by extension, the power of self-government. However, this autonomy is exercised as part of a larger and more complex whole – the Church – as explicated in *Mutuae Relationes* (n. 13), “Institutes then have an internal organization all their own ... which has its proper field of competency and a right to *autonomy*, even though in the Church this autonomy can never become independence”. The steerers of the ships of religious institutes must remember that their authority is first of all from God, and that the existence of their institutes was validated by the Sacred Hierarchy.

UNITY IN DIVERSE: BLESSINGS AND CHALLENGES

The structures and procedures of governance in religious institutes both abroad and those domiciled in Nigeria are underpinned by distinguishing properties conceived and birthed from the quintessence of their Founders' charisms. Nonetheless, the authentication of the exercise of authority remains in the understanding that it is carried out not as an independent entity, but as a part of the Body of Christ (*Mutuae Relationes* n. 13). Under Ecclesiastical care, members of religious institutes have continued to bring forth myriads of blessings to the Church and society through educational facilities, health amenities, pastoral ministries, and social services.

The subject of “unity in diversity” echoes, albeit in a non-threatening way, the necessity for reflection on the twin-theme of “complement and competition” especially from the perspective of Paul's message to the Romans in chapter 12 verse 5 – 6a where he says, “So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly...”. Paul's message establishes an unequivocal acknowledgement of disparity in the gifts bestowed to different people according to God's favour. The point that must not be overlooked here, is the fact of assortments in the gifts bestowed on different persons. Many religious institutes are blessed with members who are gifted and talented in variety of ways that have influenced their development. Notable among the gifts are skills in retreat/spiritual direction, teaching, research,

expend energy in spreading the tents of their institutes, anywhere and everywhere, taking on all manner of trades and sometimes ending up being masters of none. Yes! There is need for diversification to meet the needs, especially financial needs of religious institutes and to satisfy the need for relevance. It may probably be helpful if more emphasis is placed on development of expertise in specific areas such that institutes complement one another as much as possible, rather than mount rostrums of rivalry against themselves.

It is understandable that needs assessment of an environment is crucial to the establishment of any mission, probably more important is the cognition that if the need is due to the ineffectiveness of a religious institute already serving the same need, the authority of the incoming institute should first engage in conversation with the existing religious institute. Hopefully, if both parties are open to participating in relevant discussions, such mature engagement may help proffer solutions which would facilitate mutual growth, and probably assist the incoming group to take on another need of the environment. Running parallel structures within close proximities often portends disunity rather than foster unity.

Looking inwards, it may be pertinent to take a cursory look at the theme of diversity and unity among members of the same religious institute. Superiors are accountable for the lives of their members. In carrying out their assignments among their members, there are certain core values which must guide their decisions and practices. Amongst others,

digital technology, finance, medical practice – orthodox and traditional, legal practice – canon and civil, music, agriculture etc. All these gifts help to develop the particular religious institutes, and ultimately, the Church and society at large.

To the Corinthians, and even more appropriately to those who pilot the ships of religious institutes, Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians reiterates the veracity of belonging to the body of Christ as integral components. “Now you are the body of Christ, and each of you is a member of it” (1 Corinthians 12:27). Here, Paul's message sends out a signal of subtle warning as a parent would in their bid to ensure each member of the family understood the essence of remaining as a united unit. Although examples of rivalry abound both in Scripture narratives such as between Abel and Cain (Genesis 4: 3-8), Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25: 21-34), Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 37: 2-34), even among the Apostles of Christ in their dispute about who was the greatest (Luke 22: 24-27), and in our contemporary world within and outside the walls of religious institutes, it is inimical to unity and development for members of a family to contest against one another in a bid to outshine one another.

Many a time and motivated by a competitive spirit, Superiors impulsively, irrespective of, the population, financial reality, intellectual capacity, suitability for mission, quality of formation of their members, push their members into missions for which they are not adequately prepared – “because others are doing it”. Rather than be good in whatever a religious institute is prepared for, some leaders

Perfectae Caritatis (n. 14) highlights some of these guiding principles as, exuding a “servant-leader” disposition in the similitude of God towards God's children who for them are the members of their institute; appreciating individual's worth as human beings; being an inspiration such that members are motivated rather than coerced to obey; paying appropriate attention to and promoting unity among members. These guiding ethics are aimed at fostering the common good of their institute and the growth of the Church as long as they are careful not to have their authority undermined.

Unfortunately, from time-to-time, Superiors abuse the power invested in them and in the process, disrupt, sometimes irrevocably, the peace they are expected to stimulate and sustain among their members. There have been accounts of Superiors at all the levels of governance – general, intermediate and local, who frustrated their members whom they perceived as being more academically superior to them, more beautiful or handsome, more amiable, more gifted, more productive, more accepted by the members, more innovative than them or their leadership teams or council. Vices such as nepotism, tribalism, favouritism etc. are not uncommon in the exercise of authority. Also, it is not uncommon for a higher tier of authority to clamp down on their “subordinates” just to prove they have “superior power”. These foibles gang up to grossly denigrate fraternal unity for which Christ prays in John's Gospel chapter 17 verse 21.

COLLABORATION AMONG LEADERS OF RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES

Synonyms of the word, “collaboration” include teamwork, partnership, association, alliance, relationship, co-operation, group effort etc. In reference to the discussion in this article, the term, “collaboration” exudes emotions that more likely than otherwise calm the soul. Collins Online Dictionary defines “collaboration” as “the act of working [together](#) to produce a piece of work...”. This connotes a joint effort directed at achieving something.

Mutuae Relationes (n. 21) affirms the desire of the Holy See to have Leaders or religious institutes collaborate with one another by establishing “Conferences of Major Superiors and of Superiors General, both on the local and on the universal level...” having as their fundamental vision, “the promotion of religious life as it is inserted into the contexture of ecclesial mission”. To facilitate this vision, the conferences are expected to have as their mission, “offering common services, suggesting fraternal initiatives and proposals for collaboration” while, “respecting ... the distinctive nature of each institute”. It would not be out of place to assert that the aims and activities of Conferences of Major Superiors and Conferences of Superior Generals have as a Theological foundation, Paul’s message to the Ephesians, “From Him the whole body is fitted and held together by every supporting ligament; and as each individual part does its work, the body grows and builds itself up in love” (Ephesians 4: 16).

In Nigeria, there have been many opportunities for the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria (CMSN), and the

Joint Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria (JCMSN) comprising both the female and male Major superiors to work in partnership. More than ever before, there is need for collaboration among leaders of religious institutes particularly in Nigeria where the Church is facing a barrage of attacks on its members. Religious Institutes are not spared in this unprecedented experience of insecurity where every sphere of life is adversely impacted.

The collaborative activities of some religious institutes have brought countless blessings and incredible growth to female religious in Africa. One of these is the African Sisters Education Collaborative (ASEC) initiative which was established in 1999 by four Catholic universities in the United States of America and their religious institutes: The Sisters of Saint Joseph of Philadelphia (Chestnut Hill College), the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary of Scranton (Marywood University), the Sisters of Saint Francis of Philadelphia (Neumann University), the Society of the Holy Child Jesus (Rosemont College). The mission of ASEC is to provide opportunities for women religious to further develop their skills in their diverse ministries. So far, over five thousand religious have been served and the program is still on. The impact of this wonderful initiative has had far-reaching effects in sub-Saharan Africa.

The Joint Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria (JCMSN) has provided opportunity for Major Superiors to rub minds and share useful ideas for the growth of religious life, and by extension the Church and society. From personal experience, matters that are at the heart of religious life in Nigeria are surfaced and discussed. Worthy of mention at such meetings,

are opportunities of celebrating the Eucharist together and receiving inspirational messages that are peculiar to religious from the pulpit. Indeed, collaboration among leaders within religious institutes is very essential to the sustainability and progress of their institutes. Their roles are complementary rather than conflicting. Understanding this and mutually respecting boundaries facilitate peace among members since peace and progress are like Siamese twins.

CLOGS IN THE WHEEL OF COLLABORATION IN MISSION

Despite the many joys of collaboration, leaders of religious institutes need to pay attention to glitches which constitute obstacles to effective partnership among institute leaders. Challenges to collaboration in mission, though not exclusive to the Nigeria environment, include disparity in leadership structures, different styles of leadership, superiority and inferiority complexes, and inadequate leadership formation, to mention but a few.

DISPARITY IN LEADERSHIP STRUCTURES

Religious institutes have different levels of leaders who are resident in Nigeria. Some have their zenith headquarters in Nigeria, others do not. Some have their intermediate leadership resident in the country others have only local communities. Setting the tone and sustaining the collaboration in Nigerian missions may be cumbersome if the groups in question do not have on ground the same level of relevant leadership.

LEADERSHIP STYLES

Some religious institutes operate under autocratic leadership while others function under democratic

leadership where consensus is the preferred method of arriving at decisions. For those who are convinced that procedures are as important as conclusions, team work may be quite challenging.

SUPERIORITY AND INFERIORITY COMPLEXES

Though alluding to complexes might be touching sensitive issues, it is, however crucial to list it as one of the obstacles to successful collaboration between religious institutes. Those who have superiority complex feel they are better, cleverer, or more important than others, while those who suffer from inferiority complex believe they are not as good, as intelligent, or as progressive as others. Unfortunately, these dispositions are palpable among Superiors, even Major Superiors. It is incredibly noticeable in designations ascribed to some Superiors, and in the way those who do not sport certain types of habit are looked down upon.

INADEQUATE LEADERSHIP FORMATION

Many Superiors ascend the positions of leadership without adequate administrative skills and capacity to foster the spirit of their institutes among their members. Buckeye and Naughton (2008) in their article on need for leadership formation asserted that Founders of religious institutes could not have anticipated the complexity of contemporary mission terrains, and, therefore, suggested on-going formation for leaders of institutes so they may keep faithful to the ideals of their Founders while they embrace necessary modifications that would facilitate their relevance in their mission.

CONCLUSION

Matters bothering on autonomy, unity in diversity and collaboration will always be relevant in human conversations because of its importance in relationships among social beings. It is even more appropriate when it pertains to the Church and how her various parts are being administered. Attention should be paid to how structures, procedures and understanding of guiding principles positively or adversely influence interactions between those entrusted with the governance of religious institutes. Religious institutes bear witness to the love of Christ to Whose invitation the religious responded. No matter how autonomous their different charisms may make them appear to be, the same call is to unity for which Christ prayed (John 17:21). The Psalmist in Psalm 133 verse two and three, beautifully and graphically presents the excellence of brethren dwelling together in harmony by comparing this exceptional fraternal disposition to:

“The precious oil upon the head,
Coming down upon the beard,
Even Aaron's beard,
Coming down upon the edge of his robes.
Like the dew of Hermon
Coming down upon the mountains of Zion;
For there the LORD commanded the blessing—life
forever”.

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CANONICAL PRINCIPLES ON ELECTION AND APPOINTMENT TO OFFICES IN THE CHURCH

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ABSTRACT

The Second Vatican Council, in *Perfectae Caritatis* 14, refers to superiors as those that hold the place of God, that is, as God's representatives. The office of a religious superior is an ecclesiastical office, and is a great responsibility that requires that a person with requisite qualities be elected and designated to it. There are canonical prescriptions concerning the criteria and conditions for one to be elected or appointed as a religious superior. It is the demand of law, for example, that an individual to be promoted to the office of superior be suitable, that is, should possess the qualities laid down in the universal law and constitutions. Unfortunately, it appears that some religious institutes in Nigeria conduct

elections and make appointments of candidates to the office of a religious superior without due regard to the provisions of the extant laws in the Church. In some cases, elections or appointments of religious superiors are marred by negative actions such as favouritism, nepotism, campaigns, defamation, bribery, direct and indirect procuring of vote, which strictly speaking render the election or appointment invalid, because they tend to interfere with the action of the Holy Spirit. That is why the intent of this article is to examine the canonical principles on the provision of ecclesiastical offices in the Church, with particular focus on the criteria and conditions for the validity of election and appointment of a candidate to the office of a religious superior.

INTRODUCTION



Ecclesiastical office as a position that is established either by divine or ecclesiastical law for spiritual purpose, with attached duties and rights,¹³ is of great importance in the Church. Unfortunately, some members of the Church looking only at the benefits attached to certain positions in the Church, and not having adequate knowledge of the true meaning of ecclesiastical office, and the prohibited actions on provision of office, in some cases resort to acts that are legally forbidden to ascend to an ecclesiastical office. Hence, this article aims at the exposition of the canonical principles on the provision of ecclesiastical office in general and specific norms on the provision of office of superior as laid down in the 1983 canonical legislation. In a nutshell, one is designated to an ecclesiastical office through canonical provision. Otherwise, the occupation of the office is illegal. Ecclesiastical office needs a physical person to discharge the obligations of the office.

CANONICAL PROVISION

Canon 146 on the provision of ecclesiastical office rules that

¹³Cf. Can. 145, §§ 1 & 2.

an ecclesiastical office cannot be obtained validly without canonical provision. This canon is an invalidating law hence, any action contrary to its provision is invalid according to the prescription of canon 10, and its provision is applicable to all ecclesiastical offices without exception. The penalty for unlawful possession of ecclesiastical office is found in the 1917 Code in canons 177, §§ 1-2; 332; 3334, 1^o; 2994.

Pius XII in addition to the penalty prescribed in the Code, established censure of excommunication for those who try to occupy or promise to occupy an office, benefice or ecclesiastical dignity without legitimate canonical provision, and those who directly or indirectly participate in such crimes.¹⁴

The 1983 Code does not offer an explicit definition of canonical provision. In the 1917 Code, on the other hand, canonical provision is defined as granting of the ecclesiastical office by competent ecclesiastical authority according to law (CIC/17, can. 147).

The Code underlines the necessity of canonical provision under penalty of nullity in the Church. No one can legally exercise an office without being designated to it. An illegal occupation of office without title is an intrusion that is punishable according to canon 1381. And it states as follows: "Anyone who usurps an ecclesiastical office is to be punished

¹⁴Cf. F. D'OSTILIO, "L'incompatibilità degli uffici nell'ordinamento giuridico canonico," in *Apollinaris* (1977), 346-377.

with a just penalty.” And “the unlawful retention of an ecclesiastical office after being deprived of it, or ceasing from it, is equivalent to usurpation.”¹⁵

The act of provision of office is a technical instrument for providing a titular for an office, connecting objective element (office) as organizational instrument with the subjective element (the physical person that will carry out the function.¹⁶ Canonical provision is made up of three acts: 1) designation of the person; 2) conferral of office with rights and obligations inherent to the office; 3) installation or investiture (taking possession of office).

The person for the ecclesiastical office or position must be clearly designated by the competent ecclesiastical authority. And there has to be evidence that the person, at least in principle, accepted the responsibilities, or accepted to perform the duties of the office. And with that, the rights and obligations inherent to the office are conferred, intrinsically. Taking possession of office is the third phase of provision. It is a formal and extrinsic element through which publicity is given to canonical provision, authority install the titular in office to which is followed producing effects of the act.¹⁷ Investiture or taking possession of office is required only for some ecclesiastical offices such as: diocesan Bishop, Bishop Coadjutor and auxiliary, parish priest, and parochial administrator.¹⁸ The investiture is done according to the formality of the rite and it is from this act that the rights and

¹⁵ Can. 1381, §§ 1 and 2.

¹⁶ Cf. J. MINAMBRES, “Concorso di diritti nelle provviste canoniche,” in *Ius Ecclesiae* 7 (1995), 116.

¹⁷ See E. LABANDEIRA, *Trattato di diritto amministrativo canonico*, Milano 1994, 102.

¹⁸ Cf. Cann. 382, §2; 404, §2; 527; 542, n.3.

obligations of the titular start (cann. 382, § 1; 527, § 1). This formality can be left out through dispensation.¹⁹

In religious institute there is no prescribed formality for a superior to take possession of the office. Hence, following the acceptance of election by the general chapter, for instance, the religious concerned immediately takes possession of the office with its rights and duties as the Supreme Moderator or Superior General of the institute. Other superiors instead acquire the office with its rights and duties following appointment by competent authority, or confirmation of election by a competent major superior. However, institute can organize an official ceremony with Eucharistic celebration before superiors begin to exercise the rights and obligations attached to their office according to their particular tradition and custom approved by the Church; but such an act is not obligatory, since it is not prescribed by the universal law for religious superiors.

INVALID PROVISION

The first requirement for making valid provision for an ecclesiastical office is vacancy of office. A vacant office is one that has no legal titular occupying it; that is, an office that has not been canonically conferred on a person according to can.147. In other words, a vacant office is an office that has no titular legitimately constituted in that office. Making provision for an office that is not vacant in law renders the act invalid, and the act cannot be valid when the office later

¹⁹Cf. L. CHIAPPETTA, "La provvista dell'ufficio ecclesiastico," in *Il Codice di Diritto Canonico*, Edizione Dehoniane, Napoli, 233.

becomes vacant. To this effect canon 153 states: “The provision of an office which in law is not vacant is by that very fact invalid, nor does it become valid by subsequent vacancy”. Invalid act cannot be co-validated with the passing of time nor with the cessation of the cause for nullity. The nullity is established by the legislator to avoid abuse.²⁰

Vacancy of office can be either in law or in fact. An office is vacant in fact if the legitimate titular for the office does not occupy it, whereas vacancy in law occurs when there is no one on whom the office is conferred through canonical provision. A vacant see is different from impeded see. In the case of episcopal see, the legislator attributes different reasons for impeded and vacant see. The episcopal see is said to be impeded if the diocesan Bishop is completely prevented from exercising the pastoral office in the diocese by reason of imprisonment, banishment, exile or incapacity, so that he is unable to communicate, even by letter with the people of the diocese (can. 412). In the light of canon 416, the vacancy of episcopal see is caused by death of the diocesan Bishop, resignation accepted by the Roman Pontiff, transfer, deprivation notified to the Bishop (can. 416). The see is impeded when even though it has its legitimate titular, the person cannot exercise the pastoral ministry. On the contrary, in the case of vacant see, the office or see lacks a legitimate titular.²¹

²⁰Cf. V. DE PAOLIS, “Il libro primo del codice: norme generali,” in AA.VV., *Il Diritto nel Mistero della Chiesa*, Roma 1995, 458.

²¹Cf. G. MARCHETTI, “La vacatio di un ufficio ecclesiastico: annotazioni circa un istituto giuridico canonistico,” in *Quaderni di Diritto Ecclesiale* 17 (2004), 124).

Someone may illegitimately hold an office that is vacant in law. In that case, the legislator requires the authority concerned to declare the unlawfulness of such possession and to mention it in the conferral letter (can. 154). The declaration of illegitimate possession demanded by the legislator serves to protect the stability of the office and to re-establish legality obliging the illegitimate possessor of the office to yield to law. The absence of this declaration however, does not render the act of conferral invalid, since the office is vacant by law anyway.

The legislator in paragraph 3 of canon 149 declares the absolute invalidity of the provision of ecclesiastical office based on simony: "*Provisio officii simoniace facta ipso iure irrita est.*" The provision of an office made as a result of simony, is invalid by virtue of law itself. The word simony originates from the biblical episode concerning Simon the Magician who wanted to buy the power of the apostles in order to be able to convey the Spirit through the imposition of hands (Acts 8: 18-24).

Simonic provision is a provision of office made for a bribe or for other personal interest. In that case, the office is conferred on the titular not because the individual possesses the personal qualities required by law but because the person making the provision has received some favour (or hopes to receive it) from the person being designated to office. This act is contrary to the mind of the legislator who demands the conferring of office based on the suitability of the candidate (can. 148, § 1). Simony renders provision and resignation from ecclesiastical office invalid.

THE PROVISION OF OFFICE OF A RELIGIOUS SUPERIOR

A religious superior, in the strict sense of the term, refers to a physical person legitimately constituted in office either by appointment or election (can. 625, § 1 & 3) who governs a religious community, province or the entire institute, whose authority is granted by the universal law and the constitutions (cann. 608; 622; 596, § 1). From a theological and canonical perspective, a religious superior is regarded as one who acts in place of God, when s/he gives command in accordance with the institute's constitutions (cf. can. 601). The Second Vatican Council refers to superiors as those that hold the place of God, that is, as God's representatives.²²

The office of a religious superior is an ecclesiastical office and a great responsibility that requires that person endowed with requisite qualities be elected and designated to such office. There are canonical prescriptions on the criteria and conditions for one to be elected or appointed as a religious superior. It is the demand of law that one to be promoted to the office of superior be suitable, that is, should possess the qualities laid down in the universal law and constitutions. Unfortunately, in some cases, elections and appointments of candidates to the office of a religious superior are done without adequate attention neither to the suitability of the candidate nor to canonical stipulations on provision of office. In the subsequent pages we shall expose the principles on the provision of the office of a religious superior, the positive actions required and the negative actions to be avoided.

²²Cf. Vatican II, Decree on Up to Date Renewal of Religious Life, *Perfectae Caritatis* 14

POSITIVE ACTIONS REQUIRED**THE WILL OF GOD AND THE GOOD OF THE INSTITUTE**

The supreme principle is that all should seek the greater good of the Church and of the whole institute, not merely of some part of it or some group in it.²³ Elections and appointments to offices in religious institutes are to be characterized by members seeking the will of God and the good of the institute. This is fundamental. The common good of any religious institute is everything, spiritual and material, that enables the members of the institute to seek the glory of God and the salvation of souls. It can also be said to be what the institute holds in common and what it shares specifically as an institute in order to reveal Christ to the world.²⁴

The early Christian Community understood that the source of all authority was and is God. Hence, they always turned to him to enlighten them and show them the person he wanted. And they were always well disposed to accept God's choice. We see an evidence of this in the election of Matthias (Acts 1: 15-26). Peter stood up in the midst of the community of about one hundred and twenty. With the words of Scripture in his mind to guide him, he spoke about the necessity of choosing someone to replace Judas: "In the book of Psalms it is written: 'Let his house become deserted and may no one live in it.' ... It is also written: 'May another take his office.' Therefore we must choose someone from among those who were with us during all the time that the Lord Jesus moved

²³C. BUSH, "A Total Participation Chapter," in *RfR* 38 (1979), 300.

²⁴Cf. W. F. HOGAN, "Chapters and Structures," in *RfR* (1989), 34

about with us, beginning with John's baptism until the day when Jesus was taken away from us. One of these has to become, with us, a witness to his resurrection" (Acts 1: 20-22). After Peter's speech, two people were proposed: Joseph called Barsabbas, also known as Justus, and Matthias. Then they prayed thus: "You know, Lord, what is in the hearts of all, show us, therefore, which of the two you have chosen to replace Judas in this apostolic ministry, which he deserted to go to the place he deserved" (Acts 1: 24-25). This prayer was followed by drawing lots between the two and the choice fell on Matthias, who was added to the eleven apostles. In his comment on the action of Peter and the first Christian community, St John Chrysostom said the following:

Did Peter himself then not have the right to choose? Certainly, he had the right, but he refrained from exercising it in case he might seem to be guilty of favouritism. All prayed together: "You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all men, show us, 'You, not we.' It was right for them to say that he knew the hearts of men, for the choice was to be made by him, not by others. So they spoke confidently, in the assurance that one would be chosen. They did not say, 'Choose', but 'show', 'show which you have chosen, since they knew that all things had been preordained by God. 'And they cast lots for them'. They did not yet judge themselves worthy to make the election themselves, and so they asked for a sign to instruct them."²⁵

This interior disposition, as one can see in the action of the early Christian community, is what is required of those who

²⁵ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, "Homilies" on the Feast of St Matthias, Apostle in *the Divine Office* Vol. III, Original English Version, the Talbot Press, Dublin 1991.

appoint or elect individuals for offices in the Church and in religious life, when the legislator prescribed that they should have nothing but God and the good of the institute before their eyes; and that they should appoint or elect those whom, in the Lord, they know to be worthy and fitting or suitable.

Superiors and electors are reminded of their duty, before nominating or giving their vote, to act with a sense of responsibility, which entails discernment before God of what the good of the institute and of its members requires, and to seek above all the plan or the will of God. It is important that they pray to the Holy Spirit. The light of the Holy Spirit will lead them to nominating and electing people who will be considered as *worthy* and *capable for* the office. The two adjectives complement one another: while the first refers to conduct, the virtue required, the second underlines the attitude or capacity to carry out the function adequately. Capacity is evaluated by taking into consideration the concrete situation of the community or the task to be performed.²⁶

WORTHY AND SUITABLE PERSON

Worthiness and suitability are the prerequisites for assuming any office in the Church (can. 149, § 1). That is to say, designating a person for an office is preceded by judgment on the suitability of the person for the office concerned. In addition to the judgment of suitability, the needs of the juridical person (i.e., of the diocese or of the

²⁶Cf. E. GAMBARI, *I religiosi nel codice*: Commento ai singoli canoni, Ancora, Milano 1986, 169-170.

religious institute) in that particular circumstance must also be considered. Every office has its own demands and as such requires possession of specific qualities and capacity from the office holder. This explains why the legislator stipulates *ad validitatem* qualities required of a person to occupy ecclesiastical office in general, the office of bishop, and that of the parish priests (cann.149, §1; 378 § 1; 521, §§ 1-3).

In a religious institute or in the Church as a whole, a superior is not a mere administrator, but a spiritual leader,²⁷ God's representative. By virtue of his or her office, a superior carries out a pastoral ministry of teaching, sanctifying and governing (MR 13). These functions require from the superior certain qualities: spiritual, human and moral in order to be able to act effectively.

Andrés affirms that based on the general twofold principle of suitability and communion with the Church, every superior must possess at least these qualities:

1) be in communion with the Church, not only that the person must not be under excommunication, but also must be a Catholic by law and fact, be in hierarchical communion with legitimate superiors, should admit integrally the magisterium and participate in the means that favour communion; 2) be a woman (or man) of God, in order to be God's representative in governance; 3) have knowledge of the obligations and rights of the office; 4) be docile to the will of God, have respect for others, be willing and ready to serve

²⁷Cf. SCRIS, Private Letter, April, 1970 in *R/R*,34 (1975), 160

others, habitually practicing dialogue; 5) be very much interested in the good of the Church and of the institute (cann. 618; 626); 6) have knowledge of the Word of God, in order to nourish the community with it; 7) be exemplary in practising virtue, in observing the laws and traditions of the institute of consecrated life, in caring for the sick, in consoling those who are sad and/or restless, and in exercising patience towards all (can. 619); 8) have no inclination of abuse of others, but rather a great disposition in the service of the Lord, who came to serve, and not to be served (can. 626); and 9) love residing in the religious house, and must be capable of listening to the confession of the subjects if they asked for it spontaneously (can. 630, § 4). All of these qualities are so important that one should look out for them in candidates that are being considered for the office of superior. Equally important is the discernment in prayer.

DISCERNMENT IN PRAYER

On the importance of discernment in prayer before election or appointment Harmer writes: "Prayer is indispensable in the process of the assignment of offices in the Church likewise in religious life. Making the right choice requires true and authentic discernment in prayer. It is through the help of the Spirit of God in prayer that prejudices, self-interest, sectionalism, and nationalism, which impede the choice of the right person, are done away with. Prayer predisposes the individual interiorly for the action of the Spirit who, taking hold of the person divests him/her of all obstacles to objective selection. The superiors and subjects responsible for designating persons for the office of superior

are called to a deep and serious reliance on the movement of the Spirit, while at the same time following the prescribed juridical procedure. The attitude required is one of a willingness to allow the Spirit to work, to put aside personal preferences and hopes and fears, to place the good of the whole (institute) at the centre.”²⁸

The author in effect highlights some obstacles to objective election or appointment as follows: prejudice, self-interest, sectionalism, personal preferences, hopes, fears and nationalism. The importance of prayer lies in the fact that it helps to remove these obstacles by the action of the Holy Spirit, thereby disposing the persons involved in the election or appointment to selflessly pick a candidate who has the required qualities and capacity to function as a religious superior.

At times, there can be real disagreements as regards who is best or better for the job to be done. But authentic discernment requires the healing of division among the electors, so that they can concentrate on what really matters and focus on the essential parts of election discernment process which include: “clear and cogent criteria; periods for personal and communal prayer and reflection; personal discernment; shared experience of those presently in office; shared insights about criteria for those nominated; group discussions of and with nominees; voting only after the discernment has been completed.”²⁹

²⁸C. M. HARMER, “Election: A Call to Service,” in *R/R* 53 (1994), 698.

²⁹C. M. HARMER, “Election: A Call to Service,” 698-699.

While the law stipulates that religious institutes should observe a period of prayer before they elect or nominate candidates to the office of superior, and even while prayer is going on, some electors still go ahead to plan and execute the election or appointment of superior according to their own selfish interest and what they stand to gain from it, with little or no regard for the suitability of the person for the office. That is quite unfortunate because it is detrimental to their religious institutes. That in itself would be bad enough. Still, there are other serious negative actions to be avoided as well.

NEGATIVE ACTIONS TO BE AVOIDED

FAVOURITISM

Canon 626 urges superiors and electors to avoid any form of abuse, partiality or favouritism. Leaving oneself to be guided by motives of sympathy or antipathy, by personal interest or favours is an abuse. It is a clear lack of sense of responsibility. Gambari emphasizes that an office must not be conferred as a reward for work done or service given. However, he maintains that the experience acquired in doing certain functions can and must be taken into consideration.³⁰

The general canonical principle on the provision of ecclesiastical office is that one should be constituted in office based on subjective qualification, and not be out of favour (can. 149, §§ 1-3). The Code has great aversion to favouritism: for instance, the legislator requires the

³⁰Cf. E. GAMBARI, *I religiosi nel Codice: Commento ai singoli canoni*, Editrice Ancora, Milano 1986, 169.

avoidance of preferential treatment at funerals (can. 1181). In can. 524, the diocesan Bishop is required to confer a vacant parish to the one whom, after consideration of all the circumstances, he judges suitable for the parochial care of that parish, without any preference of persons. In can. 830, §2, the censor is required to put aside all preference of persons and look only for evidence of the teaching of the Church concerning faith and morals, as declared by the magisterium.

The violation of the norm that calls for the avoidance of favouritism “would bring prejudicial consequences for fraternal familiar life.” Partiality in making provision of office entails ignoring a capable and suitable candidate required by law, to elect or appoint one not capable or suitable focusing exclusively on the conditions of the person arising from the person's influence, nobility, affection, sympathy, friendship, etc.³¹

ABUSE

Abuse implies committing any action prohibited by law on the occasion of appointment or election, such as non-observance of common or proper law, defamation of the candidates with the pretence of consultation, violation of a confidence to help, or to damage the candidates, by campaigning in favour of or against some candidates, or

³¹D. J. ANDRÉS, “Commentary on can. 626,” in *Exegetical Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*, A. MARZOA, et al. eds. Vol.II/2 Wilson & Lafleur Montreal, Canada 2004, 1648.

could be some ideas or expressions that are associated with specific persons.³²

To designate an unsuitable person to the office of superior is an abuse of power, be it on the part of the superior responsible for the appointment or the collegial body. In his comment on the call of the legislator to avoid any form of abuse in conferring office, Andrés said that the avoidance of abuse is mostly required of the superiors who in the exercise of power, “could be closest to this possibility: non-observance of the law, favouritism, lobbying for votes, intimidation, exploitation of office, campaigning, manipulation, and attacks against qualified candidates.”³³

DIRECT AND INDIRECT PROCURING OF VOTES

Campaigning and/or procuring of votes for oneself or for another person, directly or indirectly, is prohibited by law (can. 626). The prohibition means not only efforts to procure votes for oneself or for another, but also attempts to prevent another person from being elected. Preliminary consultation as well as an open discussion of the facts, before election, is very much allowed, for the open discussion makes it possible to verify information received about the candidates, and an exchange of opinions concerning the merits or demerits of the prospective candidates minimizes the chances of casting one's votes without being adequately informed. It is different

³²Cf. A. CALABRESE, *Istituti di vita consacrata e Società di vita apostolica*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 1997, 126.

³³D. J. ANDRÉS, “Commentary on can. 626,” in *Exegetical Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*, cit., 1648.

from lobbying for votes directly or indirectly.

In a large religious congregation, capitulars in the chapter may not have adequate knowledge of the members of the institute in order to choose the right person. The electors in this situation have the obligation and right to seek for information from others as regards the person they are considering for an office. However, the point at issue here is how to meet this need of getting adequate information before voting without that provoking campaigning. Hill tells us when seeking information turns into campaigning, and when it does not. He affirms that if one simply and sincerely offers one's view about another person's qualities without pressurising the other to vote for the third person, it is not campaigning; but if one persistently tries to convince the electors or an elector of a particular person's qualities that means lobbying for vote indirectly for the person in question.³⁴

The process of election in politics, in the business of the world is quite different from election in the ecclesial domain. While in the civil society, in electoral campaign, the candidates try to convince the electors that one or the other is better, or is the best candidate, enumerating what and what will be done when elected, such campaigning is prohibited in the process of election in the Church. The *raison d'être* of this prohibition is the fact that the Church is a community of believers (of Christ's faithful) who have a supernatural goal, in which authority is not a career or

³⁴Cf. R. A. Hill, "General Chapter," in RFR (1986), 783-784).

expression of power, but rather a service in view of the attainment of the goal of ecclesial community, which is primarily the salvation of souls. No one has the right to demand to be chosen to do this service. It is God who appoints one to carry out this service through the action of the electors, or of the one who appoints.³⁵

Can. 626 unequivocally reprobates a possibly ambitious mentality that dares to aspire to command. Canonical tradition has always considered this attitude a grave matter. The 1917 Code established severe penalties for offenders. The underlying reasons for the prohibition are the following: 1) it negatively affects the essential freedom to vote, and it interferes with the election process itself; 2) it manifests a sign of ambition and lack of humility, whereas every religious professes a vow of obedience, and never of command; 3) it can injure the law and natural equity as well as the right of every community to elect the most worthy of the persons.³⁶ Now, it is time to talk about defamation and calumny that can result at times from talking about the reputation of a candidate.

DEFAMATION/CALUMNY

The terms “defamation” and “calumny” are almost the same. Defamation signifies insult, offence, slander, libel and smear, while calumny denotes slander, defamation, libel, lie,

³⁵Choosing the ministers of the Church is interpreted as accepting divine will and emanation of his Holy Spirit. Cf. R. KOTTJE, “L’ Elezione dei capi ecclesiastici: Storia ed esperienze,” in *Concilium* 3 (1971), 137.

³⁶D. J. ANDRÉS, “Commentary on can. 626,” in *Exegetical Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*, cit., 1640.

misrepresentation, slur and smear.

“The right to a good reputation is violated through an act of defamation (*diffamatio*). In general terms, defamation of character consists in the injury (*iuria*) to a person's good name caused by another. More specifically, defamation of character can be defined as “the communication to several people, whether in a group or separately, of some determined fact which exposes a person to public contempt or dislike, or injures the person's honour or reputation. For any act to stand as defamatory, the manifestation of the defamatory information must be made to more than one person. This can take place when information is placed before several people gathered in a group or before several separate individuals. It is the quantity of persons to whom access to the information has been given that matters, not the proximity of those persons to one another at the time the information was made available to them. A malicious intent to bring contempt upon someone is an essential prerequisite for any act to qualify as defamation of character. So, too, is the condition that a defamatory act be directed against specific individuals or a determined group.”³⁷

“To designate the offence against reputation the Rota and many canonists employ the term defamation. At times, the Rota and not a few canonical authors further divide

³⁷R. E. JENKINS, “Defamation of Character in Canonical Doctrine and Jurisprudence,” in *Studia canonica* 36 (2002), 426 - 427.

defamation according to whether truth or falsehood is alleged. In the former case detraction is the term used; in the later, calumny.”³⁸

There are four ways in which one can directly by words defame another person's reputation: 1) by placing on someone a false crime; 2) by amplifying or exaggerating a true crime; 3) by revealing a hidden fault; 4) by perversely interpreting a good work. There are equally four ways in which one can be defamed indirectly: 1) denying the good qualities or guilt of another; 2) striving to diminish or lessen the good qualities of another; 3) by maliciously being silent about someone's good qualities in the time and place in which one's silence is interpreted by others as a tacit blame; 4) by praising someone in such a cool and feigned manner that the praise rather leads to lessening of reputation.³⁹

Good reputation according to the Second Vatican Council is among the inviolable rights common to all people by virtue of the “extraordinary dignity, which belongs to the human person.”⁴⁰ Following the teaching of the Council, the 1983 Code of Canon Law includes the same right among those it recognizes as common to all the Christian faithful (can. 220). It makes provision for the legitimate protection of the right by use of the administrative or judicial forum for its

³⁸E. SURGES, *Defamation and Insult in Rotal Jurisprudence and Canonical Doctrine, Excerpta ex Dissertatione ad Lauream in Facultate Juris Canonici, Pontificiae Universitatis Gregoriana, Romae* 1963, 9.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 24.

³⁹E. SURGES, *Defamation and Insult in Rotal Jurisprudence and Canonical Doctrine*

⁴⁰“Eximiae dignitatis quae personae humanae competit.” VATICAN II, *Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes*, December 7, 1965, in AAS 58 (1966), 1046. See also, JOHN XXIII, *encyclical letter Pacem in Terris*, May 11, 1963, in AAS 55 (1963), 260: “Homo praeterea iure postulat, ut in debito habeatur honore; ut bona existimatione afficiatur.”

vindication and defence (can. 221). In addition, it rules that the outcome of either process could result in the imposition of penalties against those who violated the right of others to a good reputation as well as the awarding of damages to those whose good name had been injured.⁴¹

While the law recognizes the inviolability of a person's good reputation, and calls for an utmost respect of it, it establishes nonetheless that common good and rights of others (and the salvation of souls) constitute limits to the principle. In other words, the general principle on the inviolability of the good reputation of a person (can. 220) is secondary and subordinated to the common good of an ecclesial community (can. 223). Efforts should be made at all times, however, to act with Christian charity and responsibility, and never carelessly under some pretense.

CONCLUSION

Religious institutes exist to do God's will. The same search for the will of God must prevail in appointing or electing those to occupy the office of superior in a religious family, so that the right persons, according to the mind of God, can be elected under the influence of the Holy Spirit for the good of the institute and of the whole Church at large.

⁴¹Cf. Can. 1390, §§ 2-3, and can. 1729. Can. 2355 of the CIC/17 Code provided explicitly for satisfaction, damages, penalties, and penances to be levied against those who insult or otherwise harm another person's good reputation. The 1983 Code simplifies the expression of the former law by including all possible sanctions under the heading of a just penalty. Although the two Codes differ in their formulation, they are essentially (and practically) identical with regard to content. R. E. JENKINS, "Defamation of the Character in Canonical Doctrine and Jurisprudence," in *Studia canonica* 36 (2002), 419 - 420.

In this essay, we have tried to highlight the dispositions of canonical legislation on the provision of an ecclesiastical office and some principles concerning election and appointment of superiors in religious institutes.

The importance of canonical provision lies in the fact that it is only through it that one occupies an office, legally and validly as an ecclesiastical office (can. 146). The basic requirement for designating a person to office in the Church and in religious life is the possession of certain qualities for effective exercise of the functions attached to the office. Some worldly ways of doing things in order to be elected or appointed as leaders are forbidden in the Church. Any attempt to make a provision contrary to that of the Church (one that is based, for example, on favouritism or some other personal interest) is illegal and unethical. And any situation in which the person designated lacks the personal qualities demanded by law for validity, the act itself is invalid.



THE MISSION OF THE SECRETARY AND THE ARCHIVIST OF THE INSTITUTE AS A SERVICE TO THE TRUTH

*Rev. Sr. (Dr) M. Nkechinyelu Ezeanyino, DDL.*⁴²

ABSTRACT

The Secretary as the custodian of the documents of the Institute, and as the public relations officer surely serves the Truth. His/her mission which is an indispensable assignment on behalf of the corporate body, the Institute, is part and parcel of the mission of the government of the whole Institute, which is the art of organizing and taking care of the welfare of the Institute and her members. This mission of the Institute on its part is grounded in the mission of the Church which is to go into the whole world and proclaim the Good News (Mt. 28:19-20;

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Mk. 16:15). This whole mission is service to the Truth which is Christ Himself. The Good News on the part of the Secretary is that he/she performs the mission with fidelity to reality and facts. It is a very delicate mission of which any deviation from reality and facts of it spells out trouble and confusion for the Institute. The Secretary must therefore be selfless and meticulous in carrying out that mission thereby building confidence and trust in the members as well as those who have reason to relate with the Institute. So is the mission of the Archivists. The archive must be well organized and up to date to facilitate research.

When the Secretary and the Archivist can guarantee accurate and faithful record keeping, they are serving the Truth in whom there is no 'Yes and No', but always a 'YES'. It is really Good News when people can rely on the Secretary and the Archives for efficient services.

INTRODUCTION



The mission of the Secretary is part and parcel of the global Mission of the Government of the Institute which is the art of organizing and taking care of the welfare of the Institute and her members. Government is usually made up of a group of people who has the authority to look after the affairs of the Institute. Basically the Mission of the Institute is found in the Mission of the Church which is to go into the whole world and proclaim the Good News. And the whole Mission is nothing but a Service to the Truth which is Christ Himself, Christ the Way, the Truth and Life (Jn. 14:6).

The Church as the Sacrament of Salvation, was given a mandate by Christ her Founder thus: *“Go, therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you”, (Mt. 28:19ff).*⁴³

To proceed in this write-up we have to first of all try defining the salient terms in the title which include: Mission, Secretary, Archivist and Truth. This is because definition which is similar with statement of facts conveys precise and

⁴³Vatican 11, Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, *Ad Gentes Divinitus*, 7 Dec. 1965, no. 5.

certain information on the subject matter. And this, undoubtedly is the starting point for understanding the discourse.

MISSION:

There are different shades and definitions of Mission. In the first place, it is seen as *“a specific task with which a person or a group is charged. Their mission was to help victims of the disaster”*⁴⁴ Cambridge English Dictionary defines mission as *“... a group of people who are sent to another place to do a particular job or to represent their Country, Organization, or religion”*. We are quite familiar here with sending Sisters or Priests or Brothers on mission. We can equally talk of Foreign Missions of Governments or Embassies. Again, Mission is *“an important goal or purpose that is accompanied by strong conviction; a calling or vocation”*.⁴⁵ Here one sets oneself a goal which one wants to accomplish, thereby assigning oneself a mission.

Usually when we think of mission, our minds go to apostolate whether ad intra or ad extra, as an alternative word⁴⁶ But it is very important to note that Mission is not just to be restricted to apostolate or the assignment given to one, but we must understand that the whole life of the religious is ipso facto a mission by virtue of our consecration. Witness of life is the primary mission of every religious. *“Indeed, more than in external works, the mission consists in making Christ present to the world through personal witness. This is the challenge, this is the primary task of the consecrated life! The*

⁴⁴Merriam Webster Dictionary.

⁴⁵A Definition of Mission @ Dictionary.com

⁴⁶Cf. Mary Gerard Anna Nwagwu, *Consecrated Life in the Church: Discipline and Praxis*. Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt Press, 2008, p. 107.

*more consecrated persons allow themselves to be conformed to Christ, the more Christ is made present and active in the world for the salvation of all. ...To bear witness to Christ by one's life, works and words is the particular mission of the consecrated life in the Church and in the world".*⁴⁷ Therefore, all that they are and all that they do constitute the mission of consecrated people, with all that they are taking priority over all that they do. Unfortunately though, many a consecrated persons place priority on all that they do and that attitude breeds jealousy, quarrelling, unhealthy rivalry, et cetera. Collaborative ministry suffers under these negative attitudes, whether among individuals belonging to the same Institute, or consecrated people of different Institutes.

SECRETARY:

A Secretary is *"a person, usually an official, who is in charge of the records, correspondence, minutes of meetings, and related affairs of an organization, company, association, etc."*⁴⁸ A Secretary is equally seen as *"an officer of a business corporation or society who is in charge of the letters and records and who keeps minutes of meetings"*⁴⁹ The Secretary is part of the organogram of the Institute and has the function, as the definitions above show, of keeping and preserving the records/documents pertaining to the Institute. He/she is not just a copy-typist or office messenger but the custodian of all the documents, takes records of the meetings of the Central Administration and in some cases, acts as the public relations officer of the Institute. The

⁴⁷ Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of the Holy Father John Paul 11, nos. 72 and 109.

⁴⁸ <https://www.gogle.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=Secretary>.

⁴⁹ Merriam Webster Dictionary.

Secretary could be said to be the life-wire and image maker of the Institute. All the files pertaining to the administration of the Institute as well as the personal files of the members are under the custody of the Secretary.

The mode of the appointment of Secretaries vary from Institute to Institute. While some appoint one of the Councilors as Secretary, others appoint their Secretaries outside the General Council. The efficiency of the Secretary favors the efficiency of the Central Administration. An efficient Secretary facilitates the work of the Superior General.

The Secretary however does not work alone in the Secretariat. She normally has assistants who help in some clerical works and running of errands. But she is in charge of the Secretariat.

ARCHIVIST:

An archivist is one who takes care of the archive of an organization or Institute. An archive simply means the repository for records or documents which may include literary, photographic and audiovisual documents. Because of the nature of the contents of the archive, it is supposed to be a well secured building or apartment. An archive could be likened to a library but more extensive in content than the library. Researchers visit the archive at will.

“An archivist is an individual responsible for appraising, acquiring, arranging, describing, preserving, and providing access to records of enduring value, according to the principles of provenance, original order, and collective control to protect the materials' authenticity and context”.⁵⁰

⁵⁰Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology, Society of American Archivists, 2005.

This means that an archivist is responsible for collecting and managing all records of enduring value pertaining to the Institute.

The Society of American Archivists tells us that *“archivists perform a wide variety of tasks. In a smaller archive, a few individuals may do everything. While, in larger archives, archivists may specialize in specific aspects of the work. Traditionally, an archivist works with donors or the staff of its parent institution to acquire new collections; organizes and rehouses collections (also known as processing); describes collections and writes finding aids; and assists researchers in using the collections. Some archivists specialize in the acquisition, management, description and preservation of photographic or audiovisual materials or electronic records. Other aspects of the job may include records management, digitization, public outreach, writing and teaching”*.⁵¹

This long citation becomes necessary for our better understanding of the nature and implications of an archive. It is equally important to note that an archive is a repository for records of enduring value.

TRUTH:

We say that something is true if it is in accordance with fact or reality. Truth could refer to fidelity to an original or standard. This is from the ontological point of view – *adaequatio rei et intellectus* – *adequation of things and the intellect*. According to Aristotle, *“to say of what is that it is not,*

⁵¹ibid.

or of what is not that it is, is false; while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true".⁵² Truth is also sometimes defined in modern contexts as an idea of 'truth to self', or authenticity.⁵³ When one is true to him/herself, it means that the person is forthright and his/her YES is always YES. Such people are always trusted and believed in. All these point to what is known as Correspondence Theory of Truth – when what you see is really what you see, and what you say is really what you mean.

In our context here, Christ is the Truth we know and follow. For in John 14:6, He, Himself testified saying, *"I am the Way, the Truth and Life"*. St. Paul equally tells us that *"the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was proclaimed to you by us, that is, by me and by Sylvanus and Timothy, was never Yes-and No; his nature is all Yes. For in him is found the Yes to all God's promises and therefore it is 'through him' that we answer 'Amen' to give praise to God,"* 2 Cor. 1:19. This means that Christ is Truth personified. Hence the mission should be that of ever YES. That is why the Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us that *"men and women have the specific duty to move always towards the truth, to respect it and bear responsible witness to it"*.⁵⁴ Adherence to this Truth fosters healthy social relations in our communities and places of mission. Social relationships are built and thrive on living in the Truth. *"In fact, when the coexistence of human beings within a community is founded on truth, it is ordered and fruitful, and it corresponds to their dignity as persons"*.⁵⁵ Living and working

⁵²Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1011 b 25.

⁵³Cf. Wikipedia

⁵⁴Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2467.

⁵⁵Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 1st Reprint 2005, no. 198, p. 110.

in truth is nothing but serving the Truth.

SERVICE TO TRUTH:

The mission of the Secretary and the Archivist is no doubt service to truth which will begin from their persons. Since truth, as we have seen is “fidelity to the original or standard”, it means that both the Secretary and the Archivist must first and foremost be true to themselves, that is, true to their nature or identity as consecrated persons. We said earlier that the being takes precedence over having or doing. This is because, according to the Philosopher (Aristotle), “Agire sequitur esse – action flows from being”. It is buttressed by the fact that “nemo dat quod non habet – no one can give what he has not got”. Hence our thoughts, words, and actions flow from our nature. This equally applies to lower animals at their own level. For example, a goat behaves like a goat and not like a chicken, et cetera. So our first service to Truth is authenticity of character – as a Christian and as a Consecrated person. The advice of St. Ignatius of Antioch to the Christians of Magnesia buttresses this point. He told them, “*We ought not just to have the name of Christians, but to be so in reality*”⁵⁶

This authenticity of character is usually accompanied by some outstanding virtues. In this case, the Secretary should be humble, and patient. He/she should not be one prone to irritability. This calls for clear-headedness to enable him/her do the work single-mindedly without other considerations.

⁵⁶The Three Volume Breviary, Volume 3, Second Reading, Sunday of Week 16.

Above all, the Secretary and the Archivist should have good human relationship so as to be able to relate with people as human beings and never as things. The Secretary should be worthy of trust to be able to render secretarial services with justice and fairness, since it is the service being done for the love of He Who is the Truth.

The Good News on the part of the Secretary is that he/she performs his/her function with fidelity to reality and facts. The mission of the Secretary is a very delicate one with the result that any deviation from the reality and facts of that mission spells trouble and confusion for the Institute. He/she must therefore be selfless, reserved, and meticulous in carrying out that mission, thereby building confidence and trust in the members of the Institute, as well as on those who have reason to relate with the Institute.

What applies to the Secretary is equally valid for the Archivist. In smaller or new Institutes, the Secretary doubles as the Archivist, but as the Institute grows, professional or trained Archivist takes care of the archive.

When the Secretary and the Archivist can guarantee accurate and faithful record keeping, preservation of materials pertaining to their respective offices, and quality services to the people, they are serving the Truth. It is really Good News when people can rely on the Secretary and the Archivist to retrieve whatever document they need for whatever business is to be carried out. And by so doing, they are “making disciples of all nations, ...”.

The mission of the Secretary and the Archivist is really service to Truth when they serve with truth and faithfulness

to their persons, as consecrated people, as well as their mission or apostolate. But let us make bold to say that this service to Truth applies to each and every consecrated person in whatever mission that one finds him/herself. This should be an intrinsic part of every consecrated person.

Since consecrated life is following in the footsteps of Christ – sequel Christi – every mission of the religious must be carried out in imitation of Christ, in order for it to be service to Truth. Whatever mission one has is service to Christ, the Truth, in His members. The mission should be carried out in intimate union with Christi, always with the focus on Him, so that *“the entire religious life of the members should be imbued with an apostolic spirit, and all their apostolic activity with a religious spirit”*.⁵⁷

Christ the Truth, who is the YES of God, Himself told us to make sure our 'Yes' is always 'Yes' when He said, *“Let your word be 'Yes, Yes' or 'No, No'; anything more than this comes from the evil one”*, Mt. 5:37. Although He was talking in the context of oath-taking, but it is equally valid for us here since it points to authenticity of character. So in all our missions and endeavors let us always remember that we are serving no other but the Truth.

⁵⁷Vatican Council 11, Decree on the Up-To-Date Renewal of Religious Life, *Perfecte Caritatis*, 28 Oct., 1965, no. 8.



**THE INCULTURATION OF THE EVANGELICAL COUNSELS
(POVERTY, OBEDIENCE, CHASTITY):
THE MEANING AND PRACTICE IN AN AFRICAN
CONTEXT⁵⁸**

Sr. Margaret Fagbamigbe, SSMA

ABSTRACT:

This piece of work takes the path of praxis, analyzing the investigation theologically from the anthropological starting point of view; en route sequential thinking. The aim is to propose the transformation of authentic cultural values which have been dusted, purified and integrate them into the lifestyles of the religious state.

In this expose, we shall investigate the meaning and the application of inculturation of the evangelical counsels within the framework of African traditional scenery and the Roman Catholic context. Here, we shall briefly explicate the African

⁵⁸Theological Expose, an article presented by Sr. Margaret Fagbamigbe, (SSMA), a member of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Michael the Archangel.

Traditional Values and categorical elements inherent in the Religion and what these values (especially the elements of obedience, poverty, and chastity) portend for the Africans and how these are lived within the community. Thereafter, we shall present the common norms of consecrated life in the context of the Roman Catholic teaching; after which we shall present religious obedience in the light of the Second Vatican Council while we indulge individual Institutes the impetus of making necessary applications and appropriate the information vis-a-vis their constitutions; we shall examine the inculturation and the practice of the evangelical counsels; make some recommendations and conclude.

INTRODUCTION



Inculturation is the norm of modern evangelization. Inculturation is a function of contextualization wherein one appropriates valuable, good (resources, customs, values) in a culture; purifies them, strengthens them, and elevates them to enrich Christian faith.⁵⁹ This is based on the early experience of the Church when the apostles borrowed from the good customs, traditions, wisdom and everything that could be used to praise God from their cultures and their people in order to make the Christian faith relevant to local churches.⁶⁰ The Church assimilates these values, when they are compatible with the Gospel and when they are in communion with the universal church, and thus gives more effective expressions to them.⁶¹

Key words: *Inculturation, Evangelical Counsels, Freedom, Kingdom of God, Consecration*

It is observed that there is a close link between African

⁵⁹Second Vatican Council, The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern world, *Lumen Gentium*. (21st November, 1964) no. 13

⁶⁰Second Vatican Council, Decree On The Church's Missionary Activity, *Ad Gentes Divinitus*, (7 December, 1965) no. 22

⁶¹Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, "Varietates Legitimae," *Inculturation and the Roman Liturgy*, (March 29, 1994) no. 4

religious beliefs and Christianity and in the interpretation of the categorical elements of belief.⁶² This connection could be over stretched to the point where individual persons fuse and combine the elements of each in their religious belief system. Christianity frowns at such act and tag it syncretic. Consequently, it is imperative to comprehend the elements of each religion thoroughly.

Nevertheless, the categorical elements of belief inherent in Africa Traditional Religion are catalyst in deepening our understanding of the corresponding categorical elements obtainable in Christianity. In like manner, the appreciation of the religious symbols in African religious beliefs is a watershed in grasping and in the practical living of the religious state.

Against the backdrop of mutual understanding of the religious categorical elements, the leaders of the religious community and the members of the community will dwell in safety, in harmony, and in peaceful coexistence, each person respecting one another's genuine frame of mind.

AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

African Traditional Religion is the product of the thinking and experience of the forefathers and mothers of former generations of the Africans. The tradition is the passing on and taking up of the ideas, customs, moral conduct, ethics and opinion of the African society from one generation to the other. Religion is the worship of a Supreme Being. Thus,

⁶²Namawu Alhassan Alolo, "African Traditional Religion and Concepts of Development: A Background Paper", (paper 17, 2007): 50

African traditional religion is the religion of the African forefathers and mothers transmitted orally from one generation to the next. ⁶³Tradition is seen as a liberal resource for learning and appropriation; it carries with it evidences of a cumulative historical past. African philosophy is a philosophy of life. It is a reflection on the life, nature, value, and society through their belief systems. Africans seem unable to explain life without reference to what is religious and spiritual.⁶⁴

BELIEF IN GOD

Africans are not strange to the worship of One true God, who is the Supreme Being called by different names in different countries and tribes in Africa. The manifestation of God has brought about a living relationship between this Supreme Being and human being to what we know as religion. Those who experience God as a personal Being embrace him and are connected to him in a special way such as the Christians would do. ⁶⁵There are divinities who serve as deputies to the Supreme Being and the people relate to the deities as God's representatives.

Every child born into African culture grows with the concept of God and does not need a special coaching about God because the concepts of God are imbued in their folklores, myths, short stories, short sayings, proverbs, ceremonies and everything around them. Thus, the concept of God is embedded in their ontology and the knowledge of God as

⁶³Odeh Elizabeth and Akpashila Richard, "African Traditional Sex Laws: A Panacea to HIV/AIDS Pandemic in Nigeria", *Obudu Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, vol. 2 (January 22, 2020): 36

⁶⁴Rose Mary Amenga-Etago, "Critiquing African Traditional Philosophy of Chastity", Essay Chapter, (University of Ghana, Jan 2014) , 255-256- published April 18, 2017, www.researchgate.net accessed 4/5/2020

⁶⁵Emeka C. Ekeke and Chike A. Ekeopara, "God, Divinities, and Spirits in African Traditional Religious Ontology", *American Journal of Social and Management Sciences*, vol. 1, no. 2, (2010):209

Supreme Being has been part of African culture from time immemorial.⁶⁶

Africans came to believe in God when they realize their limitations and when they observe the forces of nature which are magnificent and beyond them; they understand that God is transcendent and immanent; Eternal and immortal.⁶⁷

THE ENSHRINE VALUES:

The values advocated by the traditional African communities are numerous, some of which are: solidarity, conviviality (welcome, companionableness, friendliness, and many more), celebration of life, ancestor veneration, ritual prayer, hospitality, interdependence, collaboration, co-responsibility, fraternal relationships, respect for the elders, active participation in collective events, mutual aid, compassion for the poor, sacred ecology. These values are the meeting point between religious state and the way of life of the people of Africa.⁶⁸

THEIR SPIRITUALITY

In the process of the search for the Supreme Being in African Traditional Religion, the Africans became conscious of their spirituality which relates them to that Supreme Being in a very special and particular mode and are bonded to the Supreme Being who they came to acknowledge as the source and the destiny of their existence.⁶⁹

⁶⁶Emeka C. Ekeke and Chike A. Ekeopara, 213

⁶⁷John Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, (London: Heinemann, 1991) 40-42

⁶⁸Jean-Marie Quenum, "Religious State and African Traditions" (Article, 2020): 18. www.academia.edu/5/5/2020

⁶⁹Ferdinand Nwaigbo, "Faith in the One God in Christian and African Traditional Religions", *A Theological Appraisal*, (2010):63. www.ajo.info. Accessed 5/5/2020

In many and various ways, Africans respond to their spiritual world and this response generally takes on the form of worship which is internalized in different acts and sayings. These acts may be formal or informal, regular or extempore, communal or individual, ritualized or ceremonial, through word or deed. The form, deed or acts vary from society to another. For the Africans, faith and life are not separated. Faith is the nutrient of salvation in African religion. This faith is experienced and expressed in the community and during festivals, sacrifices and worship.⁷⁰ Faith in God in Christianity as well as in African Traditional Religion expresses itself in worship and in actions.

THE RELIGIOUS SPECIALISTS:

In the bid of maintaining the equilibrium of the community, African religiousness emphasizes maintaining a harmonious relationship with the divine powers. They do this through the rituals which they wield in order to harness the cosmic powers and channel them for the common good. Ritual is the means by which a person negotiates responsible relationship with other members of the community, with the ancestors, with the spiritual forces of the nature and with the gods and every person passes through one ritual passage or the other. The cults of the divinities are visible in many shrines and the altars are consecrated in their honour including the religious specialists who are inducted into a permanent office during a religious rite.⁷¹

⁷⁰John Mbiti, *African Religious and Philosophy*, (New York: Praeger Publishing, 1969), 58

⁷¹Amy McKenna, the Senior Editor, "African Religions" *Encyclical Britannica*, March 6, 2012. Accessed 6/5/2020.

The Traditional Africans have a host of specialists who are professionals in their various disciplines such as priests, priestess, medicine men and women, diviners. Each profession has a set of beliefs, rules and regulations, practices and rituals. Those who receive powers from the spiritual forces become devotees and must follow the rules and regulations faithfully or they forfeit their position. The devotees believe in the usefulness of their powers and in the act of self-giving or the giving of one-self to the authorities or the entities behind those powers.⁷²

Anyone could communicate with the spirits but the priests, priestesses, prophets and diviners have more direct access to the invisible arenas of the world. The Supreme Being does not have a special cult of devotees because he occupies the realm beyond the physical abode of the humans and remain outside of their immediate influence. Africans who follow traditional religion rely on no scripture or holy book to guide them. Their guidance is provided through myths which are handed down orally. The priests, elders and priestess have served as guidance of the sacred tradition. The faithful who transmit this knowledge are considered sacred.

The adherents passed through long periods of apprenticeship, for example the *Ifa* Oracle) diviners are highly trained and are responsible for memorizing and transmitting important historical events to the living generations. Priests and priestess are natural leaders

⁷²Yusufu Turaki, "African Traditional Religious System as Basis of Understanding Christian Spiritual Warfare", Lausanne Movement, 1974. www.lausanne.org accessed 2/5/2020

because they are in direct service to God and dedicate themselves to the deities for life. They watch both community shrines and family shrines.⁷³

SENSE OF MORALITY:

Morality is situated within the belief system. Ethics in Africa encompass every aspect of life. They are expressed in the daily conversations of individual groups in proverbs, myths, folklore etc. For the Africans; ethical standpoints are manifested in the norms that regulate relationship between individual members of the society and their social groups.⁷⁴

Africans exhibit every aspect of their lives religiously and morally. Ethical conduct and customs were predominantly held in high esteem. The essence was to serve God or gods effectively in order to avert its wrath and punishment.⁷⁵

The concept of morality in African societies can be identified from the sanctions or commendations attached to the infringement or observance of the social norms. The formation of what is right and wrong, good or evil is based on a belief that morals are given by God.

The Yoruba word for consciousness is *ifa aya* (the oracle of the heart) which is believed to be inserted into humans by God to enable them live morally. Whether one lives morally good or bad is contingent on how individual responds to

⁷³Jacob K. Olupona, "African Traditional Religions" Encyclopedia.com April 6, 2020. Accessed 2/5//2020.

⁷⁴Mbon M.F., African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society, (New York: Paragon House, 1991), 101-110

⁷⁵Odeh Elizabeth and Akpashila Richard, 36

their *ifa aya*. A person who behaves wickedly or shamelessly is told he/she has no sense of shame or has no oracle of the heart.⁷⁶

In pre-colonial societies, the head of the group occupies political and religious positions. As time went by, people in important positions whether heads of households or sodalities or religious specialties were entrusted with the moral guidance of their families, clans and societies as a whole. They were regarded as representatives of the mystical powers of God, ancestors and spirits. They were charged with the responsibility of moral guidance through the observance and transmission of both life and tradition. They could be men or women in different societies and they were respected for their roles.⁷⁷

THE CONCEPT OF LAW AND THE ELDERS:

The concept of the practice of law in African sense is for the maintenance of the relationship between individuals and their communities. A breach of law constitutes a misdemeanor or delict (violation of law) rather than a crime to kill someone for. These are wrongs against norms and customs and the punishment of these wrongs involve compensation to be determined by the structures in the society- the Council of Elders. The elders listened to the story lovingly and the accused is reprimanded and was further educated to the point of making apology and seeking reconciliation so that cordial relationship is restored or renewed in the community.⁷⁸

⁷⁶Idowu E.B., *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Beliefs*, (London: Longman, 1962), 154

⁷⁷Magesa L., 245

⁷⁸Namawu Alhassan Alolo, 35

It was believed that a village headman was chosen with the intervention and direction of the living-dead- the ancestor, under the direction of God. He/she is supposed to be kind, merciful and just with a loving heart. The village headman is responsible for keeping peace and reconciliation between the members of his village and ensures that the spirit of justice and peace prevail. This was seen as a directive from God.⁷⁹

SEXUAL LAW:

There was something called "Traditional Sex Law."⁸⁰This was a code of ethics, morals and customs handed down from generation to generation. This was to enhance moral standard. These were rules and regulations guiding sexual relationships between man and woman, boys and girls within a context. It was a protective and guiding principle regulating sexual activities which takes the form of taboos, prohibition, customs and tradition. Traditional sex laws were relevant to avoid a breach of good relationship between members of the community and the divinities, ancestors, spirit and God (deities). Sexual law were meant for peace and stability of the community as well as maintaining chastity of family, the entire society and the avoidance of death and particularly for the enlargement of good health. Moreover, it was to serve and to offer sacrifices to the gods and ancestors; the act that requires being sexually pure and undefiled.⁸¹

⁷⁹Clement Majawa, *African Christian Reconciliation In The Light Of Yao Traditions*, (Nairobi: Published by Creations Enterprise, 2009), chapter 6: 71-82

⁸⁰Odeh Elizabeth and Akpashila Richard, 36-39

⁸¹Ekaopara Chike, *African Traditional Religion*, (Nigeria: Natos Affairs Publications, 2005), 215

CHASTITY IN THE TRADITIONAL AFRICAN SOCIETY:

Chastity is a major preoccupation in many African discourses on morality. Traditionally, chastity lies within the domain of sex and sexuality. The application of chastity to male and female was differently done.⁸² Chastity is primarily a heterosexual construct and the detail varies from one culture to another as it takes into consideration what is normal, right and wrong.

Among the Nankani in Ghana, chastity is about female sexuality, it is about virtuous woman, the woman who exudes the traditional concepts of decorum, modesty, self-service, and dignity in all spheres of life. Boys are encouraged to relate and pursue opposite sex courtship, girls are not encouraged. Boys are watched to see if they exhibit comportment. Girls are watched if they exhibit self-control and modesty. For the girls, chastity relates to self-denial and submission; for the boys, it relates to pursuance and conquest. Thus, in the African setting, the rituals of chastity and taboos were generally directed at women. Only women are guilty and who must perform the rituals of chastity. We see this scenario also in the Christian Bible in the Gospel of John 8:3-5, a tradition of the Jews.

THE IDEA OF POVERTY IN AFRICAN TRADITION:

Individual's identity is carved from his/her group's identity which may be the family, clan, lineage, tribe or community. There was a very limited sense of individuality as allegiance

⁸²Rose Mary Amenga-Etago, "Critiquing African Traditional Philosophy of Chastity", 259

is owed to the group. Individual rights in many communities were often subordinated to and subsumed under community rights.⁸³

The pre-colonial system entrusted property to leaders/rulers who were considered to be the custodians of property on behalf of the people even though the people had the right to use the property. This was to ensure shared and sustainable use of resources and harmony with the social groups; the people and the natural world. It was also to obviate arrogance and stymie envy. The idea of individual 'ownership' of property was foreign to pre-colonial system but this idea was brought by colonial powers. The leaders, kings, chiefs of the clan or family had the responsibility to provide food for their people lest they were accused of moral or social failure.⁸⁴

In the Yao community in Malawi, ⁸⁵the people were responsible for one another and this bonding is a gift from God. The vision is that of Caring, bonding, warmth, prosperity and mission. They cooperate and work together responsibly. It was a community of healthy growth and transformation and reconciliation and love by *Mlungu (God)*, a place of forgiveness and reconciliation, a community of genuine patience, a place of trust.

The socio-economic situation of the time forced people to

⁸³Price David, *Society and Bureaucracy in Contemporary Ghana*, (Berkeley, CA: University Press, 1975), 70-79

⁸⁴Namawu Alhassan Alolo, 41-42

⁸⁵Clement Majawa, 127-145

cultivate community values so as to survive. The individual needed the community for survival. In essence, unity, solidarity, collaboration, mutual aid and trust became relevant and germane for survival. On the whole, the people garnered common good; knowing that “I exist because you are and therefore, we are.”

THE IDEA OF OBEDIENCE IN AFRICAN TRADITION:

Among the African cultures such as Igbo, Yoruba, Luo, Akan, Azande, Bokis, Kikuyu, and many more, the identities of the individual is ontologically, spiritually, and normatively connected to that of the community. Such an African philosophy allows the members of a community to engage with the elders but with a reasonable degree of authoritarianism and submission of one's subjective judgement to the judgement of the group and the decision of the elders for the well-being of the community. This is an essential feature of African communalism and philosophy which affirms the importance of elders in the advancement of an African community.⁸⁶

THE RELIGIOUS STATE:

It is against this African cultural background that a person is called into the religious state to answer the call of God and the Lord said to whoever hears the call: “Leave your country, your relatives, and your father's house, and go to a land that I am going to show you.”⁸⁷ In response to this call, the respondents become “A chosen race, the king, the priest; a holy nation, God's chosen people”⁸⁸ because they have been

⁸⁶Polycarp Ikuenobe, “Philosophical Perspective on Communalism and Morality in African Traditions”, *African American Review*, vol. 41, no. 4, (Winter 2007): 808-809, Babacar M. Baye, Book Reviewer.

⁸⁷Gen. 12:1

⁸⁸1 Pet 2:9

shown mercy and received the deep love of God which they are also expressing by their response to God's call.

NORMS COMMON TO ALL INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE (CAN. 573-606)

Can. 597 §1. Any Catholic endowed with a right intention who has the qualities required by universal and proper law and who is not prevented by any impediment can be admitted into an institute of consecrated life.

§2. No one can be admitted without suitable preparation.

Can. 598 §1. Each institute, attentive to its own character and purposes, is to define in its constitutions the manner in which the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience must be observed for its way of living.

§2. Moreover, all members must not only observe the evangelical counsels faithfully and fully but also arrange their life according to the proper law of the institute and thereby strive for the perfection of their state.

Can. 599 The evangelical counsel of chastity assumed for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, which is a sign of the world to come and a source of more abundant fruitfulness in an undivided heart, entails the obligation of perfect continence in celibacy.

Can. 600 The evangelical counsel of poverty in imitation of Christ who, although he was rich, was made poor for us, entails, besides a life which is poor in fact and in spirit and is to be led productively in moderation and foreign to earthly riches, a dependence and limitation in the use and disposition of goods according to the norm of the proper law

of each institute.

Can. 601 The evangelical counsel of obedience, undertaken in a spirit of faith and love in the following of Christ obedient unto death, requires the submission of the will to legitimate superiors, who stand in the place of God, when they command according to the proper constitutions.

Can. 602 The life of brothers or sisters proper to each institute, by which all the members are united together as a special family in Christ, is to be defined in such a way that it becomes a mutual support for all in fulfilling the vocation of each. Moreover, by their communion as brothers or sisters rooted and founded in charity, members are to be an example of universal reconciliation in Christ.

From the aforementioned document and from practical wisdom it seems God designs us to live under a 'controlled freedom,' it is a freedom that is used responsibly. ".....You may eat of the fruit of the garden but do not eat the fruit..."⁸⁹ It will be a demoralizing burden in life if everyone is free to do anything. Therefore, we should not expect to live without restrictions or submission otherwise, we shall be a problem to ourselves.

Restrictions are for the consecrated persons because of the free choice of following Christ which is embedded in the evangelical counsels. Some absolute restrictions are obligatory such as the Ten Commandments. Other restrictions are relatively necessary or helpful and may be obligatory by the will of the authority. Sometimes, we find

⁸⁹Gen 2: 16-17

these duties very difficult to accept. But, reason, experiences and example of Christ demonstrate that there is no meaningful, happy and fulfilled life without this kind of submission or one will experience alienation from the group. A religious may argue or dialogue with the superior but St. Paul says that lawful things are not always helpful in the building up of the body of Christ.⁹⁰

FREEDOM IN RESTRICTIONS:

Thomas Aquinas says that the will of God is the primary rule by which all rational wills are regulated.⁹¹ God moves our will by a divinely established authority and we use our will and reason to yield to what is commanded, using our free choice proceeding from our counsel, from the will. Thus human freedom enters an ultimate connection with the divine will with the authority of God. This true obedience to the human superiors of any kind is possible only when such superiors have a share in the authority of God and only when they command according to the will of God. This obedience will in turn increase the freedom of the children of God when properly yielded to the commands of God.⁹²

It is only in freedom that human beings can turn to what is good. The human dignity requires that human being act through conscious and free choice as motivated from within and not through blind internal impulses or pressure.⁹³

⁹⁰1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23-24

⁹¹ST II-II Q.104, art 1-4

⁹²Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae Caritatis* no, 14.

⁹³Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 17.

THE FUNCTIONING OF THE WILL:

Good to note that we have two auspicious gifts, namely, our free will and the intellect. By the two gifts we are made in the image of God and are orientated to Him. For our free will to be used perfectly, it must be in conformity with God's will. God works in us; enables the will, and moves it as its object, not forcing it, but moves the will by its own natural inclination to respond for the sake of the common good.⁹⁴ This requires perfect obedience; obedience to God which is not contrary to our interior freedom. The intellect proposes reasons for being obedient; the will acts and obeys out of reverence or love for God. And so, without losing personal freedom, one obeys God's representative.

THE PLACE OF AUTHORITY:

Authority is that quality with which persons or institutions make laws and give orders to men and women and expect obedience from them. Any legitimate group will have a person in the position of authority who is also under the vows and has the power to command and the members have the corresponding duty to obey. The constitution and the rules of each institute will spell these things out. If the rule and the constitution give no explicit power in certain cases, the laws of the church become the sole source of authority.⁹⁵

However, each institute is bestowed with the power to command and to be obeyed. This becomes necessary in order to maintain peace, recollection and effectiveness of work not

⁹⁴ST II-II Q.105, art. 4 and 5

⁹⁵Code of Canon Law, no. 94, par. 1- 4; no 95, par. 1 - 2

only for the survival of the institute but also for the good of each member, guiding the members to find the will of God and thereby achieve its purpose in religious life- that is union with God.⁹⁶

It is pertinent that Superior must solve problems under the principles of prudence, charity, justice and equity. Therefore, there is no room for tyranny because the origin of this authority is of the divine, natural or ecclesiastical law.⁹⁷ Such authority must uphold the rule and constitutions of the group. Any command must not be given in contrast to faith and morals; commands must not be given against the vows and commands must not go against established law. However, superior should exercise authority in a spirit of service so as to give expressions to God's love for the members of the community.

The superiors are enjoined to treat their members as sons and daughters of God, persons to be revered and they should elicit obedience in freedom.⁹⁸ Superior's responsibilities involve giving orders with firmness and love which implies giving orders in persuasion and suggestions but this also includes the power to give particular and general directives when necessary in handling some issues while the orders are carried out in obedience required from children of God.

⁹⁶Dominic Hoffman with Basil Cole, *Consecrated Life: Contribution of Vatican II*, (Mumbai: Published by Better Yourself Books, 2006), 209-222

⁹⁷Romans 13:1-14

⁹⁸Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae Caritatis*, no 14

THE VOW OF OBEDIENCE:

The vow of obedience is a bond a religious makes with God by giving the self over to God to direct his/her life through the authorized superior according to the rule and constitution of the group. Thus, this is a way of abandoning the self to God's goodness and providence, making an act of faith, hope and love. This is a following of Christ, leading a life beyond ordinary obedience; it is a life aiming at perfection. This is a 'death' to all things except the will of God; a mediated obedience, a loving obedience to a loving God through His legitimate representatives.⁹⁹

The fundamental reason for the vow of obedience is so that a religious is more readily and completely surrendered Jesus Christ on the belief that the superior commands in the place and in the name of God. The Vow of obedience is a means of offering oneself totally to God; a clear rejection of the image of the self as autonomous.¹⁰⁰

THE PREMINENCE OF THE VOW OF OBEDIENCE:

A religious in any community that is canonically constituted is expected to strive after perfection. This perfection concerns the love of God and of neighbour. This perfection is expected to be effective with renunciations embedded in the taking of the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. According to Mary Bride Njoku,¹⁰¹ obedience is the chief

⁹⁹Phil. 2:8

¹⁰⁰David b. Knight, S.J, Joy and judgment in Religious Obedience, in Studies in the Spirituality of the Jesuits, Published by the American Assistances Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality.

¹⁰¹Mary Bride Njoku, Consecrated Life, towards Deepening its Understanding, (Enugu: Snaap Press Ltd , 2014) chapter 2.

directive guide of the three vows. This is so because with the vow of obedience, one renounces a good which is highly valued- the instinct of arranging one's life. The benefit of this renunciation lies in the fact that one will be truly guided and one's drives and talents will become means to better explore how God's plan might be duly manifested and executed. This is not the same thing as doing what might bring personal happiness and personal success with the rationalization that one is doing all these for the sake of others. The onus is doing the will of God as demanded by God's representative in imitation of Christ and this is what leads to authentic human fulfilment. Therefore, seeking for perfection of love will be impossible without perfection of obedience. In obedience, we have given our will for the rest of our lives into God's hands and we are certain that He will fulfil His plan for us.

Religious life is a school of perfection, it is a school that never closes; it is a school for learning the love of God and of neighbour. God is the Teacher leading our souls to growth and development through obedience. Being obedient is a daily task. Although chastity symbolizes the total self-giving to God, but the evangelical counsel of obedience involves the human faculty of the will; the will is the faculty which moves one to the love of God and of neighbour. Obedience is the faculty that brings a person to the end or purpose of religious life- union with God. Consequently, the vow of obedience is the greatest of the evangelical counsels because it offers the will to be guided towards God's love. In offering the will, we offer all.

This is the reason why some religious institutes take only the vow of obedience because the other two vows are implied in the vow of obedience. It is like making a holocaust offering of

the will to God, a better offering than offering the function of the body or the material possessions for the reason that obedience is better than sacrifice.¹⁰²

The will is the master faculty because it controls all other departments. In offering up the master, the servants bow in submission. A man can give nothing greater to God than giving his/her own will to the will of another on account of God.¹⁰³

SOME OBSTACLES TO OBEDIENCE:

1. Exaggerated self-interest
2. Disordered self-love
3. Other divergent desires.

Perfect obedience is the means through which these obstacles are broken in order to open the way for the love of God to grow within us. When we do not obey, it is because of pride, jealousy, personal ambition, personal aversion or hatred. For a religious who has difficulty with obedience, the virtues of faith, hope and love are weak. Rather than engaging in useless criticism, such a religious should deepen the life of prayer. The measure of Christ's obedience must become the measure of our own if we are to love Him in the perfection of love. Obedience requires us to have the attitude of disciples who listens attentively to the word of God, to the church and to world events. Thus, obedience is an attitude of

¹⁰²1 Sam. 15:22-23

¹⁰³ST II-II Q. 186. Art. 5

attentiveness and responsiveness to the call of the moment.¹⁰⁴ The religious will discuss difficulties with the superiors with tact, respect and humility with firm disposition to obey and persevere in imitation of Christ who was obedient, chaste and poor.¹⁰⁵

IS OBEDIENCE BLIND?

In the past, religious were advised to act like a stick. This metaphor is short. The obedience of Christ has specific character of freedom and loving adherence to the salvific plan of God who sent Him.¹⁰⁶ Christ's obedience was voluntary, rational, and responsible; therefore our obedience must be motivated by love and carried out in freedom. Religious obedience brings powers of intellect and will and gifts of nature to bear in any command. We are to obey not out of fear or duty, but simply out of love of God who first loved us. Thomas Aquinas says that the obedience of Christ demands of the religious the intellect, will, and grace put into any command so that obedience becomes clearer like the example of our Lord. The intellect gives assent to what was commanded.¹⁰⁷

ST. PAUL AND ST. AUGUSTINE

St. Augustine says, "Love God, and do as you wish."¹⁰⁸ Augustine is not advocating for a disregard of the law. Somewhere else he says, "Obey your superior as you would your father or mother." What Augustine is saying is that if we

¹⁰⁴Mary-Brid, Chapter 2

¹⁰⁵Second Vatican Council, Lumen Gentium, no. 44

¹⁰⁶Jn 5:30

¹⁰⁷ST II-II Q. 104 Art. 5

¹⁰⁸St. Augustine, "Homily on 1 John 4:4-12" www.newadvent.org

truly love, we will always do the will of God whom we love. His will is expressed in many situations and in his representatives. Augustine is echoing St. Paul who says that love is the fulfilment of the law.¹⁰⁹

Paul is teaching us to act with love and reverence for God's will. As a matter of fact, love is itself a law: "You shall love the Lord, your God with all your heart, with all your soul and your neighbour as yourself." ¹¹⁰These two commandments demonstrate the unity of love and law. Law and love go together in our life and they are inseparable in God and there is no opposition between the two.

God is sacred and is the supreme eternal lawgiver. If there is no law, there is no order, and if there is no order, life becomes difficult and love is under tension. Therefore, law is to be seen as a voice to be obeyed lovingly as the loving will of the loving God. This is a journey to perfection for the religious since religious life is a school of perfection.

INCULTURATION OF THE EVANGELICAL VOWS OF POVERTY, CHASTITY AND OBEDIENCE

A coalescent view hypothesizes that for a religious state to be relevant and fruitful, it must take root in African positive values because such values are the meeting point between religious state and the way of life of the Africans. This is germane because religious state and the African members

¹⁰⁹Rom. 13:10

¹¹⁰Matt. 22:37

cannot erase the relationship they have with their cultures. It is through the interface of different cultures and ideologies that the culture of the gospel is built up and searches for unity and peace.¹¹¹

By their religious profession, the consecrated persons give up all inheritance of movable and immovable property of their family and clan to put themselves at the service of humanity. This is done in following Jesus Christ in *kenosis*, placing themselves at the disposal of their institute. This giving up or total self-giving is of their own free will so that they could have a place in the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.¹¹²

IN AN AFRICAN CONTEXT,¹¹³

- i. Obedience is seen as being in relationship with members of a family, clan, or tribal community with a leader as the head. The leadership invites listening and dialoguing to discern the common good and achieve a common mission.
- ii. Chastity is a gift, a call to dedicate the self and having a preferential love for God and service of humanity.
- iii. Poverty is being identified with the neighbours with whom one shares, and being in solidarity with the community, responding to a call for a universal communion.

¹¹¹Jean-Marie Quenum, "Religious State and African Traditions"(Article, 2020): 7. www.academia.edu

¹¹²2Cor. 8

¹¹³Jean-Marie Quenum, 17

THE CONSECRATED PERSONS FOLLOW THE LORD JESUS IN LIVING THE EVANGELICAL COUNSELS BY PRACTICING:¹¹⁴

- a. Consecrated life: the commitment of the consecrated persons in the evangelical poverty replicates the mystery of the beloved Son who enriches humanity with the presence of God in Him by giving the self totally to the service of humanity. The gift of the self in evangelical poverty disposes the consecrated person to fight precariousness and underdevelopment in Africa (by working and earning the food that they eat) and share according to the norm of each institute. It is a consecrated life that announces and anticipates the universal communion where God will be all in all.
- b. Consecrated chastity: the consecrated persons practice this vow by refraining from any carnal relationship and reserve all energy for community life and mission of evangelization in anticipation of the Kingdom of God.
- c. Consecrated obedience: the consecrated persons are dispossessed of their own will and placed it in the hand of God through the community in order to be sent for service; to be available for fraternal community living and to collaborate in the work of evangelization. Living an obedient life is tantamount to a continuous listening to that voice that calls one to live and move to another land; it is synonymous to

¹¹⁴Jean-Marie Quenum, 17

living a responsible life, being in dialogue and discerning the mission of the religious state.

- d. Community living: the art of living together responds to an ethical, social and political model of the extended family in African traditions.

RECOMMENDATION

1. It is through the building of the African's world and rooting their faith in God that Christianity will free itself from producing half-Christianity or Christians that undergo a double life.¹¹⁵
2. The religious state in Africa can only be lived in the humanized worlds of African cultures. For this to be realized, the Religious state must be embodied in the good habits, beliefs, and characteristics of the Africans.
3. The emergence of the religious state in Africa must bring about a transformation of the authentic values of local cultures and integrate them into their lifestyle by conforming them to the gospel.¹¹⁶
4. The religious state will denounce ancestral traditions that do not respect the dignity and rights of the human persons. The dialogue of the religious state with African traditions must be done in a climate of discernment in tandem with intercultural

¹¹⁵Elia Shabani Mligo, *Elements of Africa Traditional Religion*, (Oregon: Resource Publications, 2013), 112

¹¹⁶Jean-Marie Quenum, 1-13

methodology that respects cultural diversity and preserves the sense of religious state in Christ's celibacy, his *kenosis* and obedience to the will of the Father in view of the Kingdom of God.

CONCLUSION

The religious, by the evangelical vows, has promised that he or she will have greater freedom from earthly cares.¹¹⁷ The freedom is a distinctive result of the evangelical counsels when properly lived to give way for service of God in humanity.

In the scripture, obedience is demonstrated as free, personal and joyous choice of following the plan of God.¹¹⁸ Obedience increases the freedom of God's children, chastity purifies the heart from undisciplined self; and poverty frees the person from selfishness.¹¹⁹

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¹¹⁷Second Vatican Council, Lumen Getium, no. 44.

¹¹⁸1 Tim 5:3-16

¹¹⁹Second Vatican Council Perfectae Caritatis, no. 14

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THE RIGHTS OF CONSECRATED PERSONS IN INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE

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Abstract

Without a doubt, the issue of the fundamental rights of individual members of Institutes of Consecrated Life will generate a seriously heated discussion. This would be especially so in Nigeria where we find various forms of Consecrated Life forming part of the ecclesial community. The notion and meaning of rights, and as to what is their fundamental nature, has been an age-long discussion in human history. Rights, defined as legal, social, or ethical principles of entitlement, dominate modern understandings of which actions are permissible and which are not. The central question that this article seeks to explore is, in the context of having professed the three Evangelical Counsels which constitute Consecrated Life, what are the underlying rights of

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consecrated persons that still need to be respected? I will be arguing that consecrated persons do have rights in Institutes of Consecrated Life and not just obligations and that their profession of the evangelical counsels is not a negation of their rights. This is to say that consecrated life should not be concerned only with justice for the people they serve, but also ensure justice for the consecrated persons themselves.

Keywords: Rights, Consecrated Life, Nigeria, Justice, Education.

Outline

- ▶ Introduction
- ▶ An Overview of Consecrated Life
- ▶ Fundamental Human Rights
- ▶ The Church and Human Rights
- ▶ Code of Canon Law and the Rights of Consecrated Persons
- ▶ Excursus
- ▶ Conclusion

INTRODUCTION



The notion and meaning of rights, and as to what is their fundamental nature, has been an age-long discussion in human history. Rights, defined as legal, social, or ethical principles of entitlement, dominate modern understandings of which actions are permissible and which are not. They define how institutions are to operate in a just and ethical manner. To accept a set of rights is to approve a distribution of freedom and authority, and so to endorse a certain set of values that define what may, or may not be done, and also what must be compulsory so that rights of all are respected.

Consecrated life, referred to also as religious life, is a permanent state of a life lived out according to Gospel values and which is recognized by the Church. Individual members of Institutes of Consecrated Life enter freely in response to a call they felt from Jesus to live their whole lives for God alone. Those who enter consecrated life profess the "evangelical counsels" of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Consecrated life is a witness to the possibility of holiness. Consecrated

persons are men and women who have decided to follow God more radically in religious life. They witness also to the joy and peace that comes with self-giving.

The central question that this article seeks to explore is, in the context of having professed the three Evangelical Counsels which constitute Consecrated Life, what are the underlying rights of consecrated persons that still need to be respected? To be able to respond to this question adequately, I will begin by presenting an overview of Consecrated Life, followed by the description of the Fundamental Human Rights. The Church and Human rights as well as the Code of Canon Law and the Rights of Consecrated Persons will be discussed in the third and fourth parts respectively while the Excursus will give a critical exposition of harassments and abuses of rights of consecrated persons. The conclusion will give a recap of the salient points discussed as well as a way forward to the problems discussed, arguing that consecrated persons do have rights in Institutes of Consecrated Life and not just obligations.

1. Consecrated life: an overview

Consecrated life means first of all baptism. At baptism, the Christian accepts the father's call to follow the Son Jesus Christ and receives the seal of the Holy Spirit as an indelible imprint. Thus, God consecrates us as his children. If at first, we were not aware of it, this happened in the faith of the parents and the church. This consecration receives further details in the confirmation for Christian witness, in marriage for conjugal and family love, in the sacred order for service to the community.

In the ecclesial language, consecrated life, however,

indicates a special “consecration of the whole, manifests in the Church the marvelous marriage established by God as a sign of the world to come. Religious thus consummate a full gift of themselves as a sacrifice offered to God, so that their whole existence becomes a continuous worship of God in charity”.¹²¹ Pope St. John Paul II in his apostolic exhortation, *vita consecrata* refers to consecrated life as the work of the Holy Trinity. This means that “The consecrated life proclaims what the Father, through the Son and in the Spirit, brings about by his love, his goodness and his beauty”.¹²² Consecrated life is the commitment to holiness and to the radical way of following Jesus Christ prophetically, that is to remind everyone that holiness must be tended because in every condition of life one must follow Jesus Christ faithfully and unquestionably.

We could say that those who are consecrated are Christians who remind other Christians to be Christians, and remind the world that there is another world. This vocation and consecration are on the line of baptism and confirmation, but it is not the same. It involves a new call from the father, a new response, a new infusion of the Holy Spirit, a new and prophetic mission that “is born in contemplation, from moments of intense communion and a deep relationship of friendship with Christ, from the beauty and light which was seen shining on his face”.¹²³ The prophetic radicality of this choice is expressed with the vows

¹²¹The Code of Canon Law: New revised English Translation (1983), St. Pauls Publications, Ibadan 2014. can.607

¹²³John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Vita consecrata*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996 n.20

¹²³Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Starting Afresh from Christ: A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium*, Rome, 2002 n. 9

of poverty, chastity, and obedience, which indicate total readiness for the mission, and with life in community, a testimony of the harmony of human relations (Cfr. LG 46). Popularly we call friars and nuns, monks and nuns, or religious, those who make this choice. As a whole, they are today designated as consecrated persons.

The primordial reference of Christian spirituality is Jesus: conversion to him and his *sequela*. The Christian life is a life "in Christ" and "in the spirit", which is welcomed by faith, expressed in love, and lived in hope. This Christian life becomes different because of the richness of its content and the circumstances in which it is lived. There is a unity of Christian life and the diversity of spirituality. This is because spirituality embraces all life, even action, and is conditioned by the circumstances in which it is lived. From them arise different accents that characterize the spirituality within the Church.

Consecrated life is a style or way of living the Christian life. It has as its starting point in a charism communicated by the spirit to follow Jesus in a consecration through vows, lived in communion for the mission. Among the characteristic aspects of the spirituality of Consecrated Life is the fact of living Christian faith, hope, and love from the commitment of the vows of obedience, poverty, and chastity. These vows introduce particular nuances in the way of living theological life. The three vows are an expression of the three theological virtues, but each one particularly emphasizes and exercises one.

Obedience is, in a particular way, a living experience of faith in openness to the ways of God, sought and discovered through the mediation of the superior and the

community. By limiting their will and renouncing exclusively personal projects, consecrated persons seek to fulfill with responsibility and initiative their mission at the service of the Kingdom. It is a way of being free in adherence, out of love, to the will of the father, as Christ did (Cfr. Jn 4:34), which “shows the liberating beauty of a dependence which is not servile but filial, marked by a deep sense of responsibility and animated by mutual trust, which is a reflection in the history of the loving harmony between the three Divine Persons”.¹²⁴ Obedience manifests and establishes a new kind of relationship in society: that of authority as a service and that of freedom that takes into account the good of others. It challenges, in this way, the totalitarian and oppressive exercise of authority and the individualistic selfishness in the use of freedom.¹²⁵

Poverty is very particularly related to Hope, which guides the Christian in the use of the goods of this world. The goods were put by God for the good of all and must be shared in justice and fraternity. Consecrated persons, through the vow of poverty, feel committed to living a simple and sober life, made up of work, detachment and personal and community availability, and to put all that they are and have at the service of the neediest, in an evangelical communion of spiritual and material goods by so doing, proclaiming “that God is man's only real treasure”.¹²⁶

Chastity consecrated together with fraternal life in community is a particular expression of Christian love. They generate a universal fraternity. They help to better

¹²⁴Vita Consecrata, n. 21.

¹²⁵Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life: *The service of authority and obedience*, Rome, 2008 n.5.

¹²⁶Vita Consacrata, n. 21

understand the riches and needs of love, the fruit of the spirit. They give, to their exercise, particular connotations: universality, gratuitousness, availability. Consecrated chastity allows, on the other hand, to be able to form communities as families united not by bonds of flesh and blood, but by the common vocation received from God. In them is expressed and manifested the power of the resurrection of Jesus who calls to fraternal communion as a “reflection of the infinite love which links the three Divine Persons in the mysterious depths of the life of the Trinity”.

The spirituality of vows gives a particular approach to the three fundamental needs of the following of Jesus (Cfr. Lk14: 2-35), which are addressed to all Christians. Concerning family ties, it is expressed in consecrated chastity; concerning material goods, it is concretized in poverty; and concerning one's autonomous project of life, it is symbolized in carrying the Cross seeking and fulfilling God's will in obedience. This spirituality of vows also pushes one to overcome the excessive desire for goods with poverty; the craving for power with obedience; and to live free for the service of the Kingdom in consecrated chastity.

Having briefly discussed the fundamentals of consecrated life, we shall now proceed to examine whether consecrated persons do have rights irrespective of their religious status. To do this, we shall first examine the fundamental human rights.

¹²⁷Vita Consacrata, n.21.

2. Fundamental Human Rights¹²⁸

Human rights can be said to be a set of basic rights and freedom that belong intrinsically to every human person in the world, from birth till death. These rights are based on shared values of dignity, fairness, independence, and respect; and they apply irrespective of one's race, religion, or choice of life. The Universal Declaration of human rights was adopted on 10th December 1948 by the General Assembly of the United Nations, which aimed at guiding the will to avoid a repeat of the atrocities committed during the Second world war. The Preamble of the Declaration specifies the fact that disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and therefore considers it essential that human rights should be protected by the rule of law, if you want to avoid that man is compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression.

To avoid the recurrence of conflict and violence, the Declaration enshrines the inalienable rights of every human being without distinction of race, sex, religion, or political ideology. The document demonstrates the supreme value of the human person, a value that was not originated by the decision of worldly power, but rather from the inherent dignity of man, which gave rise to the inalienable right of every man to live free from violence and oppression and to fully develop their personality. Years after the declaration of these rights, the Universal Declaration is still one of the main instruments for the international protection of human rights

¹²⁸It's my re-reading and summary of the Universal Declaration of Human rights (1948).

and one of the most important goals in the history of international law. Though we are aware that the degree of respect for the rule of law and upholding fundamental human rights differ from one country to another.

The declaration consists of thirty articles, preceded by a preamble, which incorporate the inalienable rights of man, and that, despite the non-binding character of the document, have been transferred to and developed in subsequent treaties and legally-binding regional instruments and national constitutions. The preamble to the declaration recognizes the intrinsic value of every man, emphasizing that the dignity of every member of the "human family" is the basis of freedom, justice, and peace in the world. Below is the summary of the thirty articles of the fundamental human rights:

Articles 1 and 2 reaffirm the fundamental concepts of dignity, equality, freedom, and brotherhood, which constitute the keystone of the entire document. Subsequent articles spell out the inalienable rights of each individual, such as the right to life, the prohibition of slavery and torture, the right to equality before the law and the presumption of innocence, the right to freedom of movement, of thought, expression, conscience, and religion.

Arts. 3 - 11 fix individual rights and freedoms (civil and political rights).

Arts.12-17 establish the rights of the individual to the community in which he lives (civil and political rights).

Arts.18-21 state Freedom of thought and association (civil and political rights)

Arts.22 -27 enunciate economic, social, and cultural rights.

Articles 28, 29, and 30 give provisions concerning the realization of those rights.

With these few lines of summary, we can say that the declaration of universal human rights as proclaimed by the world powers serve as a basic structure for the protection of the person. The fact that many countries are still lacking and lagging in upholding these rights does not deprive its existence but rather confirms the abuse of the freedom of the other. So, we can deduce that since the fundamental rights exposed above concern all humans inherently, we could say that consecrated persons do have by their virtue of being humans these same fundamental rights. We shall proceed to investigate the church's position on human rights and the rights of consecrated persons.

3. The Catholic Church on human rights

Right from her inception, the Catholic Church has been known for her immeasurable fight against injustices and promotion of the fundamental human rights. Many, if not all Religious Institutes were founded to respond to the threat or abuse of the human rights of their time. This being the case, it won't be an exaggeration to say that Consecrated persons in themselves are human rights activists. It is to be noted that the underlying factor of the Church's fight for human rights is her conception of human dignity. This is very evident, not just in the work the church does, but through different documents, conferences, and involvements of the church in human society.

John XXIII takes up and systematizes the wide range of

human rights, starting from the reaffirmation of the dignity of the human person, that is "He is a nature, that is, endowed with intelligence and free will. As such he has rights and duties, which together flow as a direct consequence of his nature. These rights and duties are universal and inviolable, and therefore altogether inalienable".¹²⁹ He went further to say that the dignity of the human person is incomparably superior if it is considered that men have been redeemed by the blood of Christ and have become by grace children of God.¹³⁰

The second Vatican council, in particular in the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, redraw the profile of the integral man whose dignity flows out of the fact of his creation in the image and likeness of God; recognized in human intellect, conscience, and freedom.¹³¹ On the 251st anniversary of the UN Universal Declaration, the Vatican commission "*Iustitia et Pax*" prepares an important historical-doctrinal-pastoral document on the church and Human Rights (1974), recognizing that "the Church has widened the scope of her defensive action beyond the boundaries of Christendom - protecting her rights and her people - to the whole —the society of man, safeguarding the rights of all based on common human nature and natural law."¹³² Through this claim, the church affirms that the human rights defined in the Universal Declaration " find in the Church's Magisterium not only a consensus but a deeper

¹²⁹John XXIII, *Pacem in terris*, Encyclical on establishing universal peace in truth, Justice, Charity, and Liberty, Rome 1963 n.9

¹³⁰Cfr. *Pacem in Terris*, n.9

¹³¹Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Rome, 1965 n. 12 – 22.

¹³²Pontifical Commission (*Iustitia et pax*), *The Church and Human Rights*, Vatican City, 1974 n.32

understanding and a fuller expression that at times surpasses anything before it".¹³³ Ten years later, it's time for a profound reflection document on the Dignity and rights of the human person (1984), drafted by the international theological Commission: here the dignity of the human person and its rights are viewed in the light of the biblical sources, of the history of salvation (in which man is seen as "the creature, a sinner, redeemed"), of the concrete situation of the people in the world.¹³⁴

With these few citations and ecclesial references, it is clear the position of the church on the matter of human dignity.

4.The Code Canon law and the Rights of Consecrated Persons¹³⁵

The code of canon law is the church's juridical book that contains ecclesiastical laws that deal with her members especially the Roman Catholics. In the third part of book II of the CCL, there lie about 170 canons (573 – 746) relating to Consecrated life (Institutes of Consecrated Life, Secular Institutes, and Society of Apostolic Life). In studying this section, several concepts must be kept in mind. Consider the following three examples:

The distinction between religious institutes, secular institutes, and societies of apostolic life. Religious and secular institutes are considered institutes of

¹²³ *Iustitia et pax*, n.33

¹³⁴ Cf. International theological commission *the dignity and rights of the human person*, 1984

¹³⁵ This Session is based on the reading of *The Code of Canon Law: New revised English Translation (1983)*, St. Pauls Publications, Ibadan 2014.

consecrated life. Societies of apostolic life are similar to institutes of consecrated life but their members do not take religious vows.

The canons often refer to the particular law of the religious institute. The term "*ius proprium*" is used throughout this section and may refer either to the institute's constitutions or to its directory of statutes or both.

Religious institutes are divided into pontifical and diocesan institutes, a distinction which is especially significant when some juridical act, such as alienation, must be referred to the competent hierarchical authority.¹³⁶

The rights and obligations of religious result from the combination of five different rights, and several courts whose respective competencies are specified to the Canon 1427.¹³⁷

1. *The rights and obligations of the Catholic faithful;*
2. *Depending on their state, the rights and obligations of the laity or clerics;*
3. *The rights and obligations of the members of the institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life, following their state;*
4. *The particular law of the diocese on which they depend, or of the Roman Congregation to which they are attached;*
5. *The rights and obligations contained in their statutes, and the internal regulations specific to their institutes, societies, or congregations.*

¹³⁶ Monsignor John A. Alessandro, *Overview of the revised Code of Canon Law*, in the Catholic Lawyer no. 2 volume 29, 1984 pg 180.

¹³⁷ <https://www.canonistes.org/justice-for-the-religious/>

The Code of Canon Law “directly or indirectly expresses very few rights for members of religious institutes; on the other hand, many of their rights are limited as a consequence of their religious profession”.¹³⁸ As well, the only three rights identified for the religious seem to be:¹³⁹

the right not to reveal their conscience to their higher (Cfr. C.630

the right to live the religious life (Cfr. C654.)

The right to means of subsistence to accomplish their vocation (Cfr. C. 670)

5. EXCURSUS

So far, we have discussed the fundamental rights of the human person, the catholic church's notion of human dignity and the Code of Canon Law's prescription of the rights of consecrated persons in the Institutes of Consecrated Life which we said that canon law only prescribed 3 explicit rights for consecrated persons as stated above. In this session of the article, I would like to discuss some harassments of consecrated persons as abuses of their rights and misuse of religious authority. I will later advocate for education as a fundamental right to consecrated persons especially the female consecrated persons in Nigeria. This part of the discussion is based on my sharing with some colleagues both old and younger religious. I will later call on catholic and religious governing bodies in Nigeria to wake up to their task and responsibilities of defending and promoting the rights of consecrated persons in the country.

By harassment, I mean an illegal behavior towards a

¹³⁸<https://www.canonistes.org/justice-for-the-religious/>

¹³⁹<https://www.canonistes.org/justice-for-the-religious/>

person that causes mental, emotional, physical, and psychological suffering. These illegal behaviors are forms of abuse of the rights of the person. Harassments cut across every part of the society including the consecrated life and unfortunately, these dehumanizing attitudes are on the rise in the consecrated life which supposed to be a place of defending the dignity of the human person. Below is the summary of the major harassments found in the consecrated life today with particular attention to Nigeria:

Personal harassment: is a form of bullying which can be damaging and destructive to the victim. Inappropriate comments, offensive jokes, Personal humiliation, Critical remarks, Ostracizing behaviors, Intimidation tactics are all examples of harassment done to the victim. This is discriminatory and shouldn't be found in Consecrated life but on the contrary, they are becoming the order of the day as the formation is being done out of fear instead of out of love.

Physical harassment: One of the things that break one's heart is to hear of physical harassment, in most cases from the superiors in the community to the younger religious. This harassment involves direct threats of intent to inflict harm, Physical attacks (such as slapping, hitting), Threatening behavior, destroying property to intimidate, and verbal abuse. The victims in most cases can't report because they are taught to the belief that their vow of obedience allows their superiors or older colleagues to do that to them; and when some of them pick up the courage to

report to higher superiors, they are not listened to and these poor and helpless religious, suffer in silence in the name of consecrated life.

Psychological harassment: hurts a person's psychological well-being. The Victims are often put down and belittled on a personal level and in some cases professional level. This type of harassment is carried out by Isolating or denying the victim's presence, Belittling, or trivializing the victim's thoughts, Discrediting, or spreading rumors about the victim. Psychological harassment often creates a huge effect on the victim's social, physical, mental, and spiritual life.

Sexual harassment: this is another form of harassment that has shaken the church in recent years. It will be a denial of reality to say this is not an issue in our African – Nigerian context. Sexual harassment is a type of abuse that is sexual in nature and generally includes unwanted sexual advances, conduct or behavior, or a kind of *quid pro quo* (This for that) harassment. It's unlawful both in the civil and ecclesiastical sense. While different religious institutes have done well in protecting those they work for in their apostolates, especially minors and vulnerable adults, they do not have explicit laydown procedures to protect the rights of their religious members that are being abused within the institutes or are being accused falsely.

Having discussed some of the major forms of harassment as abuses of the fundamental rights of the dignity of the human

person, let us now talk of another type of “Right” of the consecrated persons that is so fundamental and yet today found wanting in some religious institutes. This is the right to Education.

Education: one might ask why education is seen as a right in the religious life, after all, the decision to send religious to schools for higher education depends on the superiors of the institutes. A good number of consecrated persons indeed have access to further their education as soon as they become an official member of their institutes through their first religious profession (Cfr. C.654). But this is majorly true for male religious institutes because the majority of their members end up becoming religious priests and such, they need to follow the priestly formation plan of the church by studying at least Philosophy and Theology (Cfr. Can.659). On the other hand, a good number of our female consecrated persons have no or little opportunity for further education.

We have many examples of Reverend Sisters that the only academic qualification they have up to date even after many years of perpetual profession, is their Secondary School Certificate Examination, which was an important prerequisite for being admitted into their congregation. In our context today and in the world at large, one cannot undermine the power of education especially to the women who throughout history have been at the receiving end of marginalization. To put it simply, it is an injustice or rather an unforgivable offense to take young vibrant women religious at their prime, full of energy and vigor with good academic excellence, but fail to help them in developing their intellectual capacity. Am sorry to say and with no offense to anyone, that some female religious temporary and perpetually professed alike, cannot engage in an intellectual

argument to air their views on matters that concern them and the society they live. It is saddening when one hears some superiors complaining that their members are asking for opportunities to further their education, after all, it will be for the benefit of the Institute in their apostolate.

Yes, I am not referring to some religious persons who are after intellectualism and certificate accumulation. I am speaking of those who for years without opportunities to study. Going to school is not limited to formal university degree courses, it could be vocational and technical studies that will help respond and contribute to the situation of those we are sent to. Our African context today, demands that all and sundry need a sound education to go back to our African roots so that the different apostolates offered can be beneficial to people we are sent to. Even in teaching religious education, it needs proper access to a good education. For me, if a religious who has left everything to follow Christ more radically must lack anything, he or she must not lack in our day access to good and quality education. It should not be forgotten that Education is a fundamental right to the person according to the Universal Fundamental right and the African Charter on Human and people's rights¹⁴⁰ which Nigerian Constitutions and other member states uphold as a fundamental right to every citizen.

CONCLUSION

So far, we have been addressing the topic *Rights of Consecrated Person in Institutes of Consecrated Life*. I began

¹⁴⁰African charter on human and people's rights, Amnesty International, UK 2006.

by giving an overview of what Consecrated life consists, followed by the exposition of the Universal Fundamental Human rights, the Catholic Church's notion of human dignity, the Code of Canon Law's prescription on the rights and obligations of the consecrated persons and some forms of harassment that are being lived in the religious life. Considering the socio-political and economic situation of Nigeria, we cannot but appreciate the wonderful works consecrated persons are doing to contribute to the dignity of the lives of the Nigerian populace. The Catholic Church in Nigeria in the history of the country has been a voice for the voiceless especially in the face of political turbulence, terrorism, and marginalization. The church has contributed immensely to the development of the country in spiritual, economic, educational, psychological, political, and health sectors; preaching love and peace as well as justice and forgiveness.

If the church however wants to continue to make her presence more meaningful and existential among the people, she must do more to make sure that abuses of rights of the consecrated persons (and clerics) working and promoting the values and the dignity of persons must be respected. The magisterium of the church in Nigeria (C.B.C.N.), as well as the conferences of the major superiors of both men and women religious institutes (C.M.S.N., and N.C.W.R), must wake up to defend the rights of the consecrated persons. Documents should be written to state the rights of consecrated persons that each institute who wishes to work in Nigeria must respect and follow to be able to respect and contextualize the canonical prescription and ontological meaning of the rights of their members. Taskforce on the human right should be set up within the church to see that the consecrated persons

come first. Conferences should be organized often to help consecrated persons understand their rights and ask questions on what is not clear.

Once these rights have been defined, they should be written into documents with juridical sanction without prejudice to the autonomy of each institute (Cfr. C.578, 586). But it will be impossible to have the rights of consecrated persons fully and objectively acknowledged unless all Institutes of Consecrated Life in Nigeria, reach a juridical consensus, and a methodical way to define and narrow the conception of rights of consecrated persons. The most fundamental factor that underlies Consecrated Life is freedom lived and seen in the person of Jesus Christ, without whom, Religious life is nothing. The Paschal Mystery, therefore, becomes the foundation, guarantee, and hope of the Rights of the human person. The death and resurrection of Jesus is an emblematic icon of every reflection on human rights. The death of Jesus is in itself a dramatic experience of a right of life, and as such, a truth that has been transgressed where the crucifix becomes the public icon of the violation of human rights. It, therefore, remains the historical sign of the wreck and the failure of the law because of the guilt of those who did not want or were not able to respect it. The resurrection of Jesus is an affirmation of the right of the human persons to the primary values of life, dignity, truth, justice, freedom, etc. The Paschal Mystery shows that in Jesus human rights do not die, and no matter how they are oppressed, these rights return to the light and win.

The Paschal Memory, ritualized in the Eucharist, is the most

adequate and effective religious representation of the rights of the person because:

Firstly, it shows that the foundation upon which man was created, is God's love. Considering the *praxis* of Jesus, we could see that rather than just preaching doctrines on human rights, he practiced them with intensity, authority, universality, and constancy that made him an unforgettable witness of them. Thereby showing that one can't speak of human rights without the right of love and that our daily and communal living is the best place of expressing these rights. Secondly, it affirms that the practice of human rights, in the light of the Gospel, never has a definitive defeat per se, but if anything, shows the sacrifice of implementing them as Jesus did until he gave his life. The resurrection of the right of life in Jesus guarantees the right of everyone who lives like and in him. Lastly, it ensures hope that those who, are objectively committed to the human rights as Jesus did, are given the assurance that, even a small seed sown for justice and dignity of the other persons, will receive the final reward of the Kingdom, where there will be no hunger or thirst and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes (Cfr. Rev 7:16-17).

This fundamental right (freedom) rooted in Jesus Christ comes before anything and the evangelical counsels are not a negation of it but a maximization of it. Hence superiors should see their position as an opportunity to serve and not to lord it over their subjects especially in respect to the vow of obedience. If we want a good development for our country Nigeria, Africa and the world at large that will respond to the need of the people especially the poor and the marginalized of the society, then we need to

work more on justice for the consecrated persons who will carry out their obligations in serving the people.

It is ridiculous and contradictory to be fighting for and promoting the fundamental rights of those we work for, while those who belong to these “Institutes of Justice” undergo different forms of injustices and denial of their rights. Today we need consecrated persons who will help the people to go back to their root and make the gospel values their own. This can only be possible when the consecrated person knows that his or her rights are respected. Lastly, it will be good to commend the effort of ASEC, in contributing to the educational development of the women religious in Africa through scholarship. This is a very good initiative but each institute must be urged to make sure that their members especially the women religious gets a minimum of higher studies. It will boost their confidence; it will expose them to the reality of the marginalization of the girl child in the society and it will help in the authentic discernment of their vocation.

Conclusively, while we promote justice for consecrated persons, in the same way, each consecrated person should treasure the fundamental rights and charisms of their respective institutes and cultivate the values that sustain them for the glory of God and the Salvation of souls.

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“THE SERVICE OF AUTHORITY AND OBEDIENCE”: ITS RELEVANCE AND ACTUALITY

By
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Abstract

This paper presents the relevance and actuality of one of the major Vatican's documents concerning governance and leadership in consecrated life, “The Service of Authority And Obedience” (2008). The author highlights the relevance of the documents, the characteristic traits of consecrated life and what are benefits of this document for consecrated life in Africa.

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INTRODUCTION



This document begins with an affirmation, “*faciem tuam, Domine, requiram*”. It is your face of the Lord that I seek (Ps.27:8). This affirmation defines the human person as on pilgrimage, so as pilgrims we long and yearn for the face of God. God being the center of our Life makes Him the focus of our pilgrimage. The Consecrated Person 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. The document is addressed to all those called to witness to the primacy of God through free obedience to his will, to live their YES to the Lord in joy. The document was authored by the 'Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life'. It was published in *11 May 2008*.

The focus and methodology of the document: The document

explicitly points out that Christ is the center and focus of the obedience of the Consecrated Persons, He “is the One to whom every true obedience is directed. In fact, it is the putting of his words into practice that renders one a disciple, and it is the observance of his commandments which concretizes love for Him and draws the love of the Father.” The document focuses on the following areas:

- It addresses all those called to witness to primacy of God through free obedience to His will, to live their YES to the Lord in joy.
- The document notes that the General Chapter of every Consecrated Institute is the supreme authority.
- It noted also that the way of listening to and living authority and obedience has changed both in the Church and in the society. This is due to the awareness of the value of the individual person, with his or her vocation, intellectual, affective and spiritual gifts, with his or her freedom and rational abilities; the centrality of the spirituality of communion.
- It points out that Christ is at the center of Religious communities as the One who serves. As the One to whom faith is professed to, and the One to whom one gives his or her own obedience.
- Another area of focus is that among the Consecrated Persons, in their religious institutes, persons in authority are invested with the pastoral task of leading and deciding (cf. n.9). The beautiful thing on the authority in the Church is that is the call to serve for a stipulated period.

- The document presents the relationship between authority and obedience in the mystery of the Church and this relationship constitutes a particular actualization of its function as mediator.
- Superiors are to exercise their power, received from God through the ministry of the Church, in a spirit of service.

Organization of the document: The document is organized in three parts. In part one, the issue of Consecration and search for the will of God is discussed. In clear terms it presents that we should know the God we seek. And we should focus on *Quaerere Deum* (knowing God) and not for self-aggrandizement. This will be achieved by opening our minds and hearts to listen and obey the directives of God. This is clearly in line with the etymological meaning of obedience, '*ob-audire*' which literally means listening, to listen intently, to open one's ears to heed in practice.

The document states; “the entire Old Testament is an invitation to listen and listening is a way of coming to the New Covenant when the Lord says: “I will place my laws in their minds and I will write them in their hearts; I will be their God and they shall be my people” (n.6). Obedience flows from listening and this is done from the free will of the individual. Part one of the document further explains that the act of freedom in Obedience shows it is done out of Love. Thus the authors of this document made it clear that, “the real obedience of the believing person is adhering to the Word with which God reveals and communicates Himself, and through which he renews his covenant of love every day. By

obeying the Word, we submit ourselves to the Will of the Father, just as the Word submitted Himself to the Will of the Father.

It was also postulated in the first part of the document that in our pilgrimage and act of Obedience to God, Christ is our guide and we should learn from his example. It is He who inspires our obedience. His entire life on earth is centered on listening to the Father, so much so that "His food is to the Will of the Father" (Jn4:34).

The radical witness of Christian obedience is encapsulated in his total submission to the Will of the Father. Like Christ therefore, the Consecrated Person has placed his or her will in the hands of the Father to make a perfect and pleasing sacrifice to Him. Authority and obedience are personified in Jesus. So, they must be understood in direct relation to Him and in a real configuration to him. Consecrated life intends simply to live His Authority and His Obedience.

The Obedience of Jesus brings out the filial nature of Christian obedience. Like Christ the Christian is defined as an Obedient Being (cf. n.8). Christ is not only the model for all obedience, in addition it is to Him, every act of obedience is directed. In a succinct manner, the document states, "it is the putting of his words into practice that renders one a disciple" (cf. n.8). Christ is at the center of all Religious Community as One who serves, and as One to whom one professes one's own faith, and to whom one gives his or her own obedience. Number 10 of this document stresses on the evangelical counsel of obedience which it affirms it is a daily attitude of life. Obedience is most demanding when it is confronted with incidence that challenges our life. The number states "it is

precisely in these cases of suffering that the consecrated person learns to obey the Lord, to listen to Him and to remain devoted only to Him, waiting patiently and full of hope for his revealing Word”.

In line with this number 11 avows “if in difficult moments those who are called to obey request instantly the Father for the Spirit, he will give them the Spirit and the Spirit will give light and the strength to be obedient and will help them to know the truth and the truth makes one free”. It is therefore eminent that both the superiors and all those entrusted to them should open themselves to the Spirit. In an eloquent way the document elucidates how authority at the service of obedience leads in doing the Will of God. It is the life style of every consecrated person to seek earnestly and steadfastly the Will of God. Numbers 13-14 of the document centers on the priorities in the service of authority and the service of authority in the light of Ecclesial norms.

These are the highlights of these numbers that touched the hob or nature of authority in consecrated life:

- a) Authority as spiritual activity. This simply implies that those call to the office of authority are called to serve an ideal that is much greater than themselves. This ideal can only be approached in an atmosphere of prayer and humble seeking the face of God. This is achieved by cultivating openness to listening to others and to the signs of the times through a daily familiarity in prayer with the Word of God. (cf. n.13a)
- b) They are to promote quality time for communal prayers. They should be well-defined examples to others members of the community.
- c) The person in authority has it as part of his

responsibilities to promote the dignity of the human person (cf. n.13c). They must preserve all that is said in confidence (cf. n. 13c).

- d) They are seen as the Good Shepherd: Those in authority should be seen as having the characters of the Good Shepherd.
- e) They are seen as custodian of the charism of their institute.
- f) They keep alive the sense of faith and of ecclesial communion.

The second part of the document deals with Authority and Obedience in community life. In this part the document gave the major task of consecrated life, which is to build a fraternal community. In this community the members are called to dedicate themselves and live in the love God has poured into their heart. Fraternal life, in community is a constitutive element of religious life; it is an eloquent sign of the humanizing effects of the presence of the Reign of God. Fraternal life is the beam of religious community. Nonetheless, a good view of obedience and authority can offer a valid help for living the commandment of love in daily life especially when it has to do with facing problem regarding individual relationship. Number 16, of the document clearly emphasized the concept of the New Commandment which is base on love. It states; "if it is true that there is no meaningful community without fraternal love, it is likewise true that a correct view of obedience and authority an offer a valid help for living the commandment of love in daily life, especially when it is a question of facing problems regarding the relationship between the individual and the community." In number 17, the authors made it explicitly clear that the mandate of the superiors in union

with the persons entrusted to them, are called to build a fraternal community in Christ in which God is sought and loved above things in order to fulfill God's redemptive plan. This mandate of persons in authority in consecrated institute was equally expressed in Code of Canon Law numbers 602,618 and 619. With these mind unity and bond in community will be strengthened. "Notwithstanding, differences of race and origin, language and culture" (cf. n.18). The spirituality of communion and holiness passes through the community because through the animation of the superiors the presence of the risen Lord is felt in the community (cf. n. 19). These are strengthened by proper laws of each institute, which should be made clear and they should be enforced.

Thus, the community life of the consecrated persons has as its yardstick the new commandment, "love one another as I have loved you" (Jn. 15:12). In number 22 of the document community life is presented as a life style on a mission. It highlights that, "to love each other as the Lord has loved means to go beyond the personal merit of the brothers or sisters and to obey not one's own desires but God who speaks through the condition and needs of the brothers or sisters." Time should be invested to develop quality community life. In words of Pope John Paul II, all the fruitfulness of religious life depends on the quality of community life.

The third Part of the document centers on "Mission". How the persons in authority encourages mission:

- i. Persons in authority encourage the taking of responsibilities and respect them when taken up. They should encourage those who see some mission fearful and difficult.

- ii. Persons in authority invite us to confront diversity in a spirit of communion.
- iii. Persons in authority maintain a balance between the various dimensions of consecrated life.
- iv. Persons in authority should have a merciful heart
- v. Persons in authority should have a sense of justice
- vi. Persons in authority should promote collaboration with the laity. This collaboration will make everyone to participate actively in the ministry of Christ.

THE CHARACTERISTIC TRAITS OF CONSECRATED LIFE

The document eloquently affirms that, Consecrated Life, as a vocation is meant to make the characteristic traits of the virginal, poor and obedient Jesus visible (cf. n. 1). This assertion of the document, affirms the Post synodal Apostolic exhortation of John Paul II, that; “The Consecrated Life, deeply rooted in the example and teaching of Christ the Lord, is a gift of God the Father to his Church through the Holy spirit. By the profession of the evangelical counsels the characteristic features of Jesus – the chaste, poor and obedient one – are made constantly visible”. As such the Consecrated persons in their bearing witness to the evangelical counsels are guided by the example of Christ. He is the one who inspires us by his way of life, that is, his poverty, obedience and chastity.

Concentrating on the vow of obedience the Consecrated persons make, the document states: “It is Christ who inspires our obedience in order that the divine plan of salvation be completed through us. In Him everything is a listening to and acceptance of the Father ... the will of the Father is the food

which sustains Jesus in his work, ... it is by this obedience of Jesus that all shall become just" (cf. n.8).

To this effect the consecrated persons are called to the following of the obedient Christ within an 'evangelical project' or a 'charismatic one', inspired by the Spirit and authenticated by the Church. This is done within the religious community.

Concisely, the document explains the religious community, as a communion of consecrated persons who profess to seek together and carry out God's will: a community of sisters or brothers with a variety of roles but with the same goal and the same passion, finds its meaning. In the community all are called to seek the face of God (*faciem tuam Domine*), and obey Him, some are temporarily given the charge of exercising particular task of being the sign of unity and the guide in the common search both personal and communitarian of carrying out the will God. This indeed is the Service of Authority. (cf. n.1).

The evangelical counsel of obedience, which the consecrated persons vow is a reflection of the filial nature of Christ obedience. Christ sees His mission as coming to accomplish the WILL of His Father. Christ's obedience to the Father is the Obedience of Son and Father. Through the vow of Obedience, the Consecrated Person has placed his or her will in the hands of the Father to make a perfect and pleasing sacrifice to Him (Rm.12:1).

Regarding the superiors of the Consecrated Institutes, the document exhorts that they "are to exercise their power, received from God through the ministry of the Church, in a spirit of service" (cf. n9.). The superiors must open themselves to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, and remain docile to the will of God.

The relevance of the document

The relevance of this document to consecrated persons cannot be over emphasized. It expatiated the role of persons in authority in consecrated life; 'In consecrated life authority is first of all a spiritual authority'. This is a concept the document; *Fraternal life in community*, upholds (cf. n. 50). In a more human way it went ahead to elucidate that, persons in authority should recognize that they are called to serve an ideal that is much greater than themselves. This ideal is to be accomplished by prayers and humble seeking the will of God. The persons in authority are to allow the Spirit of God to direct them, and allow themselves to be spiritual. This spiritual aspect of carrying out authority underlines the fact that persons in authority are carrying out sacred act.

To this effect, it is clearly stated in the document that Persons in authority are to promote the hours of prayers in the community. They must make effort to mediate daily on the word of God, and make sure reverence and adoration is given to the Holy Eucharist. This should take the pride of place in the community, since it is the source and summit of the Christian Life.

Since authority is carried out in a community of persons, the document brought out an essential element and quality the persons in authority should possess. Thus, it further explains, the persons in authority should have listening ears this is the *raison d'être* of Consecrated Life.

As earlier stated that the way of listening to and living authority and obedience has changed both in the Church and in the society. This is due to the awareness of the value of the individual person. Hence, the document says, persons in

authority are called to promote the dignity of the person, paying attention to each member of the community and to his or her growth, giving to each one the appropriate appreciation and positive consideration, nurturing sincere affection towards all and keeping reserved all that is said in confidence. This is the anthropological dimension of the document.

They are to be seen as source of hope and courage. Persons in authority are called to inspire courage and hope in the midst of difficulties, just as the Apostles did to the early churches. They should recognize their own limits, which will help to form others.

Regarding the Charism of a particular institute, it is the role of the persons in authority to be custodian of the Charism of their own religious family. As a matter of fact they are the promoter of their Charism. For fruitful understanding of their charism persons in authority should have adequate knowledge of the charism of the institute. This will equally enable them to appreciate their responsibility of accompanying the journey of ongoing formation. This they do by intervening in problems, and paying attention to the normal growth of each one in every phase and season of life.

The persons in authority are saddled with the responsibility to promote growth of fraternal life through the following ways:

i. **THE SERVICE OF LISTENING**

As it is reflected in *Perfectae Caritatis* 14, the exercise of authority is in generous listening to those who have been entrusted to the persons in authority. The act of listening is a ministry that the superiors should be involved in. Through listening, affection and

understanding is conveyed. The superior who does not listen to his brothers or sisters does not listen to God. (cf. n. 20a). When the superior listens to those entrusted to him or her, this makes him or her to make better decision. Time spent in listening is never time wasted, and listening can often prevent crises and difficult times both on the individual and community levels.

ii. Creation of an atmosphere favourable to dialogue, sharing and co-responsibility:

Creating an environment of trust, recognition of the abilities and the sensitivities of individuals should be part of the superiors concern. They should make it clear that the community requires participation and information. (cf. 20b.) Free dialogue follows the act of listening. The fruit of this is the right decisions will be taken, and solutions will be provided.

iii. Soliciting the contribution of all for the concerns of all

The superior has it as a duty to stimulate and motivate each member of the community to contribute his or her own charity, competence and creativity. Because the community is what her members make it. As a matter of fact all the human resources are strengthened and brought together in the community project, motivating and respecting them.

IV. AT THE SERVICE OF THE INDIVIDUAL AND OF THE COMMUNITY

The superiors must take abilities and predispositions of

persons into consideration before giving them responsibilities.

V. **COMMUNITY DISCERNMENT**

The document expressed that the Holy Spirit inspires the community life. John Paul II, in *Vita Consecrata*, unequivocally, affirms that the consecrated community is the gift of the Holy Spirit. Through fraternal dialogue in the community the Father's will is discovered. The spirit of discernment has to characterize every decision-making process that involves the community. It includes openness to discover the truth of the members of the community, attention to the signs of times, freedom from prejudices and courage to ground firmly one's own point of view. Community discernment is not a substitute of the nature and function of persons in authority, from whom the final decision is expected. Nonetheless, the persons in authority cannot ignore that the community is the best place in which to recognize and accept the will of God. In any case, discernment is one of the peak moment in a consecrated community where the centrality of God, that ultimate end of everyone's search.

vi. Discernment, authority and obedience

The document made a pin pointed statement that the community cannot be in a state of continuous discernment. After the time of discernment there is time for obedience, which is the implementation of the decision that acquired from discernment.

The benefits of this document to Consecrated Life in Nigeria/Africa

Prospectively, the Nigeria culture will benefit a lot from this document because it stresses and underlines the importance of listening and obeying. Reflecting on the culture of Nigeria or the entire African continent it is taken that “obedience is an attitude of a son or daughter” (cf. n.5). The Nigeria culture is reflected in the teachings of the document when it affirms “it is that particular kind of listening that only a son or daughter can do in listening to his or her parent, because it is enlightened by the certainty that the parent has only good things to say and give to him or her” (cf. n.5).

It is of great value that the Nigerian church should benefit from this document the idea that; “leaders of the community are like the Good Shepherd who give his life to the sheep, because even in the critical moment they do not retreat, but are present, participating in the concerns and the difficulties of the people confided to their care, involving themselves personally, and like the Good Samaritan they will be ready to care for any possible wounds”(cf. 13).

In an eloquent manner, the document stressed another important fact that is very much relevant to the Consecrated Life in Nigeria and the entire Africa continent, which is, authority at the service of obedience to the Will of God. Persons in authority are to sincerely serve all. This is in imitation to our Saviour, who came to serve and not to be served. (cf. Mk10:45).

Persons in authority in Nigeria and in other African country should embrace the injunction of the document, which acknowledges that: “obedience even under the best conditions is not easy, but it is made easier when the

consecrated person sees persons in authority place themselves at the humble and hardworking service of the community and of the mission" (cf.n21).

All consecrated institutes in the Nigeria should embrace this document, because it simplifies the role of superiors in their respective consecrated institute. The domestication of this document will be of great value and inspiration among consecrated persons. Applying the teachings of this document in the Nigerian Church will face out the wrong concept of hierarchy in the Nigerian Church. Among the consecrated persons authority will be seen as purely a God-given opportunity to care and serve one another, and obedience to constituted authority will be seen as a singular act of holiness.

The pastoral dimension of authority in the building of fraternal life in community will be a wake-up call to all persons in authority. A superior should realized that it is in attending to the needs of his or her members, taking good care of the sick, to console the faint of heart and to be patient toward all that he or she truly serve as a person in authority. Superiors should search assiduously with the help of prayer, reflection, and the advice of others for what God really wills. They should watch out not to be playing God, or see themselves as demi-god.

New concepts the document presents to the Church

In actual fact, the document presented what the Church has reflected upon severally in various documents she has published but in a different way. Worthy of note is the emphasis the document laid on pastoral care of the members of the community as the basic duty of the persons in authority. It postulated, "in religious community authority is

essentially pastoral by its nature in that it is entirely in function of the building of fraternal life in community according to the very ecclesial identity of consecrated life” (cf. n.14). They are to meet the needs of their members, taking good care of the sick, to console the faint of heart and to be patient toward all. This is achieved through constantly listening to the Word of God and celebrating the liturgy.

Importantly, the document under review gave these guideline for superiors of religious institute: Nothing is done without his agreement, he or she should do nothing without God's agreement, those in authority should act in such a way that those you are leading will listen to you as if they are listening to God. Finally, reverence to God makes all remain humble. Quoting St. Augustine, the document presents, those who obey always fulfills the will of God

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION:

This document convincingly and precisely present to us the ideal way in which authority should be viewed and how it should be exercised. The person in authority should keep a high level of openness to being formed as well as the ability to learn from life. The relevance of this document in general to the Consecrated life is that, it made it clear what should be our preoccupation. How the Consecrated Person should freely and out love embraces themselves in Obedience to the Word of God. Seeing this act as the *raison d'être* of their calling. This will be further strengthening with the act of meditation in which they develop close relationship with God.

I completely align to the convincing assertion of the document that; It is in the case of doing what basically goes against our own whims and caprices that the consecrated

person learns to obey the Lord, to listen to Him and to remain devoted only to Him(cf. n.10).

The evangelical vow of obedience is well handed in this document, it is seen as a holy act that binds us to the Will of God. As a religious vow it is a medium of pleasing God. When genuine obedience is practiced, God is at the center for which sake it practiced. Thus it is for the sake of God we should obey those entrusted with the office of leadership.

In an emphatic manner the document states, "Contrary to the spirit of discord and division, authority and obedience shine like a sign of that unique Fatherhood which comes from God, of the brotherhood born of the Spirit. Nothing unifies the community like obedience.

My over-all impression of this document is that all consecrated persons are called to radically live out their vows of obedience in the community and fulfill it in their mission. Thus, in the quest of doing God's will and guiding others to the same, superiors, must note that authority and obedience are not therefore two distinct realities or things absolutely opposed but rather two dimensions of the same evangelical reality, of the same Christian mystery. It is through this process true fraternity is built. This is what this document advocated for.

Mutual respect that comes from fraternal obedience should be the hallmark of every consecrated community. True fraternity is based on the recognition of the dignity of the brothers or sisters and becomes concrete in the attention given to others and to their needs. The language of this document is simple that is why it is a masterpiece for all consecrated persons.

Conclusively, the service of authority and obedience

addressed how the vocation to Consecrated Life in our present day should be lived in line of imitating the Lord who came to serve not to be served. Superiors and those vested with authority should see their appointment or election as an opportunity to serve. This service is seen as prophetic and radical way of living to the fullest the evangelical counsel of obedience. Is more relevant in the Church of Nigeria that is still under the yoke of *Clericalism*. The teaches of the document underline the fact that being in authority does not make you Lord and master or a demigod but in an unassuming manner it makes the humble one.



LEADING THE PEOPLE OF GOD THROUGH WITNESSING TO TRUTH AND MERCY

Clifford AYEGWALO, OMV¹⁴¹

ABSTRACT

Leading the people of God is the art of making the kingdom of God present to all men and women in this world through witnessing in truth and mercy. Truth and mercy are among the greatest attributes of God, and these attributes enhance human dignity, which is grounded on God. With this in mind, this article argues that these people of God whose dignity are firmly rooted in God cannot be successfully led without these vital attributes of truth and mercy. This assertion raises the need for better understanding of these two wonderful attributes which seems to be lacking in some Church leaders. The consequence of this good understanding makes the leadership of the people of God a service that must be carried

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INTRODUCTION



out with all truthfulness to our human nature that is always begging for God's mercy and not a false idea of leadership that dominate others.

Human civilization experienced a great change which revolutionized human ideas in the wake of the enlightenment. With the seeming subtle consensus among the enlightenment thinkers that God is dead, there became the feeling that there was then no need for faith anymore; and reason became excessively elevated. With the creation of secular states, reason was then placed at the service of leadership, and this led to significant advancement in science and technology. There was then the rapid erosion of religious and moral traditions to create excessive freedom; an increase in pluralism and individualism, growing material inequality (survival of the fittest), and environmental devastation.¹⁴² However, the more humanity claimed to be growing, the less consciousness it had of himself. The old

¹⁴²Ingeborg Gabriel, "Christianity in an Age of Uncertainty: a Catholic Perspective" in *Between Relativism and Fundamentalism: Religious Resources for a middle Position*, ed Peter L. Berger (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 125.

question of suffering and evil in the world does not just remain but instead became worse. Humanity became fascinated with the domination of one another, manipulate nature, and relativism gradually replaced truth. The result is that while so much good has come out from human progress, a dark, amoral, self-destructive force has come about also; the latter chiefly resulting from the failure to realize our daily need for God's mercy.

Thus, even the Church of Christ, which is "in the world but not of the world," was also significantly affected by these ideas. With freedom and science giving humanity a false sense of power, and significantly influencing Church leadership too, there became the vain thinking that humans are the creators rather than the "beloved" creatures of time and space.¹⁴³ The resultant effect is that the concept of leading the people of God became nebulous, without substance, and merely 'edifying' – meanings are sometimes given to it. All these became realities because some Church leaders rather than becoming seekers of God's truth and mercy started seeing themselves as the owners of God's mercy and the framers of ethics and morals, be they counter to the Jesus' teachings or not.

According to Kasper, "Where faith on God evaporates, it leaves behind, as even Nietzsche knew, a void and an unending coldness, because without God and his mercy we

¹⁴³David A. Fisher, "One Mercy and Human Forgiveness", https://www.academia.edu/11327283/On_the_Mercy_of_God_and_Human_Forgiveness (Accessed on 17.07.2020).

are completely and hopelessly handed over to worldly fate, chance, and the impulse of history."¹⁴⁴ Leading the people of God without truth and mercy is a journey towards futility because such a journey is a journey with a map of absurdity that makes life in the Church meaningless. To give meaningful leadership service in the Church, the Church leaders must recognize their very being and essence, and the being and essence of their followers, which is dependent on God and his truth and mercy. They are dependent on God because their dignity comes from God.

Consequently, in a modern world like ours, full of hatred, chaos, relativism and injustices laced with constant abuse of human dignity and environmental pollution, this essay is, therefore, to be understood, from the background of an urgent reminder of the need to witness to the story of God's mercy and truth through the leadership of the people of God. Leading the modern people of God without truth and mercy, like Kasper opines, leads to a progress that turn them into resourceful animals,¹⁴⁵ who find enjoyment only in material things because they lack happiness, hope, and genuine meaning of life.

With this background, this work proceeds to attempt a theological understanding of the concept of truth and mercy, then the meeting point between truth and mercy, how Church leaders can witness to God in mercy and truth, and then arrive at a conclusion.

¹⁴⁴Walter Kasper, *Mercy: The Essence of The Gospel and The Key to Christian Life*, Trans. William Madges (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2013), 4.

¹⁴⁵Walter Kasper, *Mercy: The Essence of The Gospel*, 3

MERCY AND TRUTH: IN SEARCH OF UNDERSTANDING

In an insightful reflection, Cardinal Walter Kasper while elucidating on the theology of mercy, conceived it as “the essence and the key to Christian life.”¹⁴⁶ This was reiterated by Pope Francis when he posited mercy as “the very heart of God!”¹⁴⁷ These ideas find theological validity in the sacred scriptures, making it much more significantly imperative for a good understanding of the theology of mercy especially in the Churches' usage and dispersing of mercy.

Linguistically, the English word 'Mercy' expresses very little with its etymological root in the old French *merci*, *the latter* which has its root in the Latin *mercies* meaning "reward, gift, kindness," describing the recompense to the merciful person. The German connotation of the word Mercy is a bit more fascinating and insightful. The two important terms used for Mercy in German are *Barmherzigkeit* and *Erbarmen*. These two terms designate a merciful attitude, and they have meaning that goes beyond affective disposition.¹⁴⁸ Both words stem from 'barm' which in German means bosom and that is why the liturgical term *Erbarmen* means, "to cherish in one's bosom" making it fit for the German penitential rite, "*Herr Erbarmen dich*" meaning "lord have mercy." The other stem for *Barmherzigkeit* is *Herz* meaning "heart" and this *Barmherzigkeit* can be traced to the

¹⁴⁶In his book *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life*, Kasper argues that mercy is the most visible attribute and the essence of God's revelation, and so it is supposed to be the most crucially relevant topic in modern Christianity, but the tragically it seems currently like a forgotten topic in Catholic dogmatic theology and so it becomes pertinent to revisit it, See, Walter Kasper, *Mercy: The Essence of The Gospel*, 2.

¹⁴⁷Francesca Merlo, "Pope at Audience: Make mercy the air you breathe", <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-03/pope-francis-general-audience-make-mercy-air-you-breathe-5th.html> (Accessed one 17.07.2020)

¹⁴⁸Walter Kasper, *Mercy: The Essence of The Gospel*, xii

Latin *Misericordia* with the suggestion that one has his or her heart with the poor.¹⁴⁸

One of the problems of the biblical portrayal of the metaphysical conception of God, is the designation of God in the Old Testament as a transcendent being that is vengeful, angry, and chastising; while the New Testament God is a gracious and merciful God. But contrary to this claim, God in the Old Testament answers to the sin of the people by revealing his mercy which remains forever faithful to the covenant.¹⁵⁰ For instance, Deut. 4:31; cf. 13:18; 30:3, states that "Yahweh your God is a merciful God. He will not abandon you nor destroy you, nor forget the covenant which he swore to your fathers." This particular verse is characteristic of God's Mercy which in the Old Testament is designated with the Hebrew word *Rachamim* for "compassion" and "mercy". The word stems from *rechem*, which means "womb."¹⁵¹ Consequently, the term *mercy* as associated with the concept of the womb is reflective of the theology of God's maternal love. This depiction of maternal love is presented in many instances in the Old Testament, especially in the Prophetic books like Is 49:15; Hos. 11:8 and Jer. 31:20, with different shades of meanings.

However, dominant in all the instances, is the strict depiction of the quality of God's love for his people; a degree of love that supersedes even human filial expressions of love. It is an exemplification of the love of a mother for her child which nothing can break; an everlastingly irrevocable love.

¹⁴⁹Walter Kasper, *Mercy: The Essence of The Gospel*, xii

¹⁵⁰Francesco Giosuè Voltaggio, "Mercy in Christianity Biblical and Theological Notes" *Mercy Without Boundaries* Edited by Biju Michael, David Rosen, Francesco Voltaggio, Iyad Zahalka (Jerusalem: STS Publication, 2016), 31.

¹⁵¹Walter Kasper, *Mercy: The Essence of The Gospel*, 42.

"In everlasting love I had mercy on you!" the prophet Isaiah speaks of God in Is 54:8. "The merciful love of God, the source of living water, the prophet Jeremiah corroborates in Jer. 17:13, "it gives life and recreates man who had fallen into idolatry and sin."¹⁵² Furthermore, Psalm 51 was most profoundly vivid in the invocation of the mercy and love of God, saying: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your faithful love (*hesed*), according to the greatness of your mercy (*rachamim*) blot out my transgressions". In the words of Kasper, "*Hesed* goes beyond mere emotion and grief at human deprivation; it means God's free and gracious turning toward the human person with care. It concerns a concept of relationship, which characterizes not only a single action, but rather an ongoing attitude and posture".¹⁵³ This expression is a reflection on one of the unexpected and unmerited gifts of God's grace which can transcend every human relationship of reciprocity.¹⁵⁴ The meaning of the word mercy in the Old Testament goes beyond the biblical use ascribed to the word to summarize the whole book as a reflection of God's mercy. This mercy is seen in his creation of humanity, (Gen 1:27-30) how he provides resistance to evil threatening humanity; how he is always attentive to the mystery of his people (Ex. 3:7-8). Thus, the being of God in the Old Testament is revealed in his mercy. Mercy is the expression of his divine essence. He is faithful to himself and to his people who are always unfaithful to him.

More still, the New Testament authors used two Greek verbs in expressing the concept of divine mercy: *eleein* (*eleos*) and

¹⁵² Francesco Giosuè Voltaggio, "Mercy in Christianity Biblical and Theological Notes", 32.

¹⁵³ Walter Kasper, *Mercy: The Essence of The Gospel*, 43.

¹⁵⁴ Walter Kasper, *Mercy: The Essence of The Gospel*, 43.

splanchnizesthai. The last verb is commonly translated as meaning "to have compassion". While, however, compassion may indicate a feeling that remains in the outer sphere of the person, the Greek verb designates something very intimate and profound.¹⁵⁵

In the New Testament, this mercy of God is revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus coming is a fulfilment of the merciful action promised by God from generation to generation. (Lk 1:50-54). While all the gospels of the New Testament express the fulfilment of this mercy of Jesus Christ, no gospel gave a profound description of Jesus' act of mercy like the gospel of St. Luke. Luke emphasizes that God is the one who saves the lowly and the unworthy. That is a beautiful theology of mercy! This theme begins early in the gospel as we hear Mary's Magnificat in which she praises God as the one who lifts the lowly. We see it again in Luke's parable of the lost sheep and the lost coin, (Lk 15:11-32). We recognize it also in the story of the poor beggar Lazarus, who is raised to glory in the bosom of Abraham. We recognized it in the story of Zacchaeus. However, there are no characters in Luke's gospel that capture this theme more perfectly than the Prodigal Son in Lk 15:20 and the criminal in Luke 23:35-43. We know almost nothing about these men before their sudden appearance in Luke. While one is a character in the parable, the other is a historical figure. We do not know their name. We do not know their age. The one thing we know about them is that they were unworthy beyond measure. From their lips, they admitted that they had committed crimes for which they should be justly punished. They have

¹⁵⁵Francesco Giosuè Voltaggio, "Mercy in Christianity Biblical and Theological Notes", 33.

made a mess of their lives. The courage to admit their sins and ask for forgiveness gave back to them their dignity which is the direct consequences of God's mercy. God's mercy does not humiliate us, but washes us clean from our dirt and ushers us into God's kingdom. Luke could not be clearer that our salvation does not depend solely on our goodness, but God's goodness and mercy. Our salvation does not depend on our worthiness – only on God's mercy.¹⁵⁶ It was because of this fact that Jesus cannot always stay away from sinners, for it is because of them that he came.

This message of mercy which is the central theme of Jesus' teachings became the mandate given to the Church, and it is only when we view the Church from this perspective as being born from the mercy of God in Jesus Christ can one understand the experience of the Church as Mother. Hence, one cannot speak of the Church without reference to mercy, because the foundation of the Church is God's love for humanity.

Accordingly, a theological understanding of Mercy for Kasper is "a matter of attentiveness and sensitivity to the concrete needs we encounter. It is a matter of overcoming the focus on ourselves that makes us deaf and blind to the physical and spiritual needs of others. It is a matter of dissolving the hardening of our hearts to God's call that we hear in the encounter with the adversity of others."¹⁵⁷ As "the expression of God's divine essence,¹⁵⁸ it is that which enables us to see and begin to understand God. One might

¹⁵⁶George M. Smiga, "Where We Find Our King" Homily for the Solemnity of Christ the King, November 25th, 2007, <https://buildingontheword.org/homilies/cycle-c-2/c-solemnity-of-christ-the-king/> (Accessed on 22.07.2020).

¹⁵⁷Walter Kasper, *Mercy: The Essence of The Gospel*, 143.

¹⁵⁸Walter Kasper, *Mercy: The Essence of The Gospel*, 51.

even say the first word of theology, then, must be mercy. Dependent upon that word, Kasper continues, it "leads human beings to 'a return to the truth about themselves,'"¹⁵⁹ and is the "watermark of all reality...the primordial presupposition and ground of creation and all of salvation history."¹⁶⁰ In this way, Kasper establishes mercy as a necessary first condition of theological hermeneutics. To interpret correctly – whether God, ourselves, our creation – we must gaze through the lens of mercy.

TOWARDS A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF TRUTH

It was Pontius Pilate who asked Jesus "what is truth" (Jn 18:37). Biblically, the word truth is designated by the word *Amat*. In connection with God, *Amat* means "God is trustworthy." "This understanding of truth is related to God's promises for the future, and this is necessarily entangled with time."¹⁶¹ From this, it becomes clear that the Old Testament conceived truth as not yet revealed but contingent upon time. The consequence is that truth is beyond human grasp. Thus, one can only believe in this truth in the light of revelation.¹⁶² Interestingly, the same understanding of truth is found in Plato's philosophy in his designation of truth with the term (*Aletheia*). Plato's epistemology in his allegory of the cave depicts truth as beyond natural possibilities of the human mind. "It is only by illumination of the human mind that one can partake in the

¹⁵⁹Walter Kasper, *Mercy: The Essence of The Gospel*, 71.

¹⁶⁰Walter Kasper, *Mercy: The Essence of The Gospel*, 97.

¹⁶¹Habil Wolfgang Ahtner, "Truth and proof in mathematics and (philosophical) theology" 2011, PtI

https://www.academia.edu/7194693/Truth_and_Proof_in_Mathematics_and_Philosophical_Theology, (Accessed one 20.07.2020)

transcendent truth"¹⁶³ Aristotle understands truth as that which is not outside the human beings in things, but it is inside in the human mind. For Aristotle, Truth and falsehood are in the mind of who makes a judgement.¹⁶⁴

However, the Church's understanding of truth fits with Plato's and the biblical notion stated above. Augustine, for example, identified truth with the indubitable self-consciousness.¹⁶⁵ Thinking in line with Plato, he argued that "truth must be beyond the changing modes and uncertainty of sense perception; it has to be necessary, unchangeable and beyond space and time." This understanding of truth for him, must be rooted in the eternal ideas of God because only God is the Truth; *Deus est veritas*. To access this truth, man needs divine illumination; and to access this divine illumination, one has to retreat from worldly entanglement and observe introspection. Truth for Augustine lives in the soul and cannot be created by reason. Reason only finds truth. Reason does not create truth.

For Aquinas, truth is "the correspondence of statements represented in the intellect and real facts".¹⁶⁷ This definition of truth had a significant influence on theology because it introduced criteria for verifying theological truth claims. The truth is, therefore, not a personal opinion but a reflection in the mind of what can be seen in reality. This conception of truth as objective and

¹⁶²Habil Wolfgang Achtner, "Truth and proof in mathematics, Pt I

¹⁶³Habil Wolfgang Achtner, "Truth and proof in mathematics, Pt I

¹⁶⁴Habil Wolfgang Achtner, "Truth and proof in mathematics, Pt I

¹⁶⁵Habil Wolfgang Achtner, "Truth and proof in mathematics, Pt II

¹⁶⁶Habil Wolfgang Achtner, "Truth and proof in mathematics, Pt II

¹⁶⁷Habil Wolfgang Achtner, "Truth and proof in mathematics, Pt II

universal was attacked by the modern philosophy of rationalism, reducing truth to relativism. This relativism created excessive freedom that feeds on materialism and nihilism which devalues the dignity of the human person. As a result, there was then the need to revisit the idea of truth, as essentially vital for Christian salvation.

This is why pastoring a Church in a world with increasing modernist ideas, the re-visitation of the Church's idea of truth became central to the pontificate of the philosopher-theologian Pope, John Paul II. His understanding of truth, contained in his two encyclicals, *Veritatis Splendour* and *Fides et Ratio*, find valid meaning in the church's extant understanding of truth.

According to John Paul, "The Supreme Good and the moral good meet in *truth*: the truth of God, the Creator and Redeemer, and the truth of man, created and redeemed by him."¹⁶⁸ This is the logic "which is the valid source of meaning for human life",¹⁶⁹ and it is a "point of reference which cannot be ignored if the mystery of human life is to be known"¹⁷⁰ as the fullness of truth that was revealed to the Church through the Paschal Mystery, Jesus Christ, the Word that became flesh and dwelt among us (Jn 1:14). For John Paul, therefore, relying on his Augustinian/Thomistic background, God himself is not only the "Supreme Good";¹⁷¹ the source and foundation of all goodness, but also truth itself (*prima veritas*).¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸Pope John Paul II, *Veritas Splendour*: One The Splendour of Truth (Vatican: Liberia Editrice, 1993), n. 99

¹⁶⁹Pope, John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*: On The Relationship Between Faith And Reason (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice 1998), n. 21

¹⁷⁰Pope, John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, n. 14.

¹⁷¹Pope, John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, n. 83.

¹⁷²Pope John Paul II, *Veritas Splendor*, n. 9, 35, 40, *Fides et Ratio*, n. 22

With this background, he averred that "Truth is not born of consensus but correspondence between intellect and objective reality."¹⁷³ This is the case in respect of not only truth and knowledge in general, but also theological and moral truth and knowledge in particular. Thus, he incorporates the ontological commitments of moral and theological realism, that is, that propositions are true in virtue of their correspondence with a transcendent moral law and divine reality.

In particular, John Paul holds that truth is such that if a proposition is true, then what that proposition states is, in fact, the case about objective reality; otherwise, it is false. This is a realist theory of truth, a non-epistemic one because truth does not depend on justification, but on the world – reality. Given this distinction, John Paul's concept of truth should be construed within the distinction between epistemic and non-epistemic conceptions of truth.¹⁷⁴ The former holds that a proposition is true if and only if I am epistemically justified in holding that proposition to be accurate. The latter position denies that truth depends on justification. He went further to argue that though that truth is multidimensional, it is however objective and universal and independent of the knower's opinion. What is true is true regardless of who possesses it. The Pope thinks that the idea of truth is, first, indissolubly linked to that of claims to *universality*. "Driven by the desire to discover the ultimate truth of existence, human beings seek to acquire those universal elements of knowledge which enable them to

¹⁷³Pope, John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, n.57

¹⁷⁴Eduardo Echeverria, "The Splendour of Truth in *Fides et Ratio*" 2018, 3 [https://www.academia.edu/38612942/The_Splendor_of_Truth_in_Fides_et_Ratio_\(Accessed_one_18.07.202\).](https://www.academia.edu/38612942/The_Splendor_of_Truth_in_Fides_et_Ratio_(Accessed_one_18.07.202).)

understand themselves better and to advance in their self-realization."¹⁷⁵ It is based on this indissoluble link between truth and universality, that he rejects relativism, radical contextualism, or, as he calls it, historicism; because it "denies the enduring validity of truth."¹⁷⁶

Therefore, while our judgments about truth may vary, in other words, their epistemic status, truth itself does not change; because it transcends the limits of cultural context. In his own words, "Truth can never be confined to time and culture; in history, it is known, but it also reaches beyond history."¹⁷⁷ Furthermore, Truth sometimes transcends our human language, and that is why the linguistic and conceptual expressions may change, but not the truth.¹⁷⁸ Thus, there can be different linguistic expressions of the same truth, that is, of the same proposition. This corroborates the church's teachings and dogma on eternal truth. The teachings of the Church found in her dogma contain eternal truth that can never change in meaning, but the Church working with the "signs of the time" renew herself always be refining her language used in expressing these truths.

Summarily, the biblical, philosophical and theological understanding of truth affirms the fact of truth being objective, universal, and it is a designation of God who revealed himself in his son Jesus, and humanity which has

¹⁷⁵Pope, John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, n. 4

¹⁷⁶Eduardo Echeverria, "The Splendor of Truth in *Fides et Ratio*", n. 4

¹⁷⁷Pope, John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, n. 95

¹⁷⁸Eduardo Echeverria, "The Splendor of Truth in *Fides et Ratio*", n. 7

been redeemed by Jesus Christ. This was further demonstrated by Pope John Paul II's *Veritatis Splendor* and *Fides et Ratio* where he presents a proper integration of propositional truth and the authentication of truth, positing a solution for many of the controversies in the Church's interpretation of dogmatic truth given prevailing contemporary pastoral realities.

THE MEETING POINT BETWEEN TRUTH AND MERCY

The need for a converging understanding of truth and mercy is a crucially imperative need, given its urgently necessary place in leading the people of God. The relationship between truth and mercy exemplifies God's relationship with mortal men. In the words of Jesus, the spirit will lead us to the Truth Jn 14:26, and only this truth will set us free Jn 8:31-32. Humanity's attempt at understanding itself in history has demonstrated that confrontation with the truth is human's biggest problem. This is so because acceptance of the truth of humanity's weakness in the face of a powerful and righteous God shatters human's desire for domination. This is the point where mercy and truth confront one another. It is God's mercy that keeps those who genuinely seek the truth of their humanity in the face of a righteous God from being overwhelmed by their weakness and guilt, which can lead to despair. This is where the question of God's justice and mercy is emphatically situated.

According to Pope Francis, Sacred Scripture presents God as infinite mercy and as perfect justice. It might appear, however, that the two are a contradiction: how can we

reconcile the reality of mercy with the demands of justice?¹⁷⁹ For Kasper, "God's mercy is not in opposition to God's justice; rather, God's mercy serves his justice and brings it to realization."¹⁸⁰ The absolute Truth of God's righteousness and justice are based on mercy, acknowledging God's holiness or his justice is an acknowledgement of his mercy. This is necessary so that there can be an avoidance of the false interpretation of the Old testament that depicts an oversaturated emotional God that destroys anyone evil. In his compassion and mercy, God demonstrates his holiness and greatness and that is why God's wrath does not mean a surging emotional rage or an angry intervention, but rather God's resistance to sin and injustice.¹⁸¹ It is here that our understanding of heaven and hell finds theological meaning. The decision of individual's destination to heaven or hell lies in humanity's choices. For God's justice does not condemn but redeem those who ask for it (Jn 3:18).

Therefore, the message of God's mercy is not an act of cheap grace; it must be accompanied by the truth that demands that we act right and conform to our Christian calling. For this reason, mercy is God's creative and fertile justice.¹⁸² Here we realize how truth and mercy need each other. Only to the extent that mercy is grounded on truth can it endure and achieve necessary repentance. Without truth, mercy cannot establish a stable relationship between God and man, because it cannot liberate our isolated ego or redeem it. Hence, without mercy, truth becomes cold,

¹⁷⁹Pope Francis, "General Audience of February 3 2016," in *L'Osservatore Romano*, Number 6, 12th February, 2016, 2.

¹⁸⁰Walter Kasper, *Mercy: The Essence of The Gospel*, 42

¹⁸¹Walter Kasper, *Mercy: The Essence of The Gospel*, 53

¹⁸²Walter Kasper, *Mercy: The Essence of The Gospel*, 54

impersonal, and oppressive for the people. The truth we seek must be the truth that can be given in mercy. Truth and mercy are therefore love's two pillars which Christians must rely on, and heartily seek, if they want to experience the peace that comes with entering into the righteousness of Christ. As Psalm 85:10 *beautifully* says, "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other."

LEADING THE PEOPLE OF GOD: A WITNESS TO TRUTH AND MERCY

With the forgoing profound understanding of truth and mercy and their relationship, which has shaped our Christian belief, it raises the question on how we can bring this message to the people of God in our service of leadership. In a world that is fascinated by a false sense of power and domination, which has greatly influenced the Church and her ministers, there is a clarion call for good leaders in the Church.

First, to properly answer this call means letting go of that false sense of human achievement this is responsible for the false sense of superiority over others. Church leaders must always be conscious of the fact that all of humanity is specks of dust in a vast universe, but "beloved" specks of dust, like Christianity teaches. Dust that God breathed life into and claimed as his sons and daughters, and gave us "stewardship" over the rest of the landscape he had painted into being. Letting go of this false sense of achievements over the others means acknowledging the transient nature of power, and that there is a power greater than ourselves, which is found in Christ Jesus. The appointment to church

leadership as ministers is an appointment to serve, a religious position construed in preclusion as lawmakers with the deciding powers to do whatever is subjectively judged right. Such is a negation in loss of the true sense of religious service, one that is supposed to be constantly confronted with its fragile, limited, and fallible humanity; the moment of heartfelt truth of conversion, in realization of the need for God's mercy.

Secondly, leadership in the Church should never lose sight of the need for mercy which springs forth from the realization of the truth of who we are and this our identity calls for humility.¹⁸³ It is only in seeking and accepting God's mercy that we also learn the virtue of forgiveness. Leadership that cannot ask for forgiveness from God and his followers or finds it difficult to forgive cannot be in accord with the mission of Jesus Christ who had compassion for his followers always. Leading the people of God means being in solidarity with them, to recognize their strength and weakness, it is not leading because we are better, it is leading because we know what it means to be led by a loving God. Church leadership is not for the perfect but for wounded healers who are always seeking for God's mercy. It is a testimony to the power of mercy and our obedience of Jesus' command to be merciful just like our heavenly father (Lk 6:36). While there is a constant call to holiness of life through prayer and living the evangelical counsel, our greatest testimony of God's mercy is displayed in our leadership of the people of God in Truth and mercy. According to Kasper, Jesus Christ exclusively listed works of mercy as the criterion

¹⁸³David A. Fisher, "On the Mercy of God and Human Forgiveness"
Walter Kasper, Mercy: *The Essence of The Gospel*, 133

for judgement rather than pious deeds. "In doing this, Jesus seizes upon the words of the Prophet Hosea: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice'" (Matt. 9:13; 12:7; Hose 6:6).¹⁸⁴We see this demonstrated in all Jesus' teaching with connection with the heavenly reward (Matt 18:23-35). Heaven is the reward for merciful acts because we can only see the king of mercy and truth, if, in our leadership of God's people, our neighbours experience something of the miracle of God's royal dominion."

Thirdly, leadership in our present world is an urgent invitation to be a source of hope and consolation to the people in truth and mercy. Pope Benedict XVI puts it rightly, "Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction."¹⁸⁵ This encounter further made explicit in many ways and primarily through leadership that is rooted in the mercy of God for his people which brings consolation in moments of hardship. That is, leadership which opens the doors of God's mercy to those searching for a sense of direction and purpose in life. The mission is to bring to the men and women of our time, the consolation of God, to bear witness to his mercy.¹⁸⁶ Consolation from the gospel of truth and mercy should shape our sense of leadership and evangelization today and the way we minister to the people of our time and not the multiplication of the societal woes where men who are more powerful lord it over them daily. Hence, in the teachings of

¹⁸⁴Pope Benedict XVI, [Deus Caritas Est](#): Encyclical Letter On Christian Love (Vatican:

¹⁸⁵Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2005), n.10

¹⁸⁶Congregation For Institutes Of Consecrated Life And Societies Of Apostolic Life, *Rejoice: A Letter to Consecrated Men and Women*, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice: 2014), n. 8.

the Church, it must be noted that there is no room for hostile praxis which quenches the thirst for God's love and mercy, the essence of the Church was Christ's way of leaving himself behind in solidarity with suffering humanity. "People today certainly need words, but most of all they need us to bear witness to the mercy and tenderness of the Lord which warms the heart, rekindles hope, and attracts people towards the good. What a joy it is to bring God's consolation to others!"¹⁸⁷ Authentic leadership should bear the hallmark of truth, mercy, and love.

Fourthly, Mercy and Truth are the best tools for evangelization in our modern world. To this end, Pope Francis has never ceased to remind the men and women of today of how the value of leadership in mercy and truth should influence the whole idea and practice of evangelization. Furthermore, this takes concrete shape when the ones who lead and evangelize can be with the people and show them the Truth and merciful face of God in their concrete realities. In his words to the Pope to the Bishops of East Timor, during their *ad limina* visit in 2014, the Pope says to them:

Agents of evangelization must be able to warm the hearts of people, to walk with them in the night, to discuss their illusions and disillusionments with them, to overcome

¹⁸⁷Rejoice: A Letter to Consecrated Men and Women, n. 8

¹⁸⁸Pope Francis, "Address of to the Bishops of the Episcopal Conference of East Timor on Their "Ad Limina" Visit, Monday, 17 March 2014, in L'Osservatore Romano, Number 13, 28th March, 2014, 12.

¹⁸⁹Pope Francis, Address to East Timor on Their "Ad Limina" Visit.

their divisions. Without diminishing the value of the Gospel ideal, we need to accompany, with mercy and patience, the different stages of people's growth which they build day after day.

The logic of truth and mercy, which features in the teachings of Pope Francis as it relates to leadership and evangelization cannot be overlooked or waved aside as something of little or of no importance. Since, "without [truth] and mercy, today we have little possibility of inserting ourselves in the world of the wounded that need understanding, forgiveness, and love." More than ever before, the world needs evangelizers who are truthful and merciful, and do not block the flow of God's Truth and mercy reaching out and liberating the men and women of our time. In this line of thought, Benedict XVI states it emphatically that, "In our time, humanity needs a strong proclamation and witness of God's mercy."¹⁹⁰ If those at the forefront of evangelization lack the value of truth and mercy, what then is the motivation of such evangelism? Through truth and mercy, we can deeply reflect and become proactive agents in addressing the many social difficulties affecting the men and women who look up to the evangelizers for a new form of hope and consolation through their pastoral leadership rooted in the Truth and mercy of the Incarnate Word.

¹⁹⁰Pope Benedict XVI, *Angelus Message, Vatican City, September 16, 2007 in L'Osservatore Romano*, Number 39, 21th September, 2007, 1.

CONCLUSION

Imperative to this discuss has been the significance of the indissoluble connection between leading the people of God in witnessing to truth and witnessing to mercy, because truth and mercy are the central part of the gospel message. This work has been able to establish the fact that, it is in truth and mercy that the Incarnate Word, revealed his salvific liberating acts for humanity. The mystery of the incarnation and the works of Jesus Christ and his paschal mystery are all summed up in the very mystery of his truthfulness and mercy for humanity.

The onus of the gospel message is a revelation of a God who knows and loves the sinner, and who is not tired of forgiving the sinner. When we take away this core aspect of truth and mercy in leading the people of God, we are left with an empty message for a wounded people, who are waiting to be consoled by the words and actions of the evangelizers.

¹⁹¹Pope Benedict XVI, *“Regina Caeli Message on Divine Mercy Sunday”* Vatican, March 30, 2008. *L'Osservatore Romano*, Number 14, 4th April 2008, 1.

REPORT

CHALLENGED A NEW TO BEAR WITNESS TO THE GOSPEL THROUGH THE SOCIAL MEDIA

The Catholic Voyage: African Journal of Consecrated Life created in 2020 its YouTube Channel, “The Catholic Voyage-Africa” YouTube Channel, because of the objective needs to advance the aims of this journal through the social media and as a part of the project to develop its presence in the internet. In addition, the journal commemorated two important jubilee anniversaries. In fact, in 2020 occurred: (1) the 50th Anniversary of the foundation of the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria (1970-2020), and (2) the 25th Jubilee Anniversary of the publication of St. John Paul II's Church in Africa (1995-2020) --the fruits of the First African Synod (1994). At the same time, the creation of the channel marks the beginning of the journal's preparations for the 25th Anniversary of the publication of the John Paul II's post-Synodal Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata* (1996-2021). On the occasion of the launching of its YouTube channel – The



Catholic Voyage-Africa -- , the journal received important messages and reflections. One of these is the interview given by His Eminence, Joao Cardinal Braz de Aviz, which appears at the beginning of this volume. The following are more of the reflections and messages on Consecrated Life given on the occasion of the inauguration of “The Catholic Voyage-Africa” Youtube Channel.

RELIGIOUS LIFE IN AFRICA AFTER COVID-19

A Message of Rev. Bro. Guillaume Kipoy Pombo, JK

President of Confederation of the Conferences of Major Superiors of Africa and Madagascar (COMSAM)

Good morning Reverend Sisters, Reverend Brothers, and priests, all those that are living Consecrated life in Africa. I am Brother Kipoy Pombo, Superior General of St. Joseph Brothers in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and also the President of COSMAM, you call that in English COMSAM.

I thank the Major Superiors of Nigeria who give me this opportunity to talk with you and to address to you this message in the beginning of this program, in the YouTube channel of this Conference (CMSN /NCWR). I hope this will help us to share with one another a proposal and also what is happening about religious life in Africa.

My invitation is to talk about the religious life in Africa after COVID-19. You yourself know, this sickness or this pandemic is trying to change our behaviour. Everyday we are facing some problems, according to our own concrete life. In many African and Madagascan religious persons, we find this problem of the fear for tomorrow, the fear of today, the problem individualism, the problem of this indifference, a global indifference. Each one likes to live alone, but at the same time in the community. And I remind you that on October 27, 2020, the Prefect for Congregation for Institute of Consecrated Life and Society of Apostolic Life, in Rome, Cardinal Braz de Aviz, invited our Presidents of the Conferences of Religious in Africa and Madagascar to share with them some difficulties about the religious life and to

hear also what kind of problems we are facing in Africa. All the presidents received my letter where I remind them of what the Cardinal said to us. But here I do not want to return to these problems. I like to talk about this challenge: the community life. We religious from Africa and Madagascar are facing this kind of problem. Our tribal difference, our ethnic difference, our regional difference... These cannot help us to live in peace with one another. With this corona virus, with these challenges, the religious life in Africa is passing real difficulty. And for that, I like to tell you that everyday we must begin our day-to-day with Christ. We cannot, we cannot leave Christ, because with him and in him we able to face all these realities and to be faithful in sequela Christ(following Christ).

The second point is, we cannot remain only in the Word of God. This Word of God must become flesh in the day-to-day, in our life. This Word of God must become flesh. This means we must try to make efforts to bring our own fraternity, this fraternity which the Holy Father is talking about in the new Encyclical Letter (Fratelli Tutti).

We must try also to preserve our charismatic identity. You cannot live without charism. Because this is important. This is the heritage we received from our founder/foundress.

We must open our community to the reality of inculturation: how we can live religious life in Africa with African values, with the richness of our culture.

We try to must start with courage, strength to live our daily problem, to live our own problem, to live our communitarian problem. We must be able to face this reality.

My message is: you must continue to do what you are doing for the good of your apostolate and your witness of the

Gospel.

I will ask you, do not forget you are a member of COMSAM, the Confederation of the whole religious conferences of Africa and Madagascar. We need your presence. We need your encouragement. We need your participation. The religious life in Africa must go on. And the big countries like Nigeria, Kenya, Senegal D.R. Congo, South Africa must give themselves for the good of the small countries and the big countries. Please do not remain alone. The Church is family of God, according to the Synod of Africa. And do not remain only in word, but also in practice. What you have, what you are, you must share with the other religious women and men suffering in Africa. Please I beg you: Remain and remember that we are one: One continent, one religious life, one aim -- the glory of God and the salvation of man.

And the last one: we must try to discuss the "inter-formatif", the program of our formation. Because this will help us to face this reality, and also to give answers to all these problems for the good of Africa and for the good of our sequela Christi. Thank you very much. God bless you.

CONSECRATED PERSONS AS WITNESSES OF JUSTICE AND PEACE: ANNOUNCE, EDUCATE AND DENOUNCE

Brother Rodrigue DJITRINO
(Hospitaler Order of St. John of God)
President of the Regional Conference of Major Superior of West Africa-(RECOMSWA)

Today sixty years after independence, democracy, justice and peace as a culture and socio-political values remain real challenges to be taken up on the African continent which has been trying its hand at Western political modernity since the colonization. There was a ray of hope in the 1990s with the democratic wind, but instead of democracy and justice, many countries Africans have only had a multiparty system. Despite the emergence of a civil society, the policy game is still confiscated in most countries of sub-Saharan Africa by a political elite resistant to the basic demands of social justice and electoral transparency. This is why, in my humble opinion, as consecrated persons, we must be witnesses of justice and peace. This will go through three actions: Announce, educate and denounce.

Why are social networks like Youtube important, necessary or urgently needed as instruments in the mission of Consecrated Life in Africa the west now?

Nowadays, the most effective way to reach large numbers of people especially young people, it is through social networks. Thus, in his mission to announce, to educate and to denounce, consecrated life can never do without social networks such as Youtube, facebook and others. Social networks appear today as essential instruments in our mission of evangelization as consecrated persons.

EXHORTATION

On Youtube "The Catholic Voyage Africa" presents itself to us as a beautiful opportunity to meet and share as consecrated persons. To all of you, Consecrated persons, laity and members of the clergy, I invite you to watch on Youtube "The Catholic Voyage-Africa".

MY WISHES

On behalf of the Regional Union of Conferences of Major Superiors of West Africa, I wish "the Catholic Voyage Africa" long life.



CONSECRATED LIFE IN NIGERIA AND THE CALL TO WAKE UP THE WORLD

Fr. Simeon Okezuo NWOBI, CMF
Provincial Supervisor, East Nigeria Province and
President, Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria [Men]

Preamble

When the Union of Major Superiors of Men gathered in Rome for their 82nd General Assembly, little did they know that an informal meeting with Pope Francis would spark off a clarion call that would reverberate throughout the world.¹⁹² The informal and wide ranging conversation that ensued between the Major Superiors and the Pope though devoid of the trappings of a papal audience had the impetus of the Great Commission.¹⁹³

¹⁹²Pope Francis' "Wake up the World" call has inspired people of different denominations and faith. An example is Scott A. Shuford Founder of Front Gate Media and Olujimi Brown lead pastor of Impact Church, the fourth fastest growing congregation in the United Methodist Church-USA. These men have a music album and devotional inspired by the call of Pope Francis.

¹⁹³Cf. Mt 28:18-20.

“Wake up the world!”, says Pope Francis, “Be witnesses of a different way of doing things, of acting, of living. It is possible to live differently in the world”.¹⁹⁴ This invitation albeit an invitation to everyone, has a particular reference to consecrated persons. It calls to mind the identity of the consecrated person. It is a call to reexamine the world around us, discern the signs of the times, reflect on the gifts/charism and vocation each has received and consider how to live in the present times and embrace the future with hope.

In other words, this invitation suggests a fresh approach to the mission of the consecrated person not only in today's world but also in the present context of the Nigerian reality. The Nigerian Society beleaguered by the challenges of secularism, nepotism, ethnic violence, rising unemployment, terrorism, hedonism and the likes is in great need of being 'woken up'. Like the scene in the Acts of the Apostles where Paul and Silas were accused to “have turned the whole world upside down,”¹⁹⁵ Consecrated life in today's Nigeria is challenged to turn the world upside down with a new mind set and values. They can wake up the world by their joyful witness to the reign of the Risen Lord.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴Antonio Spadaro, “Wake Up the World!” Conversation with Pope Francis about the Religious Life” in *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1(2014) accessed 20 August, 2020, https://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/PopeFrancis/Wake_up_the_world-2.pdf.

¹⁹⁵Cf. Acts 17:6.

¹⁹⁶*Evangelii Gaudium*, Apostolic Exhortation of the Holy Father Francis to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World expatiates on the Joy of the Gospel carried by evangelizers.

CONSECRATED LIFE AND THE QUESTION OF IDENTITY

The challenge to wake up the world evokes the question of identity. Consecrated life in recent times suffers the crises of identity. On the one hand due to the wide spread ignorance of the identity and place of the consecrated person in the church and the society at large. On the other hand, because of the all-pervasive and aggressive secularization of the world, “it is sad to note that many Catholics know little about religious life. The much people know about the regards their outstanding outfits and the kind of apostolates they do..... In the seminary curriculum, there is no formal education in religious life. A very minimal attention if nothing, is given to the study of religious life or to the section of the Canon Law that concerns religious life. Consequently many young priests know very little about the religious life”.¹⁹⁷

Secularization in itself though not totally negative, has become what John Paul II terms “selective blindness towards the supernatural and men have lost sight of the footsteps of God”.¹⁹⁸ Rooted in the atheistic, skeptical and individualistic philosophies of the 20th century, secularization gave rise to a movement towards autonomy, to the rejection of the Church and its claim to the authority to interpret correct ethical behaviour and to a highly intensified demand of freedom”¹⁹⁹ The end result of secularization then, is that human beings no longer give God the power to determine the meaning or

¹⁹⁶Evangelii Gaudium, Apostolic Exhortation of the Holy Father Francis to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World expatiates on the Joy of the Gospel carried by evangelizers.

¹⁹⁷Mary-Sylvia Nwachukwu, *Consecrated: A Vision of Religious Life from the Viewpoint of the Sacred*, Lagos, Change Publishers, 2010, p.20

¹⁹⁸Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation 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, 85

¹⁹⁹Michael Schmaus, *Dogma 1: God in Revelation*, quoted in Mary-Sylvia Nwachukwu, *Consecrated*, p.27

trend of history, but the human being has arrogated that power to itself. It then implies that secularization is a big threat to human history and to the practice of faith. Within this context, the consecrated life is challenged to give a response. A response to wake up the world! In order to give this response, there is required an inward assessment of what the consecrated life is all about.

MEANING OF CONSECRATED LIFE

The term consecration derives from the word 'holy' or 'holiness' which translates the Hebrew word *qadosh* and Greek word *hagios*. The Hebrew verb *qadash* and its Greek equivalent *hagiazō* are translated as, “to consecrate”, “to make holy” or “to sanctify”. Consecration therefore relates to ideas like “total dedication” to God, “separation for God's service”, “election”, “chosenness”. Similarly, the word religious taken from two Latin verbs “*religare* (to bind together) and *re-eligere* (to choose again or select again) implies the same sense of selection for total belonging to God.

According to St Augustine, the consecrated person is *homo Dei nomine consecratus et Deo votus*,²⁰⁰ that is, a person consecrated in the name of God and dedicated to God. The call to holiness of life is call to live the life of God as revealed in the life of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.²⁰¹

²⁰⁰Augustine, *The City of God*, Harvard University Press, p.272 accessed, 20 August, 2020, https://www.loebclassics.com/view/augustine-city_god_pagans/1957/pb_LCL413.273.xml.

²⁰¹Vita Consecrata, 1

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that, “Consecrated life is characterized by the public profession of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience in a stable state of life recognized by the Church”²⁰²

The Code of Canon law defines it as “a stable form of living by which the faithful, following Christ more closely under the action of the Holy Spirit, are totally dedicated to God who is loved most of all, so that, having been dedicated by a new and special title to his honour, to the building of the Church, and to the salvation of the world, they strive for the perfection of charity in the service of the kingdom of God and, having been made an outstanding sign in the Church, foretell the heavenly glory”²⁰³

Perfectae Caritatis underlines this fact when it states:

All those called by God to the practice of the evangelical counsels and who, faithfully responding to the call, undertake to observe the same, bind themselves to the Lord in a special way, following Christ, who chaste and poor (cf. Mt 8:20, Lk 9:58) redeemed and sanctified men through obedience even to the death of the cross (cf. Phil 2:8).²⁰⁴

In the same vein, *Lumen Gentium* affirms that consecrated

²⁰²Catechism of the Catholic Church, 944

²⁰³The Code of Canon Law, 573§1.

²⁰⁴Perfectae Caritatis, Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life, Paul VI, 1965, 1

life is a “special calling that belongs to the life and holiness of the Church”²⁰⁵(L.G. 44). This description underscores the ecclesial dimension of the consecrated life. Thus the consecrated life is a life lived in the Church, for the Church and her mission. Consecrated persons do not live a private life but they live for the Church.²⁰⁶

CONSECRATED LIFE IN NIGERIA AND THE CALL TO WAKE UP THE WORLD

The primary assignment of the consecrated person is to bear a prophetic witness to the Church's vocation to holiness. .²⁰⁷The practice of the vows must become a sacramental witness against the threats and challenges of secularization, disunity, hatred and oppression; at seem to hold sway in our current Nigeria situation. “Through the vows, the religious give sacramental witness to God's holiness when religious communities become places where God's holiness (liberation reconciliation, justice, compassion) are lived, experienced and proclaimed to all the people of goodwill. They undertake this task by being first and foremost a reconciled and liberating community. God's holiness must become a reality in their personal lives, in their communities and the world at large. From the Pope's conversation with the Major Superiors we shall glean some areas that may be of importance to the Consecrated Life in Nigeria in its call to wake up the world.

²⁰⁵Lumen Gentium, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Paul VI, 1964, 44.

²⁰⁶Vita Consecrata is an invaluable resource that gives an in depth meaning of the Consecrated Life in all its dimensions.

²⁰⁷cf. Vita Consecrata, 72-73

GOING TO THE PERIPHERIES AND MARGINS OF SOCIETY

By virtue of their consecration, the religious are set apart for the prophetic mission of preaching and suffering like Jesus, in the favour of the poor and marginalized, as witnesses to a new civilization and in fact “wake up the world”! Benedict XVI buttresses this fact when he states that:

The Church grows through witness, not by proselytism. The witness that can really attract are common: generosity, detachments, sacrifice, self-forgetfulness in order to care for others. This is the witness of “martyrdom” of the religious life. It “sounds an alarm” for people. Religious say to people with their life what is happening?²⁰⁸

This statement reechoes the profound words of Paul VI in Evangelii Nuntiandi, “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses”²⁰⁹

In our Nigerian context, our consecration by the Spirit for a prophetic mission to the poor, to the peripheries and the margins of the society may have gotten “choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life”²¹⁰ hence, the eyes for “juicy and viable” apostolates. Thus, we are found in some cases unfruitful and our prophetic character as it were

²⁰⁸Benedict XVI quoted in Antonio Spadaro, “Wake Up the World!” Conversation with Pope Francis about the Religious Life”

²⁰⁹*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Apostolic Exhortation, Paul VI, 41

²¹⁰cf. Lk 8:14

“desecrated”. There is the need to pray for a new outpouring of the Spirit, a re-consecration and rekindling of the gifts we received when hands were laid upon us, so that it may be clearly seen that “the love of Christ impels us... He died for all that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him, who for their sakes died and was raised”.²¹¹

To 'wake up the world', we must individually and collectively search for and grasp every opportunity to express our solidarity with the needy and the poor, to share with them our money, food, and clothing in a 'renewed' way and in fact –set the pace for the rest of humanity.²¹² But the New Testament (exemplified by Lk 14:12) talks about not inviting only friends to our parties and celebrations but the poor as well and 2 Cor 8:14 demands a radically new attitude towards money and possession, which will 'turn upside down' the values and mores of this world.

Pope Francis quoting Pedro Arrupe states that “some real contact with the poor is necessary. This is really a very important to me: the need to become acquainted with reality by experience, to spend time walking on the periphery in order really to become acquainted with reality and life-experience of people. If this does not happen we then run the risk of being abstract ideologists or fundamentalists which is not healthy.”²¹³

²¹¹cf. 2 Cor 5:14-17

²¹²One remembers, the case of 'singing' little poor boy, Oluomachi Opara that recently went viral on social media who was given scholarship for his education by the SMMM Congregation. Such works are excellent and an integral part of Christian living.

²¹³Quoted in Antonio Spadaro, “*Wake Up the World!*” *Conversation with Pope Francis about the Religious Life*”

APOSTOLATE TO YOUNG PEOPLE

As a Church aware of the signs of the times, apostolate to the youth is an area that should not be neglected.²¹⁴ Pope in his discussion with the Major Superiors harped on the apostolate to young people. In his words:

Those who work with youth cannot be content with simply saying things that are too tidy and structured, as in a tract; these things go in one ear, and out the other of young people. We need a new language of saying things.²¹⁵

It then means that consecrated people should not be shy of going into the uncertain and murky waters of the world of young people. In Nigeria today, the uncertain waters come in different forms: kidnapping, cultism, addictions, human trafficking, sexual exploitation and rape, the social media and internet. Consecrated persons should not be afraid to meet these young people on their own turf. We cannot wake them up if we shy away from these realities.²¹⁶

“The web and social networks have created a new way to communicate and bond. They are a public square where the young spend much of their time and meet one another easily.”²¹⁷ Our traditional ways of carrying out youth ministry seem to be out of tune with the times. They seem to fail to meet the concerns, needs, problems and issues of the

²¹⁴Christus Vivit, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis to Young People and the Entire People of God gives insights to ministry to young people.

²¹⁵Antonio Spadaro, “Wake Up the World!” Conversation with Pope Francis about the Religious Life”

²¹⁶In this area some priests and religious have blogs, social media pages where they exhort young people and positively influence them. The social media is now a great influencer of the young people.

²¹⁷Christus Vivit, 87

present day youth. We need to develop new styles and strategies that engage young people in learning and have deep encounter with the living God.²¹⁸

FORMATION OF FUTURE CANDIDATES FOR CONSECRATED LIFE

In a world that needs to be woken up, the formation of future candidates for the consecrated life is of utmost importance. With the vocation boom and proliferation of religious groups in the country, adequate care is required in the area of formation. For the Pope, it is an area of priority:

The formation of candidates is fundamental. There are four pillars of formation: spiritual, intellectual, communitarian and apostolic. The ghost to fight against is the image of religious life understood as an escape or hiding place in face of an “external” difficult and complex world. The four pillars should be integrated right from the first day entrance into the noviceship, and should not be arranged sequentially, they must be interactive”²¹⁹

Therefore religious institutes should take adequate care to train formators that dynamic, attuned to the signs of the times and present day realities - men and women who understand that formation is not all about “policing” the

²¹⁸cf. Christus Vivit, 202-208

²¹⁹Antonio Spadaro, “Wake Up the World!” Conversation with Pope Francis about the Religious Life”

formandi but a journey of accompaniment. According to Pope Francis, “formation is a work of art, not a police action. We must form their hearts. Otherwise we are creating little monsters.”²²⁰ Formation should have ecclesial and pastoral dimension which have the people of God as its final goal - *salus animarum*. “It is important to think about the people to whom these persons will be sent while forming them.”²²¹ It is equally important in the light of the present realities, to carefully select the candidates for admission into the religious life.²²²

EDUCATION MINISTRY

The Pope highlights the importance of education as key to waking up the world. “Education today, is a key mission!” for consecrated people. The pillars of education according to the Pope are: “convey understanding, convey ways of doing things, convey values. Faith is conveyed through these. The educator should be up to being person who educates, he or she should consider how to proclaim Jesus Christ to a generation that is changing”. Shortly after the Nigeria-Biafra civil war, the Federal Government of Nigeria took over the schools, hospitals and other institutions which were means of the Church's evangelization ministry. This singular action became detrimental to the quality of education and moral life in the Nigerian society. Some argue that this unfortunate decision though hampered the growth of education and morality was also providential as it has made the Church not

²²⁰ Antonio Spadaro, “Wake Up the World!” Conversation with Pope Francis about the Religious Life”

²²¹ Antonio Spadaro, “Wake Up the World!” Conversation with Pope Francis about the Religious Life”

²²² cf. *Perfectae Caritatis*, 24

²²³ Antonio Spadaro, “Wake Up the World!” Conversation with Pope Francis about the Religious Life”

to rest on its oars and take the government for granted. Even though today some of the schools, hospitals and other institutions have been returned by some state governments while the church has gone ahead to build new institutions; one may find it difficult discovering the difference between the institutions run by the state or the ones run by the religious bodies.

To re-awaken the lost glories of these institutions, where the religious distinguished themselves in the past, consecrated persons need to see these works from the point of view of “apostolate” and not business. It then becomes an expression of their devotion to the Church whereby they are required to implant and strengthen the kingdom of Christ in souls and to extend that kingdom to every nation.²²⁴

WAKING UP THE WORLD TO A SENSE OF ORDER

Prior to creation the world was in chaos, God stepped in to establish a cosmos (order). The duty to maintain the divine agenda was given to man.²²⁵ No one is more fitting in the discharge of the divine mandate than the close collaborators of God - the religious. Our role in the world is in a way collocated with God's task for the world. We are to be the perfect models of humanity, and perfect examples of the good news we bear.

When the consecrated men and women establish harmony, peace and order in their various communities, the society will definitely be influenced positively. The consecrated people need to live a life of orderliness and always admonish

²²⁴cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 44

²²⁵cf. Gen. 1:28

people to work towards harmony. The world was in chaos before the created act of God transformed chaos into orderliness. Christ's coming was to restore everything in him. Thus, following Christ's example, the consecrated men and women build communities that celebrate unity in diversity or the dignity of difference. Order is established in the midst of varied men and women who live in well-formed communities.

WAKING THE WORLD THROUGH COMMUNION

The consecrated men and women live a life of communion in imitation of the Triune God, dwelling in perfect love and unity. What unites the persons of the Godhead is far more than what differentiates them. Through this sense of communion the consecrated men and women influence people and confront earthly divisions and rivalry, by the love existing among them. The world not only sees the way the religious celebrate their happiness but also the way they share their sorrows and pains.

WAKING THE WORLD THROUGH VIRTUE-BASED LABOUR

Jesus says – “my Father keeps on working and I work”.²²⁶ While God is known as *Deus creatur* (creator God), humans are referred to as *homo faber* (working being). Hence, the vocation to work is inherited from God who fashioned the world and sustains it. He then charged humans to control its affairs and further its course.²²⁷ In the view of St Thomas Aquinas “Man is a microcosm (*minor mundus*-

²²⁶Jn 15:17

²²⁷Gen 1:28

miniature world), who realizes and defines himself through the medium of work.” The hidden potentials in him are developed through this means – leading him to the conceivable apex of his expansion.

In their work, the consecrated men and women teach the world to shorn idleness and laziness. Reminding them of St Paul's imperative that, “If anyone is unwilling to work, he shall not eat”;²²⁸ just as St James challenges everyone to display his faith through his works.²²⁹

Now, in the discharge of their work, the consecrated men and women encourage the world to apply virtue, for it will enable people to undertake their labour with dignity and self-respect. Virtue helps us to develop the inner disposition to always set before us and consider above all the good. The formation of character becomes the sole interest of the agent who acts and wills. While acting, the virtuous person chooses to give the best of himself, tilting always towards the good. Any work that does not give glory to God nor enhance human existence is devoid of virtue. As the consecrated men and women season their work with virtue, the world learns from them in many ways.

WAKING THE WORLD BY BEING INVOLVED BUT NOT OF THE WORLD.

The best way of setting an example is by being involved in the world's affairs. Consecrated men and women don't need to be passive observers but active or proactive. If Mary was

²²⁸2 Thess 3:10

²²⁹James 2:18

passive, she would not have known when the wine finished at Cana's wedding (John 2:1-12). She was very much involved in the happenings. However, for religious to teach by example, they have to take the professional positions and run them well. However, there might be calumnies but they will also be fruits. After all, Christ too was calumnized. For religious to take this positions, there is need for the equipment of their members morally and professionally, in preparation for an enviable performance.

When the consecrated are thus equipped, their level of performance will influence and correct the errors of invirtuous workers. The world needs this and the consecrated must rise to the challenge.

WAKING THE WORLD TO THE REALITY OF SUFFERING FOR THE GOOD

The Lord Jesus talks about the blessedness of the poor in spirit, of those who hunger for righteousness' sake, and of those persecuted and reviled. He says their reward is great.²³⁰ The world is filled with people who desire pleasure and hate any form of discomfort. They believe that the Lord is their shepherd and there shall not want, forgetting that the same psalmist noted that "even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, because you are there with you crook and staff."²³¹

Hence, it is the task of the consecrated men and women to remind the world that there is no crown without a cross, and no pleasure without some discomfort. The close following of Christ, helps the consecrated men and women to understand

²³⁰cf. Matthew 5:1-5

²³¹cf. Psalm 23:1,4

the importance of enduring pain in view of a greater reward. Through their endurance, the world learns the possibility of enduring.

TEACHING THE WORLD TO HEAL WOUNDS

By our consecration we reflect Christ who is our mentor. He was wounded yet nothing stopped him from offering peace to everyone. He is today known as the wounded healer. He was like us in everything but sin. He suffered, obeyed even to death on a cross.²³² Christ is called the wounded healer due to his way of responding to the evil done to him. After his resurrection, Christ appeared to his disciples, showing them his hands, pierced with nails, he offered them peace.²³³ He used his pain to console those who were badly broken. Following the footprints of Christ, the consecrated men and woman acknowledge their challenges and setbacks, they acknowledge their pains and sorrows, and from this experience, they help those who require consolation. This is in line with the envisaged saying of St Paul:

Blessed be God the Father of our Lord
Jesus Christ, the Father of
compassion and God of all
encouragement; who encourages us
in our every affliction, so that we may
be able to encourage those who are in
any affliction with the
encouragement with which we

²³²cf. Phil 2:6-11

²³³cf. Jn 20:21

ourselves are encouraged by God. For as Christ's sufferings overflow to us, so through Christ does our encouragement also overflow (2 Cor 1:3-5).

The world, without doubt, can copy this gesture from Christ and from the consecrated men and women. They can learn to transcend their pain and stretch an elbow of support for those who suffer similar plights. This requires a sense of equanimity and sacrifice.

Waking the World to Becoming a Family

The Church in Africa or Nigeria is spiced by a strong familial mutuality. The African environment still enjoys close family ties wherein the evangelical process is cultivated. The Christian nuclear families represent the miniature or embryonic loci under which Christian values are *inter-alia* practiced in some sort of a religious socialization usually spearheaded by the parents of the household. Pope Benedict XVI makes this point clearer when he proclaimed,

The family is the “sanctuary of life” and a vital cell of society and the Church. It is here that the features of a people take shape; it is here that its members acquire basic teachings. They learn to love inasmuch as they are unconditionally loved, they learn respect for others inasmuch as they are respected, they learn to know the face of God inasmuch as they receive a

first revelation of it from a father and a mother full of attention in their regard... the family is the best setting for learning and applying the culture of forgiveness, peace and reconciliation.²³⁴

Again, in the 2008 World Day of Peace, the said Pontiff held that “in a healthy family life we experience some of the fundamental elements of peace: justice and love between brothers and sisters.”²³⁵ It delights then to say that the African people extrapolate these beautiful familial qualities into the practice of their Christian faith, poised by the very understanding that the Catholic Church itself is the “Family of God.”

Following this familial background the Nigerian or African consecrated men and women organize their communities in similitude with the African family structure. The richness drawn from our culture helps everyone to contribute in pepping up the religious family, having the Superior as the father of the religious household, with the bursar as the mother.

As the world experiences an undue sense of competitiveness and individualism, it might be appropriate for people to learn from the African religious families, to enable them become members of the world's family.

²³⁴*Africae Munus*, 42-43

²³⁵Benedict XVI, *Message for the 2008 World Day of Peace*, 3

CONCLUSION

We may not be able to wake up the world if as consecrated persons we do not look inwards to ourselves. The Synod on New Evangelization had asked consecrated persons to be witnesses of humanizing power of the Gospel through a life of brotherhood. "To be witnesses of a different way of doing things, of acting, of living" as Pope Francis puts it , consecrated persons must create a balance between commitments to the mission and community life; between work and fraternal life; so as not to be lost in maze of life, but carried along by the joy of the Gospel. The consecrated person should not forget that the vocation is a call to live and work in close intimacy with God for the liberation, reconciliation and salvation of the world, the cultivation of all that is good, progress in spiritual, growth in love are the ingredients to awaken oneself in order to wake up the world. Those who make impact are evangelizers who pray and work and are filled with joy, unflagging courage and zeal in proclaiming the Gospel.²³⁶ These are the people that wake up the world.

²³⁶cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 262-263

CONSECRATED LIFE MATTERS

CATHERINE OF SIENA: MYSTIC AND POLITICAL ACTIVIST²³⁷

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Football fans go through this experience each time they watch a football match on television. First, not only do they see what happens clearly shown on the screen, they also hear a voice in the background running a commentary on what transpires on the field of play such as a goal scored or attempted, an infringement etc. Secondly, each time something particularly spectacular occurs on the field, such as a goal, or an attempt at goal, there is a replay for viewers.

²³⁷ An earlier version of this essay was read at the Annual St Catherine of Siena Lecture of the Dominican Laity, Ibadan Chapter, Dominican Institute, Ibadan, April 28, 2012.



In a nutshell, there is a double experience of commentary and replay. In the light of this I wish to draw a parallel between history and watching a football match on television.

History is the past running a commentary on the present, and the present showing a replay of the past. Every person, every event, every experience of our past is saying something about our present. And our present experience, if we observe it carefully, plays back before and for us memories of the past. The past interrogates, encourages, challenges and enlightens the present. The present places the past before us encouraging and challenging us to learn lessons useful for our ongoing navigation of existential waters in their recurrence of turbulence.

To give the dates of birth and death of Catherine—she was born on March 25, 1347 and lived till April 29, 1380—is not just to do what is customary in a biographical sketch. It is to situate her life vis-à-vis the life of the Church and the politics of her time. Those dates show that Catherine lived and died before the Protestant Reformation of Martin Luther. Consequently, to speak of the religious situation of her time is to speak of Christianity before the fragmentation occasioned by Luther's protestation. It is to speak of the situation of the Church at her time.

Hers was a time of turbulence and decadence, of corrupt politics and of corrupt religion, a time the corruption Luther strongly condemned was already cutting through the body of Christ. Combined with corruption was the problem of insecurity. It was a time of wars and a time of plagues. Monarchs sought to maximize their powers by resorting to

military means while they ignored the population dying of the bubonic plague. While there was corruption within the clergy and popes were self-serving, Gregory XI, a Pope who lacked the courage to confront the corruption, hid himself in the peace and quiet of Avignon instead of residing in Rome. When he died on March 27, 1378, and was succeeded by Pope Urban VI on April 8 of the same year, Urban turned out to be a reform-minded Pope no doubt. But, as we can perceive from Catherine's *Letters, Prayers* and *Dialogue*, this reform-minded Pope was largely unsuccessful because his authority lacked charity. In reaction to the highhanded pontificate of Urban VI, dissatisfied cardinals took the step of electing Clement VII. Since the Pope is the visible principle of unity in the Church, the step taken by these renegade cardinals simply aggravated an already precarious ecclesial situation, to the point that, towards the end of Catherine's life, on September 20, 1378, the Church was torn into two. In this division, there were two Popes—Urban VI, the real Pope, and Clement VII the antipope.

Catherine did not stand by to watch what was going on. She plunged herself into the crises with a moral authority that issued from her life of personal holiness. She lived and worked for the unity of the Church and for reconciliation between the Italian city-states and the papacy. She did not study philosophy or theology in any university faculty. Yet, her personal sanctity and wisdom, animating her writings and activities, spoke to the high and the mighty, to the weak and the lowly, to the learned and to the unlearned. The fruits of her life as a Dominican mystic thrusts her forward as a complex personality whose interventions towards calming the troubled waters of the Church and society of her time

were found in the profound thoughts she shared with the Church and society of all times. In her we find an eloquent expression and testimony of the wisdom with which Thomas Aquinas described Dominican life: “to contemplate and to share with others the fruit of one’s contemplation.”²³⁸

The task I have set out to accomplish in this essay is to present Catherine of Siena as a reform-minded mystic and political activist whose personality and interventions in matters of religion and politics make of her an example worthy of emulation in our own time. My conclusions will be drawn from Catherine’s perspectives on the religious and political situation of the papacy and the Italian city-states of her time. But there is a difficulty in presenting Catherine in these terms. For, in the politics of Machiavellian inspiration with which we are very familiar in our days, in our days of politics without virtue, one may wonder if there can be any room for political activism in Christian mysticism. Can anyone be, at the same time, a political activist and a Christian mystic?

It is my contention in this essay that this puzzle is resolved in and by the life of Catherine of Siena. In her mysticism and political activism, Catherine enables us to see concretely what it means to obey the greatest commandment. She thus teaches us that to be a mystic and a

²³⁸To be taken into account in any attempt to understand this statement are Aquinas’ discussions first, of the active life in comparison with the contemplative life in *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 182, art 2; secondly, of kinds and hierarchy of religious orders in II-II, q. 188, art. 6; and thirdly, of Christ leading a life associated with human beings instead of a solitary life in III, q. 40, art. 1, Reply to objection 2.

In the second of the three articles cited here, he wrote: “the difference between one religious order and another depends chiefly on the end, and secondarily on the exercise. And since one thing cannot be said to be more excellent than another save in respect of that in which it differs therefrom, it follows that the excellence of one religious order over another depends

political activist is in fact to love of God above all things, and to transcribe this love of God in the love of neighbor because of God in the task of regulating common life in the city, a task which is the task of politics. Catherine's life shows that an authentic Christian political activist is one who has first fallen in love with God in order to love the common good, and who, because he or she has fallen in love with God and with the common good, lives and work for the common good. Love of God above all things led Catherine to plunge herself into the dangerous task of reforming the politics of her time, the corrupt politics in which Popes and Cardinals were very much implicated.

The religious situation seen through Catherine

Although there was as yet no Protestantism, there was a schism. The Church at the time of Catherine did not know peace because there was corruption and scandal. City-states and the papacy were on the war path, necessitating Catherine's conciliatory political activism rooted in and inspired by mysticism. Catherine's time was one of the dirtiest pages in the history of a Church that has had Popes with mistresses who made children they had from such mistresses cardinals. One is able to catch a glimpse of the corruption in the Church of the 14th century by reading the *Dialogue* of this Dominican mystic. In that *Dialogue*, she was addressed in these words:

chiefly on their ends, and secondarily on their respective exercises. Nevertheless each of these comparisons is considered in a different way. For the comparisons with respect to the end is absolute, since the end is sought for its own sake; whereas the comparison with respect to exercise is relative, since exercise is sought not for its own sake, but for the sake of the end. Hence a religious order is preferable to another, if it be directed to an end that is absolutely more excellent either because it is a greater good or because it is directed to more goods. If, however, the end be the same, the excellence of one religious order over another depends secondarily, not on the amount of exercise, but on the proportion of the exercise to the end in view....Accordingly, we must say that the work of the active life is twofold. One

Dearest daughter, because your tears are joined to my charity and are shed for love of me, your weeping has power over me and the pain in your desire binds me like a chain. But look how my bride has disfigured her face! She is leprous with impurity and selfishness. Her breasts are swollen because of the pride and avarice of those who feed there: the universal body of Christianity and the mystic body of holy Church. I am speaking of my ministers who feed at her breasts. They ought not only to feed themselves, but hold to those breasts the whole body of Christianity as well as whoever would rise from the darkness of unbelief and be bound into the body of my Church.

Do you see how ignorantly and blindly they serve out the marvelous milk and blood of this bride—how thanklessly and with what filthy hands? And do you see with what presumption and lack of reverence it is received? And so the precious life-giving blood of my only-begotten Son, which dispelled death and darkness, confounded falsehood, and brought the gift of light and truth, all too often, because of their sinfulness, brings them death instead (*Dialogue*, 14).

proceeds from the fulness of contemplation, such as teaching and preaching...And this work is more excellent than simple contemplation. For even as it is better to enlighten than merely to shine, so it is better to give to others the fruits of one's contemplation than merely to contemplate....Accordingly the highest place in religious orders is held by those which are directed to teaching and preaching, which moreover are nearest to the episcopal perfection....The second place belongs to those which are directed to contemplation, and the third to those which are occupied with external actions."In the last of these three articles I am citing, referring to the first two, he wrote: "As stated in the Second Part, the contemplative life is, absolutely speaking, more perfect than the active life, because the latter is taken up with bodily actions: yet that form of active life in which a man, by preaching and teaching, delivers to others the fruits of his contemplation, is more perfect than the life that stops at contemplation, because such a life is built on an abundance of contemplation, and consequently such was the life chosen by Christ."

The Church at the time of Catherine was in the grips of priests with “filthy” hands, priests whose hands were filthy because their hearts were filthy, priests whose hearts were filthy because they cared so little about their personal sanctity. One finds, especially in chapters 110-134 of that work of immense treasure for the understanding of the life and ministry of the priest in the Church, a candid account of the many moral failures of those priests, as well as a reassurance of divine mercy for the Church. In the course of the dialogue that took place within private revelation, St Catherine was told that despite the one thousand and one flaws of priests, God willed and still wills to use them as instruments of salvation.

In October 1377, during the Pontificate of Gregory XI, when Catherine began to work on her *Dialogue*, she pleaded with God to have mercy for the Church of her time was stinking with corruption. In the mystical experience that she committed to writing, she was shown the incomparable dignity that God conferred on priests so that she could in turn see the wretched state of the clergy of her time. In response to a request made by St Catherine, God said to her:

Now, I will answer what you asked me concerning the ministers of holy Church. First, so that you may better come to know the truth, open your mind's eye and consider their excellence and the great dignity in which I have placed them. But because things can be better known by looking at their opposites, I want to show you the dignity of those who use virtuously the treasure I have put in their hands, so that you may better see the wretchedness of those who today are feeding at the breast of this bride....I want to tell you of the

dignity in which my goodness has established them. This is beyond the love that I have shown in general to all my creatures by creating you in my image and likeness and re-creating all of you in grace through my only-begotten Son's blood.... This greatness is given to every person in general, but from among the rest I have chosen my ministers for your salvation, so that through them the blood of the humble spotless Lamb, my only-begotten Son might be administered to you (*Dialogue*, 110).

But the dignity of the priesthood was being concealed by corruption among the clergy. So, St Catherine was addressed:

I want to show you the wretchedness of their lives, so that you and my other servants will have the more reason to offer me humble and constant prayer for them. No matter where you turn, to secular or religious, clerics or prelates, lowly or great, young or old, you see nothing but sin. All of them pelt me with the filth of deadly sin. But their filth harms only themselves, not me (*Dialogue*, 121).

God took St Catherine through a tour of the origin of the clerical filth of her time. The sins of the Church's clergy and ministers were three vices, three pillars of vice, namely, lust, pride and avarice, in other words, these three vices struck [and still strike in our own time] at the pillar of chastity, obedience and poverty respectively. God told Catherine:

Do you know, dearest daughter—listen with grieving bitterness of heart—do you know where these have set their principle and foundations? In their own

selfish self-centredness. There is born the tree of pride with its offshoot or indiscretion. So, lacking in discernment as they are, they assume honor and glory for themselves by seeking higher office and adornments and delicacies for their bodies, repaying me with abuse and sin. They take to themselves what is not theirs and give me what is not mine. To me should be given glory and my name should be praised; to themselves is due contempt for their selfish sensuality. They ought to know themselves enough to consider themselves unworthy of the tremendous mystery they have received from me. But they do just the opposite, for, bloated with pride as they are, they never have their fill of gobbling up earthly riches and the pleasures of the world, while they are stingy, greedy, and avaricious toward the poor...(*Dialogue*, 121)

What is the source of such filth in their souls? Their own selfish sensuality. Their selfishness has made a lady of their sensuality, and their wretched little souls have become her slaves, whereas I made them free by the blood of my Son, when the whole human race was freed from slavery to the devil and his rule. Every person receives this grace, but these whom I have anointed I have freed from the world's service and appointed them to serve me alone, God eternal, by being stewards of the sacraments of the Church (*Dialogue*, 123).

In words that sound like a live commentary of what still transpires, the *Dialogue* continues:

I have made them so free, in fact, that it has never been my

will, nor is it now, that any civil authority should presume to sit in judgment over them. And do you know, dearest daughter, what thanks they give me for such a great gift? This is their thanks: They hound me constantly with so many villainous sins that your tongue could never describe them, and you would faint if you heard them.....(*Dialogue*, 123).

After hearing about the sins of the priests of her time, St Catherine was moved to beg God for mercy in these words:

Immeasurable Love! By revealing this you have given me a bitter-sweet medicine so that I might rise up once and for all from the sickness of foolish indifference and run to you with concern and eager longing. You would have me know myself and your goodness, and the sins committed against you by every class of people and especially by your ministers, so that I might draw tears from the knowledge of your infinite goodness and let them flow as a river over my wretched self and over these wretched living dead....(*Dialogue*, 134).

Now, I beg you, be merciful to the world and to holy Church. I am asking you to grant what you are making me ask....O eternal Father, your servants are calling to you for mercy. Answer them then....Because it is your will to answer us before we call, answer now with the voice of your mercy (*Dialogue*, 134).

Catherine respected authority. But not in a slavish way. While the notoriously timid Pope Gregory XI abandoned Rome and hid himself in Avignon, thus abdicating the responsibility of curtailng the excesses of his cardinals,

Catherine of Siena wrote him a letter which bore the language and tone of reverence and deference to the Pope without hiding her disdain for the college of corrupt cardinals. She firmly yet gently urged him to be courageous and to return to Rome.

Your poor unworthy daughter Catherine, servant and slave of the servants of Jesus Christ, writes to you, comforting you in his sweet blood. I desire to see you free of any servile fear, for I am aware that the fearful person does not persevere in the strength of holy resolution and good desire. I have prayed and will continue to pray that the gentle good Jesus will take away from you all servile fear and leave only holy fear (*Letter 233*).

The letter continued with Catherine praying that the Pope may not succumb to the promptings of those who would offer him bad advice—the corrupt cardinals.

May burning charity so fill you that you will be prevented from hearing the voices of incarnate devils, and from paying attention to the advice of evil counselors whose motivations is self-centred love. I hear that these people are trying to frighten you, saying, you will be killed, in order to prevent your return. I, however, on behalf of Christ crucified, tell you, dear holy father, not to be afraid for any reason whatever.

Come securely, trusting in Christ gentle Jesus, for if you do what is right, God will be on your side and nobody will be against you. Father, get up courageously, because, I tell you, there is nothing to fear! However, if you don't do what you should, you

will have every reason to be afraid. You ought to come. Come, come then gently, without any fear. And if any of those around you want to stop you, say to them fiercely, as Christ said, turning to Peter who out of kindness wished to pull him back from going to his passion: "Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle in my path, because you are thinking not as God thinks but as human beings do. Do you not want me to do my Father's will?" Do the same, dearest father, follow him whose vicar you are, deliberating and deciding for yourself, and saying in the presence of all who oppose you: "Even if I should lose my life a thousand times, I want to do the will of my Eternal Father." (*Letter 233*)²³⁹

While Gregory has been described as too fearful to go contrary to the views of his closest advisors, those whose advice, in the words of Catherine constituted the real danger to the life of Pope Gregory, Urban VI who succeeded him could be described as ferociously independent in his intent at reform. Being independent-minded is not a vice. But a self-centred exercise of authority is no virtue. In Pope Urban VI, the good intention to reform the Church was obliterated by excessive use of power, and such use of power, without the willingness to receive well-meaning advice, led to alienation.

²³⁹On a possible Dominican influence on fraternal correction of prelates, read Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q 33. St Thomas Aquinas discusses fraternal correction. He begins by differentiating between fraternal correction as an act of charity and fraternal correction as an act of justice (art. 1). It is an act of charity when it is a remedy against sin as harmful to the sinner. It is an act of justice when it seeks to remedy sin as harm done to others or harm done to the common good.

In art. 4, where he discusses the obligation to correct one's prelate, he wrote: "A subject is not competent to administer to his prelate the correction which is an act of justice through the

It would be the duty of Catherine to once again speak to power. To this Pope, Catherine would write, advising him to make respect for the people he led the centerpiece of his reform. Catherine reminded Urban VI that the authority of the Pope—and this is true of every exercise of authority—must be “rooted in true and perfect charity” (*Letter 291*). In this piece of advice, we see how Catherine's mysticism and political activism combine to teach us the reciprocal relationship between charity and politics, that is, between love of God above all things, and love of one's neighbor in our common life. Authority without charity is tyranny. Politics is the exercise of charity in the *polis*, the recognition of our common humanity in the direction of the affairs of the city for the sake of our common good. In apparent reference to Pope Urban's refusal to forgive the Tuscan cities that rebelled against the papacy, Catherine wrote:

Truly, holy father, only those who are rooted in charity, and therefore free from self-centered love, are ready to die for the love of God and the salvation of souls. Those whose love is self-centered are not ready to give their lives; and not only that, such people, it seems, are unwilling to bear even the least suffering for they are always fearful about themselves, not wanting to lose the life of their bodies nor any of their comforts. Consequently, whatever

coercive nature of punishment: but the fraternal correction which is an act of charity is within the competence of everyone in respect of any person towards whom he is bound by charity, provided there is something in that person which requires correction.” Such correction is to be done in a way that is devoid of insolence and malice (Reply to objection 1). He goes on to say that to withstand anyone in public exceeds the mode of fraternal correction unless the one who gives the correction and the one to whom it is given were equal with regard to the defence of the faith. Where the one who offers the correction is not equal to the one to whom correction is given, the correction is to be offered privately and respectively.

they do, they do imperfectly and corruptly, since the source of their actions is corrupt. Whatever their state, pastor or subject, they show little sign of virtue.

Pastors who are rooted in true charity, however, do not act like this; rather, all they do is good and perfect since the source of their actions is united and joined to perfect divine charity. Such persons do not fear either the devil or creatures, only their Creator. They do not heed the detractions of the world, embarrassment, insults, derogatory jokes, unfavourable comments from their subjects who, when they are reprovved by their prelate, become offended and begin to criticize....

Truly, most holy father, I do not see how this can be done unless you renew the garden of [the Church] your bride, filling it with good strong plants; taking the trouble to choose a band of holy people who are virtuous and do not fear death. Do not look for persons of high birth, but rather for good pastors who will take tender care of their flocks. Create a college of good cardinals who will be strong supports, helping you, with God's grace, to carry the weight of our many burdens.....

.....You will seek particularly to reconcile your children, winning them back with kindness and with only as much stern justice as they are able to take, and

However, continues Aquinas, "if the faith were endangered, a subject ought to rebuke his prelate even publicly, on account of the imminent danger of scandal concerning the faith" (Reply to objection 2).

Furthermore, "when a man reprovves his prelate charitably, it does not follow that he thinks himself any better, but merely that he offers his help to one, 'being in the higher position among one who, being in the higher position among you, is therefore in greater danger,' as Augustine observes in his Rule" (Reply to objection 3).

no more, I am convinced that this cannot be done without the virtue of charity. That is why I said that I wished to see you rooted in true and perfect charity. Not that I do not believe that you are in charity, but because, as long as we are pilgrims and strangers in this life, we can grow in the perfection of charity I said that I desired this perfection in you, and that it be nourished constantly with the fire of holy desire. In this way, like a good pastor, you will bring it to life in your subjects also. I implore you to do this. For my part, I shall continue until I die to work by prayer and by every other means for the honour of God and for your peace and that of your children.

Catherine did not just advise Popes. She supported them with her prayers. For the timid Gregory XI, she prayed for a new and bold heart.

Open the eye of your vicar on earth, so that he may not love you for his own sake, nor himself for his own sake, but may love you for yourself and himself for your sake. For when he loves either you or himself for his own sake we are all lost, because he who should be our life is our death to the extent that he is not careful to shelter us little sheep who are going astray. But if he loves himself for your sake and you for yourself, we live, because we receive our example for living from the good shepherd. Make him a new heart, that he may constantly grow in grace and be strong in raising the standard of the most holy cross to make the unbelievers share as we do in the fruit of the passion and blood of your only-begotten Son, the spotless Lamb, high, eternal, ineffable Godhead (*Prayer*, 1).

And for Urban VI, Gregory's successor, Catherine prayed:

O eternal love, purify this vicar of yours in himself so that he may give the others a good example of purity and innocence. May he serve willingly in your presence. May he instruct the people subject to him, and even attract unbelievers with heavenly teachings, and offer to your unfathomable majesty the fruit of their eternal salvation (*Prayer, 7*).

A glimpse at the political situation

Intertwined with the religious situation was the political situation. The corruption that featured in the affairs of the Church and corruption in the affairs of the city lived in disgraceful cohabitation. A succinct explanation of decadent political and religious leadership is to be found in the *Dialogue* where Catherine is told:

If pride is in a position of authority, it gives birth to injustice and cruelty, and becomes a dealer in human flesh (*Dialogue, 6*)

In a letter addressed to the authorities of the city of Bologna, Catherine of Siena, gave a prescription on how authority is to be exercised so that there would be peace in the city. That prescription is still relevant today, not just in Bologna, but anywhere in the world, certainly in Nigeria. Catherine boldly put it to the rulers of the city that nothing short of conversion would bring about peace in the city. In clear reference to the letter to the Ephesians 4:24, and to the letter to the

Colossians 3:10, she wrote to the authorities: "I desire to see you divested of the old self, and clothed in the new self." This conversion, she went on to explain, takes the form of charity. But to use the word charity is to risk being misunderstood. For, in another instance of collapse of distinction, charity and philanthropy are often taken as synonyms.

By charity, Catherine did not mean philanthropy. Philanthropy is primarily love of human beings, while charity is primarily love of God. She meant, primarily, love of God above all things, and, secondarily but necessarily, love of neighbor. There can be no peace in a city deprived of justice. In other words, respect for the rule of law does not suffice. What is absolutely needed for peace is respect for the rule of love. Laws may be unjust. But love is never unjust. Where love reigns, justice abides.

Justice is giving each person his dues, and what we owe each person is love. Where there is respect for the rule of love, there is justice. There God is given his dues. And where God is given his dues, human beings, loved and created by God, will be given their dues. For the way we relate with our fellow human beings is a reflection of the way we relate with God. In the words of Catherine of Siena,

When this charity is in the soul, she does not seek her own interests but is liberal and generous in returning what she owes to God, namely, love of him above everything else, and, hating and despising selfish pleasure-seeking, love of herself in God, giving glory and praise to his name; and what she owes to her neighbor, namely, good will rooted in tender charity and in ordered love.

But then, why do leaders fail in justice? St. Catherine

answers:

When one is in charge, one [often] fails in true justice. And this is the reason: one is afraid of losing one's status, so, in order not to displease others, one keeps covering and hiding their wrong-doing, smearing ointment on a wound which at the time needs to be cauterized.

Injustice is the offspring of self-centred love.

In order to remain in true holy justice, rendering to all their subjects their due, they [rulers] need to show mercy to those who deserve mercy, not on sudden impulse but out of truthful conviction. They need likewise to exercise justice toward those who deserve it, a justice seasoned with mercy and not the result of impulsive anger. Their motivation will be not what people say but holy true justice, and they will be concerned not for any private good but for the common good.

Scipio the destroyer of Carthage, represented in Cicero's *De Republica* and quoted in St. Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*, sums up what we have been struggling to put across by asserting that communal concord cannot possibly exist where there is a disgusting infection of crime and immorality. Going by Scipio's definition, one can conclude that a nation is not a state held together at gunpoint. Neither is it any and every association of the population, but "an association united by a common sense of right and a community of interest." And the crises of corruption and insecurity in Nigeria show us that where those who govern peoples demonstrate belief in the superior utility of injustice there discontent and strife will reign. As St. Augustine reports Scipio through Cicero, when the king is unjust (a 'tyrant', as Scipio calls him, in the Greek manner), or the nobles are unjust (he calls such a

combination a *factio*—a caucus) or the people are unjust (and for this he finds no accepted term, unless he should call it a collective tyranny), then, he holds, the commonwealth is not corrupt, as had been argued, but, by a logical deduction from the definition, it ceases to exist at all—for there is not 'weal of the community', if it is unjust, since it is not 'associated by a common sense of right and a community of interest', which is the definition of a community (*De Civitate Dei*, Bk II, ch. 22).

The sincerity and credibility, the validity and effectiveness of any professed respect for the rule of law will depend on the kind of laws one is talking about, on whether they are just or unjust laws. And let it be borne in mind that the law is not an end in itself. A good law is a means for dispensing justice. Justice is the love we owe God and our neighbor. That is why, in a country that sincerely seeks peace, the rule of love takes precedence over the rule of law. In a civilization of love, which is what we need, the rule of law, in its authentic form, is subject to the rule of love.

Catherine as model for our time and all times

The events of the time of Catherine, her own personality, and her interventions are a commentary on the events of our time. The events of our own time are a replay of the events of her time. But whether it can be said that our own personalities and our interventions or lack of interventions replay the life of Catherine is an issue that requires sober reflection. It is evident that our times are times of decadence. Politics, which ought to be an intelligent regulation of common life for the sake of the common good, is in fact a race of ruffians and common thieves. This is not to say all

politicians are the same. Rather, it is to say that the question that confronts us is not who among our political actors is lacking in integrity but who among them is not.

Religion, as it is and not how it ought to be, is not altogether different when it comes to decadence. In place of religion as a virtue that makes its possessor united to God, religion is misconstrued and practiced as a set of rules and rituals designed for loving and serving the self more than loving and serving God and neighbor. Corruption is the privation of virtue, particularly of the virtue of charity, within a person or polity. To overcome corruption, there is need for a return to the path of virtue. Virtue is reinforced by good legislations and fidelity to good laws, and both legislation and fidelity will be assisted by the grace of God. In this respect, Thomas Aquinas had taught that there is no moral virtue without prudence, no prudence without charity, and therefore, no virtue without charity. In the *Dialogue*, we meet a Catherine who, under the instrumental influence of Thomas, an influence that would have come by way of her relationship with Dominicans, particularly her Dominican confessor and friend, Raymond of Capua, was made to recognize that the right antidote to corruption is charity, that is, primarily, love of God above all things, and, secondarily but necessarily, love of neighbor because of God who loves him.

No virtue can have life in it except from charity, and charity is nursed and mothered by humility. You will find humility in the knowledge of yourself when you see that even your own existence comes not from yourself but from me, for I loved before you came into being. And in my unspeakable love for you I willed to create you anew in grace. So I washed you and made

you a new creation in the blood that my only-begotten Son poured out with such burning love.... (*Dialogue*, 4)

I have told you how every sin is done by means of your neighbors, because it deprives them of your loving charity, and it is charity that gives life to all virtue. So that selfish love which deprives your neighbors of your charity and affection is the principle and foundation of all evil.

Every scandal, hatred, cruelty, and everything unbecoming springs from this root of selfish love. It has poisoned the whole world and sickened the mystic body of holy Church and the universal body of Christianity. For all virtues are built on charity for your neighbors. So I have told you, and such is the truth: Charity gives life to all the virtues, nor can any virtue exist without charity. In other words, virtue is attained only through love of me.

Virtue, once conceived, must come to birth. Therefore, as soon as the soul has conceived through loving affection, she gives birth for her neighbors' sake. And just as she loves me in truth, so also she serves her neighbors in truth. Nor could she do otherwise, for love of me and love of neighbor are one and the same thing: Since love of neighbor has its source in me, the more the soul loves me, the more she loves her neighbors (*Dialogue*, 7; cf. *Dialogue* 6).

Love of God and love of neighbor, these, for Catherine, are the two feet on which one must walk on the way to God. It is in this love that mysticism and political activism meet in Catherine of Siena. Religion is primarily about love of God,

and politics is the expression in the city [in our common life] of this love of God in the love of neighbor. Participation in religion and politics becomes a way of moving the two feet. The extent to which we practically seek virtue (excellence)—moral excellence, intellectual excellence and religious excellence—is the extent to which we transform Church and society. The need for conversion to truth and love in God is as important and urgent in our own time as in the time of Catherine. Without truth and love, neither Church nor society can be spared corruption and turbulence. It is in the intimate relationship of truth and love that common life is to be regulated in the Church and in society. As we learn from the opening paragraph of the Prologue to the *Dialogue*, the soul's relentless and tremendous desire for God's honor and the salvation of souls leads her to exercise virtue while she dwells in the cell of self-knowledge. Self-knowledge leads the soul to a greater knowledge of God's goodness toward her, this knowledge is followed by love. "And loving, she seeks to pursue truth and clothe herself in it" (*Dialogue*, 1).

Those words not only set the agenda for the *Dialogue*, they describe the agenda of Catherine's life as a reform-minded mystic. In the face of the corruption that affected the Church and politics of her time, Catherine of Siena sought virtue in the cell of self-knowledge. There in the cell of self-knowledge, she came face to face with God's goodness towards her and the whole of creation. Overwhelmed by this goodness, Catherine cried out in ecstasy:

O depth of love! What heart could keep from breaking at the sight of your greatness descending to the lowliness of our humanity? We are your image, and

now by making yourself one with us you have become our image, veiling your eternal divinity in the wretched cloud and dung heap of Adam. And why? For love!

O immeasurably tender love! Who would not be set afire with such love? What heart could keep from breaking? You, deep well of charity, it seems you are so madly in love with your creatures that you could not live without us! yet you are our God, and have no need of us. Your greatness is no greater for our well-being, nor are you harmed by any harm that comes to us, for you are supreme eternal Goodness. What could move you to such mercy? Neither duty nor any need you have of us (we are sinful and wicked debtors!)—but only love! (*Dialogue*, 25)

You temper your justice with mercy. In mercy you cleansed us in the blood; in mercy you kept company with your creatures. O mad lover! It was not enough for you to take on our humanity: You had to die as well! Nor was death enough: You descended to the depths to summon our holy ancestors and fulfill your truth and mercy in them. Your goodness promises good to those who serve you in truth, so you went to call these servants of yours from their suffering to reward them for their labors! (*Dialogue*, 30)

It was in this interplay of truth and love, of self-knowledge and knowledge of God, that Catherine desired reform. She scolded, dialogued, criticized, counseled and prayed. But above all, she sought personal and collective

purification in the forgiveness of her own sins and in the forgiveness of the sins of others. One of the qualities of a saint is a deep consciousness of her sinfulness. This was true of Catherine. She saw the sins of others and she saw her own sins in the sins others. In her the thesis is illustrated that a saint is not sinless but a sinner with a contrite heart. The purification that a contrite heart desires is attainable in and through the Eucharist. In the Eucharist,

The soul seems more sweetly bound to God and better knows his truth. For then the soul is in God and God in the soul, just as the fish is in the sea and sea in the fish. From her deep knowledge of herself, a holy justice gave birth to hatred and displeasure against herself, ashamed as she was of her imperfection, which seemed to her to be the cause of all the evils in the world. In this knowledge and hatred and justice she washed away the stains of guilt, which it seemed to her were, and which indeed were, in her own soul saying, "O eternal Father, I accuse myself before you, asking that you punish my sins in this life. And since I by my sins am the cause of the sufferings my neighbors must endure, I beg you in mercy to punish me for them." (*Dialogue*, 2)

In this regard, Catherine learns from the Eternal Father what the Eucharist does to the soul.

Dearest daughter, contemplate the marvelous state of the soul who receives this bread of life, this food of angels, as she ought. When she receives this sacrament she lives in me and I in her. Just as the fish is in the sea and the sea is the fish, so am I in the soul and the soul in me, the sea of peace. Grace lives in

such a soul because, having received this bread of life in grace, she lives in grace. When this appearance of bread has been consumed, I leave behind the imprint of my grace, just as a seal that is pressed into warm wax leaves its imprint when it is sealed off. Thus does the power of this sacrament remain there in the soul; that is, the warmth of my divine charity, the mercy of the Holy Spirit, remains there. The light of my only-begotten Son's wisdom remains there, enlightening the mind's eye. [The soul] is left strong, sharing in my strength and power, which make her strong and powerful against her selfish sensuality and against the devil and the world (*Dialogue*, 112).

In Catherine, a deep consciousness of sin was inseparable from a burning desire for personal union with God within the Church. The combination of awareness of sin, burning desire for holiness of life, and unflinching loyalty to the Church, despite her corruption, gave Catherine the strength of a mystic, the spiritual and moral authority to speak to ecclesiastical and civil authorities. She thus could speak not as a sanctimonious ideological agitator but as an authentic spokeswoman for God. She is thus a model for our time and for all times, teaching us by her life and her writings that politics is cleansed only when religion is cleansed, that is, when charity is brought into the political arena by those in whom political activism is imbued with mysticism. In simple terms, Catherine is teaching us that if we wish to build a better world, we must heed the universal call to holiness by constantly seeking the path of personal sanctity. And this teaching found an echo in the wishes of the First African Synod in 1994, when the wish was expressed that Africa be

blessed with saintly Presidents and holy politicians.²⁴⁰ Catherine can herself be described as a holy politician.

A concluding three-lesson summary

This essay concludes with a summary that seeks to address a question posed in two ways: why should anyone be interested in the life of a 14th century mystic in our age when cybernetics and artificial intelligence seem to have superseded piety? What has Catherine of Siena got to say to our time? The essay is itself an attempt to provide answers to these questions, answers that may be hidden in the many paragraphs already written. That is why this conclusion is not out of order.

The personality of Catherine teaches many lessons to prelates and priests, to religious and lay faithful in the Church and society of our time. But I shall limit myself to three in this essay. Her personality teaches us that she was a woman of prayer, it teaches us what prayer is, and it teaches us the place of prayer in ecclesiastical and political engagement. Explaining what each of these means demand at least three more essays. However, by way of a conclusion to this paper, one may offer a brief summary here.

The first lesson—that she was a woman of prayer—is clearly evident from the opening words of her *Dialogue*, words in which she described herself as a soul with “tremendous desire for God's honour and the salvation of

Pope St John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, 111. “On the political front, the arduous process of building national unity encounters particular problems on the continent where most of the states are relatively young political entities. To reconcile profound differences, overcome long-standing ethnic animosities and become integrated into international life demands a high degree of competence in the art of governing. That is why the Synod prayed fervently to the Lord that there would arise in Africa holy politicians—both men and women—and that there would be saintly Heads of State, who profoundly love their own people and wish to serve than be served.”

souls". Her desire for God's honour and the salvation of souls took a concrete expression in prayer, and, as she was told by the Eternal Father in the *Dialogue*, prayer is not just mental or vocal at scheduled time and in private. "The principle of holy will means that each of you must work for the salvation of souls according to your own situation. Whatever you do in word or deed for the good of your neighbor is a real prayer" (*Dialogue*, 66).

From the first lesson can be derived the second, and that is, what it means to pray. To pray is to have a tremendous desire for God's honour, and desire for God's honour is desire for the goodness that God is and for the good of one's neighbour. The one who truly prays enters into "the cell of self-knowledge in order to know better God's goodness toward her, since upon knowledge follows love" (*Dialogue*, 1). Here Catherine challenges the populist and prevalent perception of prayer in contemporary Nigerian religiosity, and that is, prayer as a list of demands presented to God, or, a decree that God grant our demands. For Catherine, prayer is not a list of needs and wants presented to God. Prayer is first and foremost, a dialogue with God in which one expresses a humble desire for union with God, a desire "that the soul is united to God through love's affection". To be noted here is that a dialogue is neither a demand nor a decree. To be noted also is that desire for union with God is prioritized over desire for material things.

It is in the light of this understanding of prayer that she began the dialogue with four requests: first, for herself, that she might be purified of her own sins. Secondly, for the reform of the Church of her time badly affected by corruption and abuse of power. Thirdly, for the whole world in general, and for the peace of Christians who were living in rebellion

and dissension. And fourthly, for the intervention of divine providence in a case she did not specify.

And the third lesson to be learnt is that in the personality of Catherine of Siena could be found a woman in whom political activism is engendered and nourished by religious contemplation. She sought to be, and she was effective, in her political and ecclesiastical engagement by striving to live the Dominican motto: *contemplata aliis tradere*. As a mystic, she ardently desired God, was in constant touch with God, and sought to share with others by her word and by her action the contents and fruits of her dialogue with God. She thus shows that there is no Christian mysticism without activism, and no intelligent activism without mysticism. She show us what it is to be prophetic: it is not to make predictions, it is not to pretend to be a fortune teller, it is to speak for God. Catherine's constant dialogue with God shows that no one can speak for God who does not listen to God. Her closeness to God empowered her to tackle corruption in the Church and society of her time and challenges Christians of every generation to see the indissoluble bond between piety and responsible ecclesiastical and political engagement, to see holiness of life as necessary antidote to pervasive corruption and abuse of office.

Catherine, as a Dominican woman of prayer, teaches the whole world surely, but teaches us Dominicans first, that to be prayerful is not to be irresponsible. We cannot hide under the canopy of contemplation while we abdicate our responsibility for the common good. It would be irresponsible to meditate on the word of God without reading the newspapers, to hide in the house of prayer, in the conventual chapel, while turning a blind eye to the injustices

and ambiguities of power that pervade our world and affect our Church. Catherine embodied the precious Dominican tradition: one in which contemplation and action are not antitheses but a synthesis. And that was her greatest contribution to Church and society, the greatest contribution a Dominican can make.



FROM DENIGRATION TO ANCESTRAL VENERATION: ADVOCATING A RETHINK

Valentine O. Anaweokhai

INTRODUCTION



It was Benedict XVI (2011, par. 173), who once remarked: Once more I say: “Get up, Church in Africa... because you are being called by the heavenly Father, whom your ancestors invoked as Creator even before knowing his merciful closeness revealed in his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Set out on the path of a new evangelization with the courage that comes to you from the Holy Spirit.

This statement formed part of his final remarks in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Africae Munus*, on the Church in Africa, in service to reconciliation, justice and

peace. His call to a new evangelization in Africa, urged by the lives and experiences of our ancestors, for me is very appealing and striking.

I happen to be born into a socio-cultural milieu and world view where almost everything wrong, awful, evil, and negative is sometimes traced back to some ancestral cause. It's a cause and effect that defies any psychological, philosophical, and theological reasoning. It is a major pastoral issue that has so much dazzled me because it has generated so much acrimony, tension, malice, hatred, disagreement, and commotion among people in families, religious organizations, and social institutions.

For instance, when people experience death, bad luck, set backs and problems at work, business, school, abroad, travelling, encounters calamity and misfortune like still birth, childlessness, sickness, accident and the likes, they are all attributed to some ancestral manipulations and curses. The next thing is to see a “pastor” and so-called “prayer warriors” coming for prayers, trees are cut down, syncretistic practices, and certain rituals are carried out to stem out and cancel any bonds, links, and affiliations. With this, it is believed that such curses have been broken and life will change for the better. This situation is aggravated by the fact that we are made to believe that everything about Africans and Africa is black, fetish and evil. So, everything about our ancestors too is considered pagan, satanic, and evil. And we have bought this idea and, also taken it too far, all in the name of Christianity.

As a priest, I remember once receiving a woman in my office, who came because of her younger brother living abroad that was having some challenges and setbacks in his

“business”. His condition was giving him a lot of stress that he sent her to their father, urging him to do something about the situation. He advised they go visit a very “powerful” and “prayerful” pastor or man of God for prayers. Since the sister was a catholic, she decided to come and see me in the office. It was when I asked to speak with him, to ascertain what was really the problem, I discovered he was seriously into drug business, yet he strongly believed that his problem was coming from his family and just prayers would solve the problem. This is just one example to paint a picture of how endemic this mentality has eaten deep into people's consciousness.

The question now is, do I believe the devil exists? Yes, I do. That he is out to kill, to steal and destroy? Yes, I do. That he has so much power to do whatever he likes? No. I don't. He only has limited powers. That he is accorded too much power and attention nowadays? Yes, I do. Am I advocating that everything done by our ancestors was right, just, and good? No, I'm not. Neither do I believe everything they did was evil and from a bad motive. Rather, I'm advocating that we do a rethink of this whole issue about ancestral and generational curses for obvious reasons.

To address this topic, I will consider some of the basis for this misconception, the notion of curse and shared sin, my basis for advocating a rethink, some obvious obstacles on the pathway of realizing this dream, and suggestions on some of the ways we can go about this ancestral veneration in the liturgy.

Basic Foundations for this Belief in Ancestral Denigration

Scriptural Basis

Certain passages in the Scriptures have been taken by some people to justify the idea of ancestral curse and

malediction. For instance, in the book of Exodus, we read:

You shall not make for yourself an idol...You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments (Ex. 20:4-6).

Also, in another passage we read:

The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation (Ex. 34:7).

Other texts of note include Num. 14:18 and Jer. 32:18. In the book of 2 Sam. 12:1-25, it is recorded there that because of the sin of King David, the child from the illicit relationship with Bathsheba was believed to be struck dead by the Lord. All efforts, entreaties and prayers offered by the King to avert the wrath of Yahweh were heedless. And eventually, the child died. These have been taken as scriptural basis for this belief, where God is portrayed as a jealous God, punishing the children for the sins of the parents to the third and fourth generations. However, they leave us with the idea of a vindictive, wicked, and unforgiving God. A

God who can bear grudges for generations and yet asks us to forgive as much as seventy-seven times, every time we are offended (Matt. 18:21-22).

Socio-cultural context

Within the African world view is the notion of a God who rewards good behaviour and punishes severely bad behaviour. There exists also the idea of spirit and ancestral veneration. For Waweru, the *"importance of ancestors can be understood by recognition of the belief that in Africa, all that we possess belong to the ancestors as well as to the living community"*.

John McCall in his article: *"Rethinking Ancestors in Africa"* (1995), underscores the grave damage done by foreign writers and ethnologists to the belief and practice of ancestral veneration through stereotypes and false impressions. He recognized the fact that ancestors played an incredibly significant role in the daily lives of the people of West Africa, acknowledging that there is a relationship between the people and their ancestors, an experience which leads to the *"construction and reproduction of historical consciousness and identity"*. They were believed to invoke blessings upon their descendants during public events and festivals. These ancestors are asked to bless their descendants with good fortune and health.

However, as Waweru agrees, with the coming of the missionaries, they problematized and rejected the whole idea, coining the phrase 'ancestor worship'. This dealt a heavy blow to the whole practice of veneration to what one may term ancestral denigration. It ushered in an era of undermining and condemning almost everything instituted and formulated by our ancestors, seeing most of them as

fetish and pagan.

This is further compounded by the belief in evil spirits and evil forces that are believed to control and dominate human space and time. They are believed to inflict so much pain, famine, affliction, sickness, death, and vengeance on people even for unjustifiable reasons. It is believed for instance that when someone in a family or community enters into agreement or covenant with these spiritual forces due to childlessness, sickness or other misfortunes of life, they must fulfill their part, otherwise they will invite doom or retribution upon themselves or their generations to come. This idea has been prevalent even before the advent of Christianity to Africa. It is based on this understanding that people easily relate the effects of their negative experiences to such spiritual causes. As such, certain misfortunes are interpreted as stemming from the failed commitments and agreements made by ancestors with some of these evil spirits and forces.

Within this same context is the dominant reality of witches, wizards, and evil-minded human beings, who are believed to manipulate people's future and twist their fortunes into bad luck. They are believed to be tirelessly lurking around seeking ways of subverting people's ability to flourish and be happy. So, if it happens that one's ancestors, while here on earth, possessed such occultic powers, they are believed, even at death, to still have negative influences over their descendants.

The Notion of a Curse and shared sins

There are usually two ways of understanding curses, i.e. undeserved and deserved curses. The book of Proverbs gives

an insight (Prov. 26:2). An undeserved or causeless curse is one where curses are aimed at an innocent person. For example, Goliath raining curses at David. (1 Sam. 17:43). Such a curse has no effect but rather hovers around and return to the one who has uttered it. While deserved curse is one where curses are aimed at a guilty person, one who has committed a crime, offence, or evil act against another. For example, someone who has committed murder, sodomy, rape, oppressed strangers, widow and orphans, the poor, cheated and exploited labourers and workers. The cry and curse of the victims could have some negative consequences on their perpetrators except they repent and ask for forgiveness.

It is the idea that a person can participate or share from another's sins through any of the following ways: counsel, command, consent, provocation, praise or flattery, concealment, partaking, silence and defending evil. So, when the scripture talks about God punishing ones children for the sins of the parents to the third and fourth generation, it is only when such children continued in the way of life and culture of sin like their parents. When they participate and continue in the sins of their parents then they reap the fruits of such sinfulness. Like St. Paul would say, the wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23)

In the light of the above, it is difficult to draw a relationship and link between the sins of the ancestors and the present plight and condition of their children. The question is: Are the children suffering from a curse they deserved or from the sins they did not commit? Who's effecting and implementing the curse and making it potent over several generations? God or the devil? If the devil, who is now more powerful between satan and God? If God, then

how unfair and unjust is he? Why does he punish me for my father's sins when my life and preferences are completely different from his? Why would God be so estranged, far away and indifferent to my calamities and predicaments, knowing that I am under a spell or suffering from an ancestral curse that I know nothing about or don't even deserve, because of my innocence over what transpired then? Otherwise, this will be divine injustice and vindictiveness.

Basis for Advocating a Rethink

Scriptural

The books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, 23:34-36; 31:29-30 & Ezekiel 18:1-4,32, refer to God who says that all lives are His, the life of the parent and that of the child. It is only the person who sins that shall die. For God has no pleasure in the death of anyone. This sounds remarkably interesting, contrary to the texts earlier mentioned. For instance, Jeremiah says:

In those days they shall no longer say: The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge. But all shall die for their own sins; the teeth of everyone who eats sour grapes shall be set on edge" (Jer. 31:29-30).

Even Ezekiel puts it succinctly saying:

As I live, says the Lord GOD, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. Know that all lives are mine; the life of the parent as well as the life of the child is mine: it is only the person who sins that shall die... For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord GOD. Turn, then, and live (Ezek. 18:3-

4.32).

In the Gospel of St. John, Jesus was asked a question by his disciples, concerning the man who was born blind: *“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him”* (John 9:1-3). Some Scripture scholars have seen this question of the disciples as both “uncharitably censorious and unnecessarily curious”. All probably emanating from the mentality that his condition wasn't ordinary but as it is believed nowadays, it was occasioned by an ancestral curse, spiritual forces, or attack. It boils down to the idea that the one who suffers more is the one who has sinned more. Jesus clarified such insinuations when he said, neither his parents nor the man sinned, but so that God's works might be revealed in him. Eventually, he healed the man of his blindness.

PSYCHOLOGICAL BASIS

One of the strong tenets of positive psychology today is that of viewing the human person not simply as a languishing victim, who is afflicted by the events of the past, but rather as one created to flourish and be happy. Emphasis is based on how to grow in virtues, building on character strengths and looking into the future and forging ahead. It aims at not only repairing *“the worst things in life but also build positive qualities...Not just fixing what is broken, but also nurturing what is best.”* Positive psychology, pioneered by Seligman and now, many other people working in this very important field of psychology, focus more, not on what was wrong with us, not with what had caused our problems, but on what positive things we could do to move ahead, and flourish, and to

prosper (Institute for the Psychological Sciences [IPS], 2014).

This has occasioned a tremendous paradigm shift in psychology. Reshaping the disease and victim model psychology, where people remained passive and helpless in the face of their problems and were weighed down by their past harrowing experiences. Instead, it advocates a reliance on the virtues, for example, faith, hope, love, fortitude, temperance, prudence and justice, as well as positive values (respect, compassion, kindness, altruism, forthrightness, diligence and truthfulness), in moving ahead in life. This, therefore, would not pave the way for people to attribute their setbacks, problems, disappointments, failure, and challenges on others. Here, there is no room for any blame-game and negative mindedness.

It is a known fact that children inherit certain traits and characteristics from their parents. This is true both physiologically and psychologically. For example, children acquire some obvious physical semblances like colour, height, physique, shape, and behaviour or character like gentleness, shyness, outspokenness, agility, temperament, and smartness. These are some of the traits people observe in children and they match them with their parents. The transference of such qualities are beyond both the parents and their children. They are endowments of nature necessitated by God.

It is not unusual to notice that certain traits, habits, characters, and behaviours (either good or bad) are repeating themselves in a family, culture, or social group from one generation to another. For example, excessive drinking, sexual depravity, lousiness, laziness, industriousness, intelligence, gentleness, kindness,

truthfulness, stealing, lying, short-temperedness and pride. This is where education, whether religious or formal, comes in to assist people in doing away with such bad characters and behaviours that are unhealthy or against standard norms and practices. People can learn to acquire good (new) habits and to do away with bad (old) habits.

Theological and Magisterial

Generally, Africans have a profound religious sense, a sense of the sacred, of the existence of God the Creator and of a spiritual world, the reality of sin in its individual and social forms, the need for rites of purification and expiation, a sense of the family, a sense of solidarity and community life. Like John Paul II says:

The sons and daughters of Africa love life. It is precisely this love for life that leads them to give such great importance to the veneration of their ancestors. They believe intuitively that the dead continue to live and remain in communion with them. Is this not in some way a preparation for belief in the Communion of the Saints? The peoples of Africa respect the life which is conceived and born. They rejoice in this life... Africans show their respect for human life until its natural end and keep elderly parents and relatives within the family (ibid, 1995, par. 43).

On Pentecost Sunday, 7 June 1992, John Paul II acknowledged before the people of Angola, on the 500th anniversary of their evangelization, the courage of their ancestors when he said:

Your ancestors heard the message of the Good News which is the language of the Spirit. Their

hearts accepted this message for the first time, and they bowed their heads to the waters of the baptismal font in which, by the power of the Holy Spirit, a person dies with Christ and is born again to new life in his Resurrection...It was the Holy Spirit who sustained the life of those four first Angolan Christians who, returning from Europe, testified to the Christian faith (ibid, 1995, par. 32).

Also, while recalling the memorable words of his predecessor, Paul VI, during the canonization of the Ugandan Martyrs in Saint Peter's Basilica on world Mission's Day, 1964 and the heroic lives of some of the African Martyrs [Blessed Clementine Anwarite of Zaire, Blessed Josephine Bakhita of Sudan, and Blessed Isidore Bakanja of Zaire] he had beatified so far, John Paul II, admonished that: "*the Church in Africa must furnish and write her own Martyrology, adding to the outstanding figures of the first centuries ... the Martyrs and Saints of our own day*" (ibid, 1995, par. 34).

The church in Africa has witnessed countless Saints, Martyrs, Confessors, and Virgins, from the second to the fourth centuries, in the North of Africa. Renowned among them are doctors and writers like Origen, Saint Athanasius, and Saint Cyril, leaders of the Alexandrian school, Tertullian, Saint Cyprian and above all Saint Augustine, one of the most brilliant lights of the Christian world. Also, are the great Saints of the desert, Paul, Anthony, and Pachomius, the first founders of the monastic life. Others are Saint Frumentius, known by the name of Abba Salama, who was consecrated Bishop by Saint Athanasius and became the first Apostle of Ethiopia as well as Saints Perpetua and Felicitas, Saint

Monica, Saint Thecla and also the saintly African Popes, Victor I, Melchiades and Gelasius I, (ibid, 1995, par. 31).

Both the papal statements and the exemplary lives of the men and women from Africa, mentioned above are indicative of the fact that our ancestors have played a major role in the growth of the church and the Christian faith. They recall the landmark commitments and sacrifices they made to shape the course of history and were used by the Holy spirit to actualize the will and plan of God for the salvation of souls. Had they reneged, no one knows what would have happened. Such history and memories cannot be easily blotted out and forgotten by those who should hold them dearly and specially.

One thing stands clear, that within the African world view, the ancestors hold a place of esteem, pride, and reverence. They share a deep communion, though dead, with their relations and communities. To this end, Benedict XVI (2011, par. 69), once said in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation; *Africae Munus* that:

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

There is no doubt that some of our ancestors were involved in acts and practices that could be termed evil and barbaric today. For example, connivance in the the trans-Atlantic and sub-Saharan slave trades, ritual killings, fetish and abominable practices based on certain religious and cultural beliefs like killing of albinos, twins, female genital mutilation, animal sacrifices to the gods and other forms of ancient worship. Some of these religious and cultural beliefs and practices have continued till date. But let us not overlook the fact that they also did certain things with 'good intentions and motives', established certain structures, value systems and customs that have sustained and preserved our society till date as well.

They were inspired to formulate and establish enduring moral and social value systems, customs and traditions, folklores, proverbs and wise sayings, family and marriage values, skills and knowledge in the arts & culture, trade, agriculture, health care and housing, respect for human life and concern for the common good. Just as we have bad things to say, we have the good to remember them for. As they made mistakes and committed sins, so they made laudable impacts and laid good foundations too. They lived according to their times, knowledge and understanding. Just as we do today, especially now that history is no longer part of our school curricula.

An undue emphasis on the whole notion of ancestral curses reduces humans to inculpable beings. It subjects every set back and failure in life to some external forces and cause. It does not give room for individual freedom and responsibility (Sirach 15:14-17). It assumes a fatal determinism, where everything evil happening in a person's life is determined by the sins of the past. It gives too much

powers, glory and sovereignty to the devil, evil forces and the wicked over and above GOD who is Almighty, Omnipotent, Omnipresent, Merciful and Loving. It gives the impression of a vindictive and merciless God. One who is weak, overwhelmed, and helpless with the quantum of evil in His own creation. A God who has lost authority, control, and governance over human affairs. It denigrates and undermines everything about our ancestors, as if nothing good is known about them. It paints them in a bad light. It is important to rethink and reassess this kind of narrative that has been further fuelled and spread by some Christian preachers occasioned by fundamental Pentecostalism.

This aspect of the negative influence of modern-day preachers and fundamental Pentecostalism can not be over-emphasized. With an upsurge in the proliferation of churches, prosperity messages, healing ministries and miracle centers, all cashing in on the deplorable socio-economic and political realities of most African countries, their impact on the psyche and way of the life of the people has been outrageously scandalous and brutal.

Their nomenclature and vocabulary easily give rise to confusion, and they can lead people in good faith astray. These many sects take advantage of an incomplete social infrastructure, the erosion of traditional family solidarity and inadequate catechesis in order to exploit people's credulity, and they offer a religious veneer to a variety of heterodox, non-Christian beliefs. They shatter the peace of couples and families through false prophecies and visions. They even seduce

Political Leaders (ibid, 2011, Par. 91).

Anytime I listen to the litany of the saints, I ponder about men and women, boys and girls who did little things in special ways, ordinary things in extraordinary ways. We remember people like St Augustine, St Paul, St Mary Magdalene, and the thief crucified at the right hand of Jesus. They are officially recognised today as saints because people did remember them and their good deeds. They were weak and sinners but saved by the grace of God. In the genealogy of Jesus as found in the first chapter of Matthew's Gospel, we find out that even people with certain "questionable" and unfashionable characters were also listed as part of the ancestral lineage of our saviour, Jesus Christ. For example, Tamar and Judah (Gen. 38:6-30), Rahab (Joshua 2:1), Bathshebba (2 Sam. 11:2), Kings Rehoboam (1 Kgs. 11:43), Abijah (1 Kgs. 14:31) and Joram (2 Kgs. 8:16-19).

By all standards, the above-mentioned names ought not to be included as Jesus' ancestors (tresses). But God in his own wisdom has decided to make good things out of the unusual and abnormal. Like the saying goes; "Grace does not run in the blood, neither does reigning sin. God's grace is his own, and he gives or withholds it as he pleases". It is imperative to note that we ought not to upbraid people with the scandals of their ancestors; it is what they cannot help, and has been the lot of the best, even of our Master, Jesus himself. David's begetting Solomon of her that had been the wife of Uriah is taken notice of and in the words of Dr. Whitby "to show that the crime of David, being repented to, was so far from hindering the promise made to him, that it pleased God by this very woman to fulfil it".

Evident Obstacles and Impediments on the Pathway

Some of the dominant factors that have occasioned a strong resistance to this new way of thinking about our ancestors include, but are not limited to; superstitious belief, syncretism, untethered neo-Pentecostalism, poor catechesis, little or no theological training of some “pastors”, poor understanding and dialogue, mutual suspicion and condemnation.

Structures and avenues abound through which this reorientation and rethink can be made possible. They are parishes, movements and associations at the parish, diocesan and national levels, and Catholic schools. Regarding the role of schools in this all-important issue, John Paul II (*ibid*, 1995, par. 64), says:

Bearing this in mind, the Synod expressed the hope that the Episcopal Conferences, in cooperation with Universities and Catholic Institutes, would set up study commissions, especially for matters concerning marriage, the veneration of ancestors, and the spirit world, in order to examine in depth all the cultural aspects of problems from the theological, sacramental, liturgical and canonical points of view.

Venerating Our Ancestors Today

From the foregoing, it is necessary to ask the question; how do we concretely apply the urge and appeal to review this negative perception of our ancestors to real life situations? In which areas or aspects of our lives can special attention be focused, to restore the golden memories and values of our past heroes. I have identified here, the following:

First, there is an urgent need to revisit and refine some of our African traditional practices and festivals e.g. new yam, new year, marriage, and adult initiation festivals and seek ways of integrating them into the church's liturgical celebrations, as they hold an inestimable importance and value in the lives of the people. This is based on the appeal by Benedict XVI (Ibid, 2011, par. 92), for an in-depth study of African traditions and cultures, so that rather than condemn, we may learn to discern and appreciate the unique goodness of others' cultures and values. He says:

It is worth singling out knowledgeable individual converts, who could provide the Church with guidance in gaining a deeper and more accurate knowledge of the traditions, the culture, and the traditional religions. This would make it easier to identify points of real divergence. It would also help to clarify the vital distinction between culture and cult and to discard those magical elements which cause division and ruin for families and societies.

Advocating the cause of sainthood for notable persons who lived exemplary and heroic lives. This can only be pushed forward by Africans themselves. Though, cost and procedures may not come by easily, it is a route that needs to be fruitfully explored and ventured into. This could pave the way for more saints like Vivian Ogu, officially emerging from the Nigerian church. It would also show that Africa, even in the present situation, still has a capacity to produce men and women of rare character and virtues. The church in Africa should take this seriously to heart.

Another way is to re-enact and promote the wisdom and memories of our ancestors through writings, homilies, sacred music, sacred artwork, and movies. These would create awareness about their lives, contributions, and good deeds.

Those who have the responsibility of promoting and encouraging this new way of thinking about our ancestors include bishops, priests, consecrated persons, catechists, formators in seminaries and religious houses, theologians, laity, and traditional institutions. This is very crucial because:

the credibility of the Church in Africa depended upon Bishops and priests who followed Christ's example and could give witness of an exemplary life; upon truly faithful men and women religious, authentic witnesses by their way of living the evangelical counsels; upon a dynamic laity, with deeply believing parents, educators conscious of their responsibilities and political leaders animated by a profound sense of morality (ibid, 1995, par. 22).

The different ways they can encourage this include: an intensive, focused, goal-oriented and purpose-driven catechesis and homilies, positive psychology (one based on the virtues and core values on how to move forward and flourish in life), specialized pastoral counseling (where unsuspecting people do not end up in the hands of so-called charlatans and exploiters of consciences), an all-inclusive and balanced spirituality (devoid of syncretism), re-evangelization, inculturation, a sincere, serene and open

dialogue. The church must rise to these needs and realities. Meanwhile, the purpose, intent and motif behind certain gatherings and activities, e.g. crusades, all night vigils and other 'special ministries' in the church, should be looked into. Proper guidelines and policies should not only be formulated but well implemented to check the ideas and knowledge been disseminated to the people through these occasions. This is one of the strongest avenues by which such impressions are sold out and they stick easily. But their effects are usually damaging and destructive.

CONCLUSION

In Africa, to use the words of John Paul II (*ibid*, 1995, par. 47), *"the elderly are held in particular veneration. They are not banished from families or marginalized as in other cultures. On the contrary, they are esteemed and perfectly integrated within their families, of which they are indeed the pinnacle. This beautiful African appreciation of old age should inspire Western societies to treat the elderly with greater dignity.* Having alluded to that, it is obvious then, that if we do not celebrate and venerate our elders and ancestors, especially those who exuded heroic virtues and greatness as Africans, who will do it for us. If we keep vilifying and blaming them, how would that help? Could they have behaved differently and other wise as we usually expect and think? They acted and behaved as their age and time permitted. Just the same way we do in our own age and time. There is no doubt that generations to come after us may vilify and criticise our generation for the things we did and failed to do also. It's simply, what goes around, comes around. It is simply uncharitable and unchristian to denigrate and treat with irreverence those who lived their lives to the best of their

ability, knowledge, exposure, awareness and understanding. Sad still, accuse them for every mishap and misfortune we experience today.

Christian charity demands that we pay respect and homage to whom it is due. Ours is not to judge or condemn. God alone is the one to acquit or condemn. Who says we have not produced innumerable saints, heroes and heroines, great men, and women of outstanding and sterling virtues over the ages? But if we don't extoll their good deeds and virtues, who will do it for us? Who will celebrate them for us if we don't? Who will revere and venerate them if we don't? How many of us can trace our ancestral lineages to the first, second and third roots? How many of us know anything good (except only evil and wicked stories and images) about our parents, grand, great grand and great, great grand parents?.

It's good we all trace our ancestral roots to the extent possible and begin to rethink and rewrite the narratives ourselves. Let us remember; "Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back" (Lk. 6:37-38). For those who may not have lived and done well, let's have them in our prayers and commend them to the mercy and grace of God. For those who have done and lived exceptionally well, let's venerate, reverence, extol and celebrate them. Let's echo their good deeds to the ends of the earth. Other wise, posterity may also be unfair and unjust to us and even denigrate us too if care is not taken. The church in Africa must

wake up and meet this need and challenge.

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**THE NECESSITY AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE NEW
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With the new Apostolic Letter, *Authenticum charismatis* (The Authenticity of a Charism), issued *motu proprio* by Pope Francis, all new foundations in the Catholic Church aspiring to be institutes of consecrated life or societies of apostolic life are now required to obtain written approval from the Apostolic See before their canonical erection as institutes of consecrated life or societies of apostolic life.

Previously, the provision of the law in canon 579 of the Code of Canon Law stated that Diocesan Bishops could establish new institutes after prior consultation with the Apostolic See. Now it is no longer sufficient to consult in this regard because this new document, *Authenticum charismatis* modifies the stipulation in canon 579 and makes it explicit that Diocesan Bishops can only validly erect institutes of consecrated life or societies of apostolic life by a formal

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decree, and only when written permission has been given by the Apostolic See.

This canonical revision of canon 579 of the Code of Canon Law has its values and implications for the Church in Africa.

THE PROBLEM

In recent times, the Catholic Church in Africa has experienced an upsurge in the foundation of new pious associations aspiring to be institutes of consecrated life or societies of apostolic life.

Of course, this religious fervor should be seen as a blessing to the Catholic Church because there can never be too many religious men and women in the life of the Church that the Church would no longer need them for its mission in the world. The matter of concern to the Church is the crucial need to follow the proper procedures of founding new institutes of consecrated life and new societies of apostolic life which the Church has laid down for the wellbeing of these new institutes and their members.

I am speaking from Nigeria, and I have to say that the proliferation of new foundations that want to become institutes of consecrated life in Nigeria has become a grave concern not only to the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria but also to the Religious Orders and Congregations themselves in Nigeria. Some of these numerous associations and groups come into existence without reference to competent ecclesiastical authorities.

IMPLICATIONS

It is not enough to bring young men or young women together for the purpose of living religious life; it is important that their future must also be placed into perspective. The

spiritual and physical patrimony required for the sustainability and viability of the new foundation must be seriously considered.

In Nigeria, many young people who feel they have a vocation to religious life end up in these pious associations because they do not know the difference. Both pious associations and the institutes of consecrated life wear the religious habit. These young people identify religious life with the religious habit and that is all they know.

To join an association that is not approved by the Church and that is not making any effort to participate in the process of discernment leading to the ecclesial recognition is a risky venture.

Every pious association is not destined to be an institute of consecrated life in the Church, especially if it lacks the stability and is suffering from profound deficiencies in relation to religious discipline and basic features of religious life.

It has been observed that some of the founders and foundresses of these new foundations in Nigeria that want to become institutes of consecrated life were either dismissed from their original institutes or had some unsettled issues with their original institutes. These founders and foundresses end up only changing the name of their previous institutes, but adopting the same spirituality, charism and apostolate of their former institutes, thereby resulting in the unnecessary duplication of charism and apostolate in the same region.

NECESSITY

The Pope's intervention addresses a timely need in the Church in Africa.

It will assist the local churches in making the right discernment regarding the establishment of new institutes of consecrated life and new societies of apostolic life. It will provide information to prospective founders and foundresses as well as to competent ecclesiastical authorities responsible for discerning the authenticity of new foundations making clear the laid down procedures to be followed before the written approval by the Holy See and the subsequent canonical erection of these new institutes. The Roman Pontiff as the Pastor of the Universal Church has provided a workable solution in this regard so as to bring sanity to this issue and to prevent further degeneration.

**THE COMMUNIQUES OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE
MAJOR SUPERIORS OF NIGERIA ISSUED AT THE JOINT
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING (AGM):
A COLLABORATIVE SERVICE TO THE CHURCH AND
SOCIETY
FROM 1998 – 2020. A CHRONOLOGICAL LIST²⁴¹**

1. *FORMATION FOR MISSION. Given 29th January, 1998, at the Pope John Paull II Pastoral Centre, Makurdi, Benue State.*
2. *THE RELIGIOUS LIFE AS A SIGN OF CONTRADICTION. Given 29th January, 1999, at the Madonna Renewal Centre Nkpor-Agu, Onitsha, Anambra State.*
3. *LEADERSHIP AND AUTHORITY IN RELIGIOUS LIFE –CULTURAL CONTEXT. Given 22nd January, 2000, at the Pastoral Institute, Ibadan, Oyo State.*
4. *COLLABORATIVE MINISTRY Given 19th January, 2001, Sacred Heart Pastoral Centre, Jos, Plateau State.*
5. *SHARIA: PASTORAL IMPLICATIONS Given 19th January 2002, at Assumpta Pastoral Centre, Owerri, Imo State*
6. *SEXUALITY AND CELIBACY Given 18th January 2003, at Pope John Paul II Pastoral Centre, Ado – Ekiti, Ekiti State.*
7. *FORMATION WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE CHURCH AS FAMILY OF GOD. Given 17th January, 2004, at the Catholic Social Centre, Kaduna, Kaduna.*

²⁴¹The editor gratefully acknowledges the assistance received from Rev. Sr. Augustina Okoroafor, SSH, General Secretary of NCWR, during the compilation of this list.

8. *THE EUCHARIST AS THE SOURCE AND SUMMIT OF OUR LIFE* Given 15th January 2005, at the Daughters of Divine Love Retreat and Conference Centre, Enugu, Enugu State.
9. *RELIGIOUS AS AGENTS OF TRANSFORMATION IN NIGERIA* Given 21ST January, 2006, Pope John Paul II Pastoral Centre, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State.
10. *THE RELIGIOUS AND THE EXERCISE OF POWER.* Given 20th January, 2007, at the Daughters of Divine Love Retreat and Conference Centre, Sabon Lugbe, Abuja FCT.
11. *CHALLENGES OF SELF-RELIANCE FOR RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES IN THE CHURCH IN NIGERIA* Given 19th January, 2008, at Assumpta Pastoral Centre, Owerri, Imo State.
12. *THE CHURCH IN THE SERVICE OF RECONCILIATION, JUSTICE AND PEACE IN AFRICA.* Given 23rd January, 2009, at Kelly Pastoral Centre Benin City, Edo State.
13. *THE PLACE OF THE WORD OF GOD IN THE LIFE OF THE RELIGIOUS.* Given 22nd January, 2010, at Catholic Social Centre, Kaduna, Kaduna State.
14. *THE SECOND SPECIAL SYNOD FOR AFRICA: PRACTICAL IMPLICATION FOR THE CHURCH IN NIGERIA* Given 22nd January, 2011, at Madonna Renewal Centre Nkpor-Agu, Onitsha, Anambra State.
15. *CARING FOR THE CARERS: HEALTH ISSUES* Given 31st March 2012, at the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus Generalate, Ikeja, Lagos, Lagos State,
16. *NEW MEDIA TECHNOLOGY* Given 5th May, 2012, at

- the Daughters of Divine Love Retreat and Conference Centre, Sabon Lugbe, Abuja*
17. *RELIGIOUS AND FAITH CRISIS IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD. Given 26th January, 2013, at the Daughters of Divine Love Retreat and Conference Centre, Sabon Lugbe, Abuja.*
 18. *NEW EVANGELISATION AND MODERNISM IN NIGERIA. Communique, January 17, 2014, Joint AGM of the CMSN, January 12 – 18, 2014, at Bishop Anthony Nwedo Pastoral Centre, Umuahia, Abia State.*
 19. *CONSECRATED LIFE IN THE 21ST CENTURY: The African/Nigerian Experience. Communique, January 30, 2015, issued during Joint AGM of the CMSN January 25 – 31, 2015, held at Bishop Kelly Pastoral Centre, Benin City, Edo State.*
 20. *CONSECRATED LIFE AND PASTORAL CARE OF THE FAMILY. Communique. January 22, 2016, issued at the joint AGM of the CMSN, January 17-23, 2016. Venue: Daughters of Divine Love Retreat and Conference Centre, DRACC, Abuja*
 21. *RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES: HOME OF MERCY. Communique. January 20, 2017, issued during the Joint AGM of CMSN January 15 – 21, 2017. Venue: Daughters of Divine Love Retreat and Conference Centre, DRACC, Enugu*
 22. *MARY MODEL OF CONSECRATED PERSONS: PROPHETIC WITNESSING IN THE NIGERIAN*

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This article is an expanded version of the original short reflection posted on the facebook on the occasion of the 59th Anniversary of marriage of the parents of the author's parents, Chief Vital and Mrs Comfort Anaweokhai, on Thursday 14th May, 2020. (Ed.'s note)

