

The background of the central section is a light gray image of a crowd of people. Many individuals have their arms raised, some holding up signs or banners. The scene suggests a public demonstration or a large gathering. The overall color palette is dominated by dark red and gold accents.

# **CONSECRATED LIFE AND POLITICS:**

**Drawing the Line and Making the Connections**

*Editor:*

*KANU Ikechukwu Anthony, O.S.A*

# **CONSECRATED LIFE AND POLITICS:**

**Drawing the Line and Making the Connections**

**Editor:**

**KANU Ikechukwu Anthony, O.S.A**

# CONSECRATED LIFE AND POLITICS:

Drawing the Line and Making the Connections

All Copyright 2019 ©

## CONTACTS

ALL rights reserved: No part of this publication may be produced, stored a retrieved system or transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photographic, recording or otherwise without the prior written permission of the Editor

ISBN: 978-978-8458-83-8



*Printed in Nigeria by*

Fab Anieh Nigeria Limited,

Plot 7, Kabong Layout, Near PW Construction Yard,

P.O. Box 1441, 930001 Jos, Plateau State.

Tel: 0703 229 8131, 0803 452 7025

E-mail: [fabaniehpress@yahoo.com](mailto:fabaniehpress@yahoo.com)

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Dedication</b>	-	-	-	-	-	<b>v</b>
<b>Foreword</b>	-	-	-	-	-	<b>vi</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	-	-	-	-	-	<b>xi</b>
<b>The theology of Consecrated Life</b>						
<i>Kanu Ikechukwu Anthony, OSA</i>	-	-	-	-	-	<b>1</b>
<b>Theology and Politics: Towards a Strange Alchemy</b>						
<i>Kanu Ikechukwu Anthony, OSA</i>	-	-	-	-	-	<b>11</b>
<b>Consecrated Persons in Public Service: Panacea for Development of the Society</b>						
<i>Innocent Chukwuemeka Ekeagwu, SMMM</i>	-	-	-	-	-	<b>21</b>
<b>The Role of Consecrated Persons in Educational development</b>						
<i>Naanmiap Baamlong, OSA</i>	-	-	-	-	-	<b>39</b>
<b>Consecrated Life and Option for the Poor</b>						
<i>Chukwuebuka Charles Ugonwafor, OSA</i>	-	-	-	-	-	<b>59</b>
<b>Consecrated persons and environmental politics: The 'green' vow?</b>						
<i>Kizito Uzoma Ndugbu, SMMM</i>	-	-	-	-	-	<b>111</b>

**Consecrated Persons and Witnessing in Nigeria  
Political Context**

*Jude A. Ofuani, CMF* - - - - 129

**Consecrated Persons and Political Participation**

*Samuel Aliba-* - - - - 141

**Consecrated Persons and Election**

*Kingsley Ogbu, SMMM* - - - - 155

**Consecrated Persons and the Promotion of  
Justice in Nigeria**

*Daniel Onyeayana, CMF* - - - - 183

## **Dedication**

Late Rev. Sr. Mary Gloria NJOKU, DDL  
*Who served in the Editorial Board of the Catholic Voyage?*

## FOREWORD

In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle describes man as a political being/animal (*zoon politikon*). This understanding of man highlights clearly the social dimension of his existence. He lives in constant interactions with others, governed by laws and customs in society; and by so doing develops his potentials and acquires self-actualization. Hence, there is need for order in the society. Of course, the man in the society is the same man in the Church, bearing in mind the thought of St. Augustine in “the City of God,” that “Christians are citizens of two worlds.” The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*) encourages all citizens to participate in the political process (GS 75), since political community exists for the common good (GS, 74). However, the Church, on her part, is not identified with any political party or system (GS, 76); rather she serves as the sign and safeguard of the transcendence of the human person by witnessing to the truth that has political implications.

The Church promotes and defends fundamental human rights; rights which each of us has, not through the kindness of leaders or the grants of constitutions but by reason of our intrinsic dignity as men and women created in the image of God. These rights, frequently explicated in the constitutions of many nations, are expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

of the United Nations (on December 10, 1948) and in the African Charter on Human and People's Rights of the Organization of African Unity, (OAU). They include: right to life, liberty, security of life and protection of law, freedom of conscience, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, freedom of movement and freedom of association, protection of property and privacy of home and protection from discrimination and exploitation. Also included are economic and social rights: right to food, shelter, health, medical care, education and to work under good conditions with just remuneration, as well as respect for cultural diversity and right to freedom of worship - religion.

The government must not see these declarations as mere political statements as it is currently the case in Nigerian politics. This is noted by Pope Benedict XVI as he states that "in truth political morality consists precisely of resisting the seductive temptation of the big words by which humanity and its opportunities are gambled away" (Joseph Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics*, p.149). It is indeed alarming that the political system and governance in Nigeria remain a nightmare. It is a mythological politics. Incessant kidnappings of the clergy, consecrated persons and other citizens have put the lives and securities of people under siege and jeopardy. The brutal deadly massacres by the terrorist and Boko Haram insurgency together with the indifferent response of the government put everyone in disarray.

The consecrated persons feel the impact of mal-administration and political instability in the country which is causing impoverishment, untold hardship and loss of hope among the citizenry. Consecrated persons, therefore have the moral duty to condemn evil as well as demand for their civil rights. We are urged to maintain attitudes of solidarity with all peoples, in justice and peace, by sharing our gifts and inspirations in our areas of apostolate in order to “manifest the gift of the Spirit for the common good” (1Cor. 12:70). According to Pope Benedict XVI: “amoralism ought to be fought with morality; evil by a determination to persist in what is good, and not otherwise. Morality, doing good, is true resistance and only what is good can be the preparation for a dramatic change to what is better” (Ratzinger J. 150).

This piece therefore raises awareness of the collective responsibility required of the consecrated persons as well as all Christian men and women in the political life of our nation. We need to change the current prevailing inhuman political landscape. Efforts to achieve the right relationship of faith and politics occupy the foreground of the contributors of the articles that make up this journal. Consecrated persons in their contributions assure men and women that their hopes extend beyond the State and beyond the sphere of political activity. Thus, the service that Christian faith performs for politics is that it liberates men and women from the

irrationality of the political myths which are the real threat of our time. The writers aim to assess the actual situation of the lives of consecrated men and women, analyze the significance, effectiveness and relevance of religious life and their motivations for engaging in the work of evangelization through lives of witness (Cf. VC n. 25) that enable transformation, restructuring and innovation, which will in turn help to change concrete political praxis in the country.

This work displays a sound analysis of significant scholars. It is constructively critical, comprehensively educative and informative in its presentation of facts as regards politics, as far as Nigerian situation is concerned. It is a work of daring boldness that has broken the ice to engage in creating awareness in politics both now and in the future. The ideas expressed in this literary work are unbiased, fair and empirical. It is a revolutionary contribution that will help the Church and the nation at large to make a seasoned stock-taking exercise as regards politics in Nigeria. This journal comes at just the right moment and with the right approach. It is a creative response of consecrated persons - philosophers and theologians - to address the political situation of the country, by bringing 2019 Nigerian elections out of the realm of speculations into the real world of pastoral concern and conscientization. All are thereby encouraged to participate positively by voting according to their consciences the right people for leadership. I

therefore, recommend this journal to all and enjoin us to put into action the recommendations therein.

*Very Rev. Fr. Dr. George M. Okorie, SMMM,*

*President Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria  
(Men)*

## INTRODUCTION

A cursory glance at the theology of the church reveals that the Paschal Mystery is the wellspring of the Church's missionary nature, which is reflected in the whole of the Church's life. It is expressed in a distinctive way in the consecrated life. Over and above the charisms proper to those Institutes which are devoted to the mission *ad gentes* or which are engaged in ordinary apostolic activity, it can be said that the sense of mission is at the very heart of every form of consecrated life. To the extent that consecrated persons live a life completely devoted to the Father (cf. Lk 2:49; Jn 4:34), held fast by Christ (cf. Jn 15:16; Gal 1:15-16) and animated by the Spirit (cf. Lk 24:49; Acts 1:8; 2:4), they cooperate effectively in the mission of the Lord Jesus (cf. Jn 20:21) and contribute in a particularly profound way to the renewal of the world<sup>1</sup>.

As consecrated persons are called to change the world for the better, the church also teaches that the first missionary duty of consecrated persons is to themselves by opening their hearts to the promptings of the Spirit of Christ:

Consecrated persons will be missionaries above all by continually deepening their awareness of having been called and chosen by God, to whom they must therefore direct and offer everything

---

<sup>1</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Vitae Consecrata*, No. 25

that they are and have, freeing themselves from the obstacles which could hinder the totality of their response. In this way they will become true signs of Christ in the world. Their lifestyle too must clearly show the ideal which they profess, and thus present itself as a living sign of God and as an eloquent, albeit often silent, proclamation of the Gospel<sup>2</sup>.

This responsibility to renew the world does not end with the self. Consecrated persons must go out of themselves to proclaim to the world the peace which comes from the Father, the dedication witnessed to by the Son, and the joy which is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. And this is not possible without a visible presence in the world.

The Church must always seek to make her presence visible in everyday life, especially in contemporary culture, which is often very secularized and yet sensitive to the language of signs. In this regard the Church has a right to expect a significant contribution from consecrated persons, called as they are in every situation to bear clear witness that they belong to Christ<sup>3</sup>.

This work on 'Consecrated Life and Politics' provides a context in our contemporary culture, precisely the

---

<sup>2</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Vitae Consecrata*, No. 25

<sup>3</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Vitae Consecrata*, No. 25

political hemisphere, for consecrated persons to bear witness to the world the peace which comes from the Father. This is very important as the Nigerian nation prepares for the 2019 election. And thus it is not surprising that areas such as consecrated persons and witnessing in the socio-political arena, consecrated persons and involvement in political partisanship, consecrated persons and political office, consecrated persons and elections, consecrated persons and the promotion of justice, education, political rights, etc., occupy the centre stage of this piece.

This work is a great accomplishment, which has carefully reflected on the relationship between consecrated persons and politics. The different contributors, like artists, combine originality with insightful imagination. This piece is of value to all who treasure good theological literature on consecrated life; and most especially for anyone who wishes to be abreast with important debates and developments within the parameters of consecrated life.

*KANU, Ikechukwu Anthony, O.S.A.  
Professor of Religion and Cultural Studies  
Tansian University, Nigeria*





## THE THEOLOGY OF CONSECRATED LIFE

Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony, O.S.A

*Professor of Religion and Cultural Studies  
Tansian University, Umunya*

The Consecrated Life is deeply rooted in the example and teaching of Christ the Lord, as a gift of God the Father to his Church through the Holy Spirit. It is traceable to the post-apostolic church, especially to those early Christians who dedicated themselves to a gospel-oriented life-style, to a radical following of Jesus Christ. The first person in this line was Anthony of Egypt. He was followed by a line of disciples, until it became an institution in the Church<sup>1</sup>. However, in every age there have been men and women who, obedient to the Father's call and to the prompting of the Spirit, have chosen this special way of following Christ, in order to devote themselves to him with an undivided heart (cf. *1 Cor 7:34*)<sup>2</sup>.

The word consecration is derived from the word 'holy' or 'holiness'. In Hebrew it is *qadash* and in Greek *Hagios*; these are translated to mean 'to consecrate' (Lev 15:31; Ezek 14:7). In Numbers 6:5-7, 12, the Nazirites were

---

<sup>1</sup> Mary-Sylvia Nwachukwu, *Consecrated: A Vision of Religious Life from the Point of View of the Sacred*. Lagos: Change Publications, 2010, pp. 34-35.

<sup>2</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Vitae Consecrata*, No. 1.

referred to as consecrated because of their vows to God. This makes the person holy and separates him or her from others. Therefore, the word consecration implies a setting apart or a separation. This separation does not in any way imply superiority<sup>3</sup>, or complete severance from those the consecrated are called to serve<sup>4</sup>. It rather means that, like the Apostles, they have left everything behind in order to be with Christ and to put themselves, as he did, at the service of God and their brothers and sisters. In this way, through the many charisms of spiritual and apostolic life bestowed on them by the Holy Spirit, they help to make the mystery and mission of the Church shine forth, and in doing so have contributed to the renewal of society<sup>5</sup>.

The consecrated persons in the Church live the consecrated life “to the extent of their capacities and in keeping with the particular kind of religious life to which they are called, whether it be one of prayer or of active labour as well, they have the duty of working for the implanting and strengthening of the kingdom of Christ in souls and for spreading it to the four corners of

---

<sup>3</sup> Myers, A. C. *Holiness*. The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1987, p. 493.

<sup>4</sup> Myers, A. C. *Sanctify, Consecrate*. The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1987, p. 493.

<sup>5</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Vitae Consecrata*, No. 1.

the earth.”<sup>6</sup> *Perfectae Caritatis* recognizes five different types of Consecrated life<sup>7</sup>:

1. The Contemplative,
2. the Apostolate/ Active Communities,
3. the Monastic,
4. the Lay Religious and,
5. the Secular Institutions.<sup>8</sup>

Each form of consecrated life has its beauty and positive contribution to the Church. Contemplatives remain “an ornament to the Church a fount of heavenly graces”.<sup>9</sup> The Active Communities perform, on behalf of the Church, the apostolic and charitable ministry entrusted

---

<sup>6</sup> Ochiagha G., *An Echo From the Past (Anti-clericalism Around the Corner)*, Enugu: SNAAP Press, 1994, p. 30.

<sup>7</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae Caritatis*, Nos 7-11

<sup>8</sup> No. 11 recognizes, however that Secular institutes are not religious institutes: “While it is true that secular institutions are not religious institutes, at the same time they involve a true and full profession of the evangelical counsels in the world, recognized by the Church. This profession confers consecration on people living in the world, men and women, laymen and clerics”. Pope John Paul II in the Post-Synodal Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, Nos 5-12 lists different forms of consecrated life. See also, Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation on the Renewal of religious Life, *Evangelica Testificatio*, (29<sup>th</sup> June 1971). Nos. 8-10.

<sup>9</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 7.

to them.<sup>10</sup> The Monks are assets to the church through their duty:

The principal duty of monks is to present to the divine majesty a service at once humble and noble within the walls of the monastery. This is true whether they dedicate themselves entirely to divine worship in the contemplative life or have legitimately undertaken some apostolic or charitable activity.<sup>11</sup>

Lay religious life is complete in itself and the Second Vatican Council holds it in high esteem because of its contribution towards the education of the young, caring for the sick and in its other ministries.<sup>12</sup> Since the members of the Secular institutions make profession of the evangelical counsels, they are thus consecrated and, therefore, to be encouraged to maintain their special character as they carry on their apostolates in the world.<sup>13</sup>

Consecrated persons set themselves apart through the evangelical counsels by means of a sacred bond, and become members of an institute of consecrated life according to the law of the church<sup>14</sup>. The universal

---

<sup>10</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae Caritatis* 8.

<sup>11</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 9.

<sup>12</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 10.

<sup>13</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 11.

<sup>14</sup> Code of Canon Law, 573.2

presence and the evangelical nature of the witnessing of consecrated life points to the reality that it is not something isolated and marginal, but a reality which affects the whole Church. In the language of the Second Vatican Council, it is "de re nostra agitur" (this is something which concerns us all). In effect, the consecrated life is at the very heart of the Church as a decisive element for her mission, since it manifests the inner nature of the Christian calling and the striving of the whole Church as Bride towards union with her one Spouse, Jesus Christ<sup>15</sup>.

In embracing the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience, consecrated persons totally dedicate themselves to God with the goal of pursuing perfection in charity. In this sense, they respond freely to the invitation of the Holy Spirit to follow Christ the poor, the celibate, the obedient son, more closely, thus becoming in this life a sign of the life to come. These counsels are referred to as evangelical because the religious vows are central to the life of Jesus and message and also because religious consecration is founded on baptismal consecration<sup>16</sup>. The Second Vatican Council, therefore, teaches that:

---

<sup>15</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Vitae Consecrata*, No. 3.

<sup>16</sup> Fleming, D. L., *Understanding a theology of Religious Life*. In G. A. Arburckle and D. L. Fleming (Eds.). *Religious Life: Rebirth through Conversion*. New York: Alba House, 1990, p. 22

The evangelical counsels of chastity dedicated to God, poverty and obedience are based upon the words and examples of the Lord. They were further commanded by the Apostles and Fathers of the Church, as well as by the doctors and pastors of souls<sup>17</sup>.

The Second Vatican Council emphasizes the relevance of the Evangelical Counsels in the definition of the identity of the Consecrated Life: “The state which is constituted by the profession of the evangelical counsels, though it does not belong to the hierarchical structure of the church, nevertheless, undeniably belongs to the life and holiness of the church”<sup>18</sup>. The document continues, “The holiness of the Church is fostered in a special way by the observance of the counsels proposed in the gospel by the Lord to his disciples. An eminent position among these is held by virginity or the celibate state”<sup>19</sup>. Thus, another Second Vatican Council exhorts consecrated person:

Members of each institute should recall first of all that by professing the evangelical counsels they responded to a divine call so that by being not only dead to sin (Rom 6:11) but also renouncing the world they may live for God alone. They have dedicated their entire lives to his service. This constitutes a special consecration, which is deeply

---

<sup>17</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* 43

<sup>18</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* 44

<sup>19</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* 42

rooted in that of Baptism and expresses it more fully<sup>20</sup>.

The Second Vatican Council situates the Consecrated Life in its proper place within the Church by teaching that it is not an intermediary between clergy and laity. The Council rather returns Consecrated Persons to the people of God. *Lumen Gentium* clearly states:

This form of life has its own place in relation to the divine and hierarchical structure of the Church. Not, however, as though it were a kind of middle way between the clerical and lay conditions of life. Rather it should be seen as a form of life to which some Christians, both clerical and lay, are called by God so that they may enjoy a special gift of grace in the life of the Church and may contribute, each in his own way, to the saving mission of the Church.<sup>21</sup>

From the above document, it is obvious that a Consecrated Person could be a clergy or a lay faithful, but he or she is different. This is the clear message of the Council Fathers who did not bother to stress this fact in *Perfectae Caritatis*. Religious are simple Christians who are dedicated to living lives of holiness in a special way. Ernest Larkin observes that, “the viewpoint of Vatican II

---

<sup>20</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae Caritatis*, No. 5

<sup>21</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, 43. Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, Can. 487 and 488

is that religious life is not an office, or a function, or a particular work in the Church. It is a state of being, a state of grace that pertains to the order of life and holiness”<sup>22</sup>. This assertion is very vital as it reminds consecrated persons that they are special but simple people; they are called from the priests and from the lay faithful to witness to Christ in a different way. Therefore, a consecrated person needs to always remember that what makes him or her a religious is not really what he or she does, but how he or she does it.

### **Bibliography**

- Fleming, D. L., Understanding a theology of Religious Life. In G. A. Arburckle and D. L. Fleming (Eds.). *Religious Life: Rebirth through Conversion*. New York: Alba House, 1990
- John Paul II, “VITA CONSECRATA (*The Consecrated Life*)” Apostolic Letter, March 25, 1996.
- Kanu, Ikechukwu A. (2017). *Consecrated Persons and Mutual Relations: The Dynamics of Collaboration within the Ecology of Mission*. Decent Global, Lagos.
- Kanu, Ikechukwu A. (Ed.) (2016). *The Consecrated Life and the Jubilee Year of Mercy: Contexts and Perspectives*. Nigeria: Altograde.

---

<sup>22</sup> Ernest E. Larkin, “Religious Life in Light of Vatican II”, p. 304

- Kanu, Ikechukwu A. (Ed.) (2016). *The Consecrated Life and the Jubilee Year of Mercy: Contexts and Perspectives*. Nigeria: Altograde.
- Kanu, Ikechukwu A. *Philosophy of religion: With essays on African philosophy of religion*. Author House Publications, UK.
- Mary-Sylvia Nwachukwu, *Consecrated: A Vision of Religious Life from the Point of View of the Sacred*. Lagos: Change Publications, 2010.
- Myers, A. C. *Sanctify, Consecrate*. The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1987.
- Ochiagha G., *An Echo From the Past (Anti-clericalism Around the Corner)*, Enugu: SNAAP Press, 1994
- Paul VI, Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life (*Perfectae Caritatis*) on October 28, 1965
- Paul VI, *Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Second Vatican Council, on November 21, 1964
- Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation on the Renewal of religious Life, *Evangelica Testificatio*, (29<sup>th</sup> June 1971).



**THEOLOGY AND POLITICAL CONCERNS:  
TOWARDS A STRANGE ALCHEMY**

Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony, OSA

Professor of Religion and Cultural Studies  
Tansian University, Umunya

The concept theology is from two Greek words Θεο (God) and λογία (study). Brought together, it means the study of God. Far back in history, Plato understood theology as an instrument for demythologizing the Greek Poets<sup>1</sup>. Aristotle on his part saw theology as an aspect of philosophy that explains the cosmos in terms of an Unmoved Mover<sup>2</sup>. When theology began to assume a Christian tone, Origen defined theology as a tool for expressing the Christian understanding of God as distinguished from Christian faith. St Thomas Aquinas, while working out the theory of theology used the concept in the context of a methodical elaboration of the truth of divine revelation by reason enlightened by faith.

---

<sup>1</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, 379. A. Retrieved 20<sup>th</sup> May 2011. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Republic\\_\(Plato\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Republic_(Plato))

<sup>2</sup> Plato, *Metaphysics* 1026. A. Retrieved 20<sup>th</sup> May 2011. <http://search.sweetim.com/search.asp?q=Metaphysics+Plato&ln=en&src=1002&sf=0>

He understood theology as the science of Christian faith<sup>3</sup>.

These notwithstanding, St Anselm defined theology as “faith seeking understanding” (*fides quarens intellectus*). It is a branch of learning in which the Christian, using his reason enlightened by divine faith, seeks to understand the mysteries of God revealed in and through history (Ephesians 1:9). These mysteries encapsulate the revelation of God himself and his love for humanity – mysteries hidden in God but revealed to humanity through the spirit (1 Cor 2:7-16). As a discipline, it began with the self-conscious faith in God. As soon as human beings began thinking about the ultimate meaning of life, about their relationship to the whole cosmos, about the ultimate purpose and direction of human history, about the experience of the holy and the sacred, they were beginning to do theology. As such, theology precedes not only Christianity but even Judaism as well<sup>4</sup>.

Christian theology, however, begins with the Apostles, because the Apostles had to reconcile themselves with the message of Christ and because they had to preach

---

<sup>3</sup> Kanu Anthony, *Philosophy of religion: With Essays in African philosophy of religion*. Germany, Lambert, 2018. P. 46.

<sup>4</sup> Kanu Anthony, *Philosophy of religion: With Essays in African philosophy of religion*. Germany, Lambert, 2018. P. 46.

the Good News. With the edict of Constantinople in 313, the Church acquired a legal status and its theology began to show the marks of the Church's new situation<sup>5</sup>. This was influenced by Neo-Platonism and the Roman Juridical thought. As circumstances changed, so too did the character of theology. With the desolation of the Roman Empire in 476 and breakdown of traditional social and political institutions, theology passed to the Monasteries and to Monastic Theologians like St Anselm, Bernard of Clairvaux, etc.

As time succeeded one another, those who were formed in the spirituality of the monasteries found it most difficult to accept. A new theological enterprise then began to emerge from the universities headed by figures like Albert the Great. This spelled the emergence of scholastic theology. As controversy followed controversy, the role of universities as centers of theological thought declined and was replaced by seminaries and schools of religious orders<sup>6</sup>. The 19<sup>th</sup> C witnessed a theological transformation, which recovered a sense of history and a sense of the Christian message as an organic whole rather than a collection of theses. However, the modern overthrow of theocentricism

---

<sup>5</sup> Kanu Anthony, *Philosophy of religion: With Essays in African philosophy of religion*. Germany, Lambert, 2018. P. 46.

<sup>6</sup> Kanu Anthony, *Philosophy of religion: With Essays in African philosophy of religion*. Germany, Lambert, 2018. P. 46.

interrupted the course of this new historical and integrated approach of theology. It denied the capacity of the human mind to grasp and express the supernatural in ways that are open to objective examination<sup>7</sup>.

These notwithstanding, the major questions looming at the horizon of this chapter are: Is theology an entirely independent discipline from politics? And if no, what is the relationship between theology and political concerns? Some scholars have described theology and politics as two subject matters that ought not be mixed or related together. Kee describes it as a 'strange alchemy between oil and water'<sup>8</sup>. It is, therefore, not surprising that the relating of the two disciplines has not only raised questions of meaning but also questions of degree of involvement: will theology entail direct political involvement, or revolutionary action<sup>9</sup>. By the 1960's

---

<sup>7</sup> Kanu Anthony, *Philosophy of religion: With Essays in African philosophy of religion*. Germany, Lambert, 2018. P. 46.

<sup>8</sup> Kee, A., 1978, *The scope of political theology*, SCM Press, London, p.2.

<sup>9</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, E., 2013, 'Critical feminist the\*logy of liberation: A decolonizing Political The\*logy', in F. Schüssler Fiorenza, K. Tanner & M. Welker (eds.), *Political theology: Contemporary challenges and future directions*, pp. 23-36, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY; Schüssler Fiorenza, F., 1977, 'Political theology as foundational

when the concept 'Political theology' was developed by Jürgen Moltmann and Johann Baptist Metz, the fear of politicizing the church through this strange mixture deepened.

Reacting to these fears, Church theologians pointed out that there is always a political dimension to every theology, as there is no such thing as un-political theology. And thus the fear rather than being over a real concern, is only the result of the unawareness of the political dimension of theology. Moltmann argued that:

There is consciously political theology, there is politically un-conscious theology, but there is no such thing as an un-political theology, at least not

---

theology', *Proceedings of the catholic theological society of America*, 32, pp. 142-177, CTSA, New York, NY; Schüssler Fiorenza, F., 1982, 'Religion und Politik: Geschichte und Funktion der politischen Theologie', in K. Rahner & B. Welte (Hrsgs.), *Christlicher Glaube in moderner Gesellschaft*, pp. 59-101, Herder, Freiburg; Schüssler Fiorenza, F., 2013, 'Prospects for political theology in the face of contemporary challenges', in F. Schüssler Fiorenza, K. Tanner & M. Welker (eds.), *Political theology: Contemporary challenges and future directions*, pp. 37-60, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY; Schüssler Fiorenza, F., Tanner, K. & Welker, M. (Eds.), 2013, *Political theology: Contemporary challenges and future directions*, pp. 37-60, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY.

on this earth and presumably not even in the heavenly *politeuma*<sup>10</sup>.

Alistair Kee expressed the same sentiments:

The attempt at separating politics and theology is invariably done out of self-interest: political theology does not arise from opportunism or the attempt to win a strategic advantage, but of a particular understanding of the way we can be true to the fundamental character of Christian faith<sup>11</sup>.

From the foregoing, a theology that expresses political concerns is a socio-critical theology with a commitment towards the good life, justice, peace, the integrity of creation and the good governance of the state, true to the fundamental character of Christian faith and not a strange mixture of two disciplines. The concept of a "suffering God" who shared the pain of his creation introduces the relevance of theology to political affairs. If the suffering God shared in the socio-political concerns of his people, how can the theology of the creator God avoid the language and concerns of the suffering God? Theology should be able to say something about slavery,

---

<sup>10</sup> Moltmann, J., 2013, 'Political theology in ecumenical contexts', in F. Schüssler Fiorenza, K. Tanner & M. Welker (eds.), *Political theology: Contemporary challenges and future directions*, pp. 1-12, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, p.2.

<sup>11</sup> Kee, A., 1978, *The scope of political theology*, SCM Press, London, p.3.

oppressive capitalism, colonialism, corruption, apartheid, war, racism, etc.

My understanding of the involvement of theology in political affairs is based on the classical rather than contemporary understanding of the political. There are three dimensions of the classic concept of the political:

1. the political as referring to the good and just life, which is very evident in Aristotle's political philosophy,
2. the political as involving praxis rather than technical skill, character rather than strategy,
3. the political as a practical philosophy based on prudence rather than a rigorous science of apodictic knowledge.

This is different from the modern concept of the political as governmental and administrative engineering. The role of theology in relation to political affairs would, therefore, not be to generate governmental and administrative principles, but to reawaken the elements of the classical concept of the political in our contemporary times. This would involve raising critical questions about the good and the just life; demanding prudence and practical consequences of good governance on the masses.

## Bibliography

- Kanu, Ikechukwu A. *Philosophy of religion: With essays on African philosophy of religion*. Author House Publications, UK.
- Kee, A., 1978, *The scope of political theology*, SCM Press, London.
- Moltmann, J., 2013, 'Political theology in ecumenical contexts', in F. Schüssler Fiorenza, K. Tanner & M. Welker (eds.), *Political theology: Contemporary challenges and future directions*, pp. 1-12, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, p.2.
- Plato, *Metaphysics* 1026. A. Retrieved 20<sup>th</sup> May 2011. <http://search.sweetim.com/search.asp?q=Metaphysics+Plato&ln=en&src=1002&sf=0>
- Plato, *The Republic*, 379. A. Retrieved 20<sup>th</sup> May 2011. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Republic\\_\(Plato\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Republic_(Plato))
- Schüssler Fiorenza, E., 2013, 'Critical feminist the\*logy of liberation: A decolonizing Political The\*logy', in F. Schüssler Fiorenza, K. Tanner & M. Welker (eds.), *Political theology: Contemporary challenges and future directions*, pp. 23-36, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY
- Schüssler Fiorenza, F., 1977, 'Political theology as foundational theology', *Proceedings of the catholic theological society of America*, 32, pp. 142-177, CTSA, New York, NY

- Schüssler Fiorenza, F., 1982, 'Religion und Politik: Geschichte und Funktion der politischen Theologie', in K. Rahner & B. Welte (Hrsgs.), *Christlicher Glaube in moderner Gesellschaft*, pp. 59-101, Herder, Freiburg
- Schüssler Fiorenza, F., 2013, 'Prospects for political theology in the face of contemporary challenges', in F. Schüssler Fiorenza, K. Tanner & M. Welker (eds.), *Political theology: Contemporary challenges and future directions*, pp. 37-60, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY
- Schüssler Fiorenza, F., Tanner, K. & Welker, M. (Eds.), 2013, *Political theology: Contemporary challenges and future directions*, pp. 37-60, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY.



## **CONSECRATED PERSONS IN PUBLIC SERVICE: PANACEA FOR DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOCIETY**

Innocent Chukwuemeka Ekeagwu, SMMM

Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike

### **Introduction**

The opening words of Vatican Council II's decree on the missionary activity of the Church (Ad Gentes) states: Divinely sent to the nations of the world to be unto them a universal sacrament of salvation, the Church, driven by the inner necessity of her own catholicity, and obeying the mandate of her Founder (cf. Mark 16:16), strives ever to proclaim the Gospel to all men. The Apostles themselves, on whom the Church was founded, following in the footsteps of Christ, preached the word of truth and begot churches. It is the duty of their successors to make this task endure so that the word of God may run and be glorified (2 Thess. 3:1) and the kingdom of God be proclaimed and established throughout the world<sup>1</sup>. This kingdom of God being proclaimed and established throughout the world implies the harnessing of the spiritual and temporal resources of the world to bring about the fulfillment and satisfaction of the children of God. This is a commission made for the wellbeing of the human person body and soul.

The salvation Jesus Christ ransomed for humankind through the shedding of his blood on the cross is an all inclusive salvation. This is not only liberation from the damnation of sin but also liberation to live a better and healthy life. Christ made this abundantly clear when he explained in the Gospel of John that he came that people may have life in its fullness (cf. Jn 10:10). The implication of this is that the Church as a sacrament of salvation to the world is called in service to the people of God in the Church and also called in service to the world. This she complements through public services in her education apostolate, hospital apostolate and other social service apostolate. She is also called to be part of the public service sector delivery system which is part of public service. These services are expected to add up to bring about better living for the people of God at large.

The mission of the Church is rooted in Evangelization which is world-focused as Jesus in the Gospel of Mark commanded His disciples to go out into the world and preach the Good news to the whole of creation (Mk 16:15). This mission is an all inclusive mandate to transform the whole human person into the likeness of the Son of God as Christ profoundly expressed in the statement that he came that they may have life in abundance (cf. Jn. 10:10). Evangelization goes beyond the simplistic understanding of consecrated persons working within ecclesiastical territories. It is a transformational process that takes place within and outside the Church which must be encouraged and

sustained. It is a task that the Church is very much aware of its necessity and urgency. Hence, the pride of place the Church identifies the consecrated life.

The Church recognizes this role placed upon her as she declares in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church; “The consecrated life is a gift which the Father has given to the Church by means of the Spirit so that, in faithfulness to the Gospel, the most characteristic traits of the life of his Son Jesus, the chaste, poor and obedient one (cf. Mt. 8:20; Phil. 2:8), and the unfathomable riches of his mystery (cf. Eph. 3:8), might be present in the world and might draw everyone toward the kingdom of God”<sup>2</sup>. The realization of this kingdom of God starts here in the world when a consecrated person steps out into the world to manifest the radical evangelizing strategy of the obedient, chaste and poor son of Mary who transformed the whole world through this evangelizing model that radiated the Spirit in action. The action of the Holy Spirit renews the face of the earth and consecrated persons make themselves available as agents of this transformation. “It is the Spirit who awakens the desire to respond fully; it is he who guides the growth of this desire, helping it to mature into a positive response and sustaining it as it is faithfully translated into action; it is he who shapes and moulds the hearts of those who are called, configuring them to Christ, the chaste, poor and obedient One, and prompting them to make his mission their own. By allowing themselves to be guided by the Spirit on an endless journey of purification, they become,

day after day, *conformed to Christ*, the prolongation in history of a special presence of the Risen Lord"<sup>3</sup>.

A consecrated person who has undergone the process of formation and professed the Evangelical Counsels becomes a handy gospel message available for the evangelization of others where ever he or she is employed in the public service sector apostolate. This is made possible when the consecrated person lives out the simple life that manifests obedience to constituted authority and chastity of conduct and thought in the simplicity of the professed poverty.

The urgency of Christian witness for testimony within the church is clearly the same urgency needed in the public service sector apostolate. The formation which consecrated persons received should be show-cased in the society in contributing to the development of the human person and the larger society.

This reflection is divided into five sections; introduction, originating summons and consecrated life, public service sector, synthesis of consecrated life and public service sector, and conclusion

### **Originating Summons**

Our originating summons are taken from the already quoted gospels of John and Mark; Jn 10:10 and Mk 16:15. Christ clearly understood his mission from the Father which he stated clearly as; "I have come that they may

have life, life in all its fullness” (Jn 10:10). This verse falls within the teaching of Christ about himself as the good shepherd whose primary concern is the life and sustaining welfare of his flock. The sustenance of the flock in addition to ensuring that the flock is alive precludes the existence of good pasture where water and green grass are adequately available with a well secured pen for the safety of the flock. This means that the environment where the flock pastures must be an enabling one that guarantees the wellness of the flock. It is this enabling environment which public service sector supplies to the people of God. The failure of the public service sector generates tension and stress for the Church in the mass of poverty stricken members seeking for basic sustenance.

Christ commanded his disciples, “go out to the whole world and proclaim the Good News to all creation” (Mk 16:15). The immediate background to this great commission of the disciples is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and the appearances he made to the disciples. In the immediate preceding verse Christ reproached his disciples for their lack of faith in the resurrection stories of those that saw him before his eventual appearance to the eleven. “Later Jesus showed himself to the Eleven while they were at table. He reproached them for their unbelief and stubbornness in refusing to believe those who had seen him after he had risen” (Mk 16:14). Jesus expected his disciples to have

believed in the stories of his resurrection as narrated by the women and the Emmaus disciples.

This expectation is based on the fact that Jesus was inclined to believe that the formation he imparted on the disciples for three years before his crucifixion should have prepared them enough to understand the resurrection and post resurrection events sequel to the Good News proclamation. This implies that those who proclaim the Good News must be people of faith who understand the content of the Good News and can bear witness to it through evangelizing witness. Who can such people be other than Consecrated persons? This is the background that situates consecrated persons adequate to offer public service.

The Church as a trans-cultural society in its mission to bring the whole human race to salvation<sup>4</sup> existentially places herself as a transformational agent for development in the society. This influence and impact of the Church could be better understood when one considers the works of the early missionaries in Nigeria especially the southern part. Their evangelizing missionary work led to the dismantling of inhuman practices and institutions such as slavery, killing of twins, human sacrifices. On the other hand they established schools and hospitals that brought development and better living standards for the people<sup>5</sup>.

## **Consecrated Persons**

Consecrated persons are called to live a life of consecration in which the person consecrated dedicates himself/herself in service to God. "Consecrated life is a call to incarnate the Good News, to follow Christ, the crucified and risen one, to take on Jesus' way of living and acting as the Incarnate Word in relation to [God] and in relation to his brothers and sisters"<sup>6</sup>. Although there are classes of consecration in the Church where some exist as religious congregations living in community or otherwise, some others are not called to live as religious congregations. However, the pertinent point in consecration is that all forms of consecration in the Church are directed in service to God. The 'consecrated life' is an all-embracing word that includes all other ecclesial life forms focused on mission and ministry but not necessarily on community life nor the vows<sup>7</sup>.

The opening canon on the Institute of Consecrated Life states that; "Life consecrated by the profession of the Evangelical Counsels is 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 dedicated themselves to His honour, the up-building of the Church and the salvation of the world by a new and special title, they strive for the perfection of charity in service to the kingdom of God and, having become an outstanding

sign in the Church, they may foretell the heavenly glory”<sup>8</sup>.

This canon stands as a capstone upon which consecrated life is understood as a life fundamentally dedicated to God in realization of the Good News (Gospel) of the kingdom through the profession of the Evangelical Counsels. The canon makes it clear that consecrated life is a grace-filled life because the following of Christ which consecrated persons opt for is an action under the influence of the Holy Spirit that guides the consecrated to totally dedicate oneself to God who is loved most of all. The implication of this is that the dedication to God should translate into the up-building of the Church and the salvation of the world. This implies a two-fold service of the consecrated person that should bring about the growth and development of the people of God and their salvation. This is brought to reality through their service in charity as they imitate Christ the Saviour of humankind.

This radical consecration of the Christian is a further expression of the Christian vocation as a call to renew the face of the earth through the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Church pays very great attention to the formation of consecrated persons in preparation for their evangelizing apostolate. This evangelizing apostolate is extended beyond ecclesiastically defined boundaries when consecrated persons engage in public service sector.

## **Public Service Sector**

The importance of the public sector of any economy cannot be overemphasized. The interest in the study of the public sector is varied. It could be studied from the economic point of view, political, sociological or religious point of view. However, all these viewpoints converge on the growth and development of the society which is aimed at the welfare of the people. Amartya Sen who received the Nobel Prize in Economics in 1998 for his contributions in Welfare Economics advocates that we should think about development in terms of people's capability to achieve those things that they have reason to value<sup>9</sup>. Earlier in 1992 the World Bank published a significant paper on 'good government', highlighting the importance of transparency and accountability, as well as sound macroeconomic and public sector management<sup>10</sup> in the bid to focus attention on economic development. The public sector therefore exists for the welfare of the people.

From the foregoing we understand that the sound development of the people involved in public service sector delivery and the efficient management of the public sector is a condition for the development of the society. The reason for this is because the public sector is the dominant sector of any economy. However, it is important to distinguish between public service sector and public service. According to the Oxford dictionary of Economics, public sector includes those parts of the economy which are not controlled by individuals,

voluntary organizations or privately owned organizations or companies. The public sector thus includes government at all levels, national and local. It also includes all government owned firms or organizations. The funding for such bodies or organizations is provided by the government through public revenue. The services such public sector outfits provide is public service sector. Examples of public sector include education (schools, libraries etc), electricity, fire service, gas and oil, healthcare, infrastructure, law enforcement, police service, security and defense, postal service, waste management, social services<sup>11</sup> and so many others. These services can be provided by the public sector or private sector up to a certain degree or even jointly by the public and private sectors. On the other hand public service is service rendered to the public irrespective of the rendering agency owned by the public sector or private sector. The distinction between public service sector and public service is; public service sector is provided by government established agency that employs workers who render such services while public service can be provided by public or private agency.

The Church has been involved in the provision of public services like healthcare, education and some other social services. However, the Church has not been so much involved in public service sectors where members of the clergy and other consecrated persons are employed in government service. The contributions of the Church in

public service delivery in Nigeria have been tremendous and have contributed to a large extent in the growth and development of the Nigerian economy and her human capital development.

Although the Church has been engaged in public service delivery through the various schools, hospitals and other social services apostolate, the Church still has to reach out in public service sector delivery in government establishments. Such synergy of service delivery could further boost the growth and development of the Nigerian economy and the advancement of a better society in service to the people of God.

### **Synthesis of Consecrated Life and Public Service Sector**

The packaging of the public service sector delivery is such that public civil servants are meant to be cultured and organized breed of human beings guided by the rules of the Public Service Commission. Unfortunately what we observe in our Nigerian society is a public service sector under the burden of systemic corruption with less functionality. The consequences are the colossal decay observable in the public sector. This scenario is aptly captured by Mr Peter Obi, the former governor of Anambra state. According to the former governor, Anambra state was ranked 15<sup>th</sup> in the ranking of schools (secondary) in Nigeria when he became governor. However, when he returned the schools originally owned by the church to the church the standard

tremendously improved as the ranking of Anambra in secondary schools in Nigeria placed her among the first three<sup>12</sup>. This transformation in such public service sector could not have been accomplished without a heavy input of transparency and accountability coupled with good macroeconomic focus on the good of the people which is heavily implicit in the teachings of the Church that guides consecrated persons in their service delivery. This service delivery is the focus of their evangelization. The Church has much to contribute in the realization and restoration of the growth and development of the Nigerian society and her economy.

The Peter Obi-Church model of public service sector delivery succeeded tremendously because the government did not withdraw public funding of education even when the Church took over ownership and management of those schools handed over to them. The governor's argument that the children in such schools are also their children validates government funding of such schools. The result is improvement in human capital development. Studies in the field of Economics have shown that the impact of human capital development on economic growth and development is very significant<sup>13,14</sup>. There is therefore the need for such synergy between the Church and government by way of encouraging greater participation of consecrated persons in public service sector delivery.

By being present to the world through public service sector consecrated persons communicate the wealth of their specific vocation and charism for the renewal of the society. This is an intangible value that adds up to the development of the society. The effect of this witnessing by being present in public service sector makes consecrated persons communicate through their persons an arousal in others around their work place a capacity for an enriching response through the participation of his/her personal gift and his/her specific vocation. The transformative effect of the presence of the consecrated persons in public service sector is enhanced by the commitment and diligence consecrated persons conduct themselves in their work place. "This commitment responds perfectly to the nature and to the scope of the consecrated life itself and is carried out according to the double educational and formative model that accompanies the growth of the individual consecrated person. Through school apostolate men and women religious educate, help young people to grasp their own identity and to reveal those authentic needs and desires that inhabit everyone's heart, but which often remain unknown and underestimated; thirst for authenticity and honesty, for love and fidelity, for truth and consistency, for happiness and fullness of life; Desires which in the final analysis converge in the supreme human desire; to see the face of God"<sup>15</sup>.

This charism is enhanced through the formation of the consecrated persons to a life of dedicated service to God through the profession of the Evangelical Counsels. This life disposes the consecrated to whole hearted service that witnesses to the Gospel. Two characters of the life of consecrated persons dispose them fittingly enough to carry out this role, namely, celibate life that allows them to be available for service and freedom from immediate family responsibilities. Celibacy creates the condition for service availability while the absence of an immediate family creates the freedom from family attachment which distracts the commitment level of the consecrated person in service.

The World Bank identified a missing link in the process of the growth and development of the economy especially in developing economies when it identified the strong need for transparency and accountability. This gap is a yawning one that has militated against the growth and development of the Nigerian economy. The story of Peter Obi, the former governor of Anambra state of the transformation of the secondary education sector of the state as a result of the participation of consecrated persons in that public service sector delivery is an indication of the developmental impact of incorporating the services of consecrated person in public service sector delivery system.

One of the experiences I have enjoyed as an impact of the evangelizing presence of a consecrated person teaching in a secular institution is the interest some students developed in attending my lectures. Some students have confessed to me that one of the things that make them not to miss my class is the blessing of the students at the end of my lectures. This strategy attracts at least some students who would otherwise not be available for lectures so as to receive blessing from Reverend Father. In this way my students develop friendly disposition towards attending my lectures and this helps to build them in their holistic human development which at the end of the day has a salvific dimension to their life as they receive lectures that will help them secure their temporal welfare.

## **Conclusion**

The missionary mandate of the Church requires consecrated persons to have a good understanding of missionary animation and cooperation not only within mission territories but also within public service sector delivery system in the wider society. This will help in the understanding of evangelization beyond boundaries as a process to leaven not only missionary areas but also the public sector areas. This is bearing witness to a world in desperate need of the love of God. The presence of consecrated persons in public service sector is a source of sanctification of the people of God in their work place. It is a sanctification that calls for presence and bearing witness through our work and in our work environment.

Consecrated person in public service sector is an extension of the evangelizing mission of the Church to preach the Gospel to the whole world. It is an inclusive service delivery for the development and salvation of the human person. It is a commission that needs to be sustained and encouraged.

### End Notes

1. Second Vatican Council, *Ad Gentes*, 1
2. Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, 43
3. John Paul II (1996), *Vita Consecrata* 18
4. *Lumen Gentium* *ibid*
5. Onwunaibe, R.C. (1985), "Culture and Technology: A Moral Viewpoint" in *Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 1 June 1985, p. 64.
6. Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CICLSAL, 2014). *Rejoice: A letter to consecrated men and women on the Year of the Consecrated Life. A message from the teachings of Pope Francis*. Lagos, Nigeria: St Paul Publication/Libreria Editrice Vaticana
7. Schneiders, S. M. (2013). *Buying The Field: Catholic Religious Life in mission to the world (Religious Life in a New Millennium, V. 3)*. New York / New Mahwah Jersey: Paulist Press.
8. Code of Canon Law 573
9. Sen Amartya K., (1999), *Development as freedom*, New York; Knopf

10. World Bank, (1992), *World Bank Report; the state in a changing world*, Washington DC; The World Bank
11. Black, J. (2002), *Oxford dictionary of Economics*, Oxford University Press, New York
12. Daily Independent, (March 11, 2015), Nigeria: Churches are best managers of schools and hospitals – Peter Obi
13. Ude, D. K, & Ekeagwu, I. C, (2014) Investigation of the impact of human capital investment on economic performance in Nigeria, *Journal of management and Social Sciences (IJSAR-JMSS)*, vol. 1 issue 1, August 2014
14. Nwadike, G. C, Ekeagwu, I, & Alamba, S.C, (2014) Human Capital formation and Nigerian economic growth (1980-2012), *Journal of Management and Social Sciences, (IJSAR – JMSS)*, vol.1 issue 2 September 2014
15. Congregation for Catholic Education (2002), *Consecrated persons and their mission in school, reflections and guidelines*, no. 18



## **THE ROLE OF CONSECRATED PERSONS IN EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Naanmiap Baamlong, OSA

Estudio Teologico de Valladolid, Spain

### **Introduction**

In the late sixteenth century, Francis Bacon, regarded by many as the father of scientific methods of inquiry in 1597 in his book, *Meditationes Sacrae and Human Philosophy*, stated that Knowledge is power<sup>1</sup>. That is, simple put, to have facts or information is very important for any meaningful growth or development. No wonder then even in the bible, God through the prophet Hosea said his people perish because of lack of knowledge because they fail to understand the importance of serving God<sup>2</sup>. This knowledge is usually gained through education. Without doubt it can be affirmed that education is very important and necessary for every individual<sup>3</sup>. By education we mean those experiences by which intelligence is developed, knowledge acquired, and character formed we make

---

<sup>1</sup>Cf. <https://www.quora.com/Inspirational-Quotes-Who-was-the-first-to-say-knowledge-is-power>.

Accesed

15/10/2018. 15:28h.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Hosea 4,6

<sup>3</sup> It is interesting to know that educación like life and freedom is a fundamental human right that is necessary for every individual of every race and sex. Cf. GE n.1

reference to its meaning both in the universal and narrow sense. In the broadest sense, education includes all those experiences by which intelligence is developed, knowledge acquired, and character formed. In a narrower sense, it is the work done by certain agencies and institutions, the home and the school, for the express purpose of training immature minds<sup>4</sup>. Since we must not forget that this concept, like any other, is equipped with historicity, besides having an enormous complexity, in this work we will be more restricted to the second aspects, that is the formal education and we want to spell out the great role played by the church especially the religious groups in education throughout the ages. This kind of education had at first been obtainable only in the monasteries. It is interesting to know that apart from the study of the Bible, and the Church Fathers, in the monasteries there were other studies done and the curriculum consisted of the *trivium* (grammar, logic or dialectic, and rhetoric) and the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, music, geometry, astronomy) known as the *seven liberal arts* and the content of these subjects was almost entirely what had been inherited from the ancients<sup>5</sup>. Like a starting point, we will first of all clarify the concept of consecrated persons.

---

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Education in The New catholic encyclopedia Vol. V. Washington: Jack heraty associates 1967, 111.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Jowitt, D. *Christianity. A concise history*. Ibadan: kraft books limited 2010, 102-103.

## **Who are the consecrated persons?**

Consecrated<sup>6</sup> persons are individuals who through certain commitment and compromises are dedicated to God. In this sense and in a broad sense all Christians are consecrated to God. However, in this work on consecrated persons we are referring to a strict sense of the term. The code of canon law describes consecrated life as a life consecrated through the profession of the evangelical counsels in a stable form of living by which

---

<sup>6</sup> The term consecrated and its equivalent consecration is used by the Vatican II Council with a constant meaning and global signification referring to intimate donation of self to God. And in this it includes all Christians committed to God. Christ is consecrated and sent to the world by God the father (LG 28). The people of God through regeneration and in union with the Holy Spirit in baptism is consecrated in order to form part of the holy dwelling of God and are consecrated as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood (LG 10). The Bishops are consecrated; the sacramental rite of consecration confers on them the plenitude of the priesthood and the capacity to exercising the service of sanctifying, teaching and guiding (LG 21). The Priests are consecrated in order to preach the gospel and celebrate the eucharist (LG 28). The lay faithful dedicated to Christ and anointed by the Holy Spirit, are marvelously called and wonderfully prepared so that ever more abundant fruits of the Spirit may be produced in them... the laity consecrate the world itself to God (LG 34). Cf. Stefano de Flores and Tullo G, Directors. *Nuevo diccionario de espiritualidad*. Madrid: ediciones paulinas 1987, 1395.

the faithful, following Christ<sup>7</sup> 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 honor, to the building up of the Church, and to the salvation of the world, they strive for the perfection of charity in the service of the kingdom of God and, having been made an outstanding sign in the Church, foretell the heavenly glory<sup>8</sup>.

The dogmatic constitution *Lumen Gentium* and the decree *Perfectae Caritatis* describe the rise of various forms of religious and consecrated life, that is, institutes devoted entirely to contemplation, institutes of monastic and conventual life, clerical institutes dedicated to various apostolic works, lay institutes and secular

---

<sup>7</sup> It is from Christ that the identity of the consecrated person has its meaning and foundation. This identity can be seen in the mystery of Christ. By the profession of the evangelical counsels the characteristic features of Jesus – the chaste, poor and obedient one – are made constantly "visible" in the midst of the world and the eyes of the faithful are directed towards the mystery of the Kingdom of God already at work in history, even as it awaits its full realization in heaven. Cf. Velasio de Paolis. *La vida consagrada en la Iglesia*. madrid: BAC 2011, 5. See also APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION *VITA CONSECRATA* Of John Paul II n. 1

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Can. 573 §1. The code of canon law. Bangalore: theological publications 2013, 133.

institutes<sup>9</sup>. The Code of Canon Law includes among the institutes of consecrated life religious institutes in general and secular institutes. In this category, it also places the eremitical and anchoritic life. It also mentions that the order of virgins is similar to the forms of consecrated life, as are societies of apostolic life as well<sup>10</sup>.

### **Consecrated persons and the history of education<sup>11</sup>**

Education especially the formal or scholastic education has been a very important item in the Works of the Christians<sup>12</sup>. It has been recorded throughout history as

---

<sup>9</sup> Cf. number 5 of the document *The consecrated life and its role in the church and in the world*

Vatican Synod Secretariat.

<http://www.ewtn.com/library/curia/synrelig.htm#1>.

Accessed 22/10/2018. 17:50h. See also *Vida consagrada y su misión en la Iglesia y en el mundo*. Zamora: ediciones monte casino 1995.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *The code of canon law*. Bangalore: theological publications 2013. Book II part III, the people of God. Canons 573-746.

<sup>11</sup> This part of the work follows closely (and in some points literally) the commentary elaborated by Joseph Pittau, S.J. in the article *mission of consecrated persons in the school*. Cf.

<https://www.ewtn.com/library/CURIA/cceschol.htm>.

Accessed 21/10/2018. 18:21h

<sup>12</sup> The Augustinians for example have occupied themselves with the principal task of education in different countries of the world in schools and colleges. And its main objective is the proclamation of the Word of kingdom of God. Cf. Mt. 28,

among the corporal Works of mercy. Since the Middle Ages, the Church, especially through religious communities, has been in the forefront of education. The few educational institutions that existed were the schools of cathedrals and monasteries, and the ecclesial universities. The European educational system was truly born *ex corde Ecclesiae* (from the heart of the Church). The beginning of the 16th century saw the flourishing of many religious orders and congregations that were dedicated to the educational apostolate, especially the education of the children of the poor who could not receive a systematic education. In many countries, consecrated persons led the way in establishing new schools in the spirit of their founders and foundresses who saw education as an effective means for the apostolate. An essential element of the education imparted by consecrated persons has always been an integral formation in a context of faith, which offers children the opportunity to develop harmoniously their physical, moral and intellectual qualities so as to make sound moral judgements based on a well-formed conscience and to put them into practice with a sense of personal commitment, and to know and love God more perfectly<sup>13</sup>. For centuries, consecrated persons, have devoted their lives, often in oppressive financial, political or religious conditions, to guiding children and

---

19-20. The great commission of Christ to go and make disciples of all nations.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. GE n. 1

adolescents in their formation, communicating to them not only a sound intellectual formation, but also a deep appreciation of the gift of faith.

In the document, *Gravissimum Educationis*, the Second Vatican Council justified how very important education is in the life of every individual and how its influence grows in the social progress of each age<sup>14</sup>. This concern with the whole of an individual's life reflects the Church's desire to fulfill the mandate she received from her divine founder of proclaiming the mystery of salvation to all men and women and of restoring all things in Christ<sup>15</sup>. This missionary mandate, as contained in the documents of the Second Vatican Council, is carried out by means of that activity through which, the mission of the church, is fulfilled by that activity which makes her, obeying the command of Christ and influenced by the grace and love of the Holy Spirit, fully present to all men or nations, in order that, by the example of her life and by her preaching, by the sacraments and other means of grace, she may lead them to the faith, the freedom and the peace of Christ<sup>16</sup>.

### **Founders and foundresses of orders for the formation and education of youths**

---

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *ibid*, n.5

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Mt. 28,19-20.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. A.G n. 5

The total dedication of men and women religious led to a great revolution in the world of education. The educational wisdom of Don Bosco, the attraction to the poor of Joseph Calasanz, the educational work of John Baptist de La Salle, the concern for the education of girls and young women of Domenica Mazzarello and Lucia Filippini, to quote just a few of the best known names, are present in the treasure that consecrated persons bring with them to schools at the beginning of the third millennium<sup>17</sup>. It suffices to mention only a few founders<sup>18</sup> and foundresses to understand the influence exercised by consecrated persons in the field of the formation of the young.

*St Jerome Emiliani* founded the Congregation of the Somascan Fathers for the education of orphans, with a programme that included Christian doctrine, reading, writing, the abacus, music and playing in concerts in

---

<sup>17</sup>Cf. [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccatheduc\\_doc\\_20021119\\_press-release\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_20021119_press-release_en.html). PRESENTATION OF "CONSECRATED PERSONS AND THEIR MISSION IN SCHOOLS la intervención del INTERVENTION BY H. EM. CARD. ZENON GROCHOLEWSKI. Accessed 19/10/2018. 19:42h

<sup>18</sup> From this point, the work follow closely (and in some points literally) the commentary elaborated by Joseph Pittau, S.J in the article *mission of consecrated persons in the school*. Cf. <https://www.ewtn.com/library/CURIA/cceschol.htm>. Accessed 21/10/2018. 18:21h

such a way that with the training in the various arts and virtues, each one may follow his own inclinations and honourably earn his living. The Somascans also opened schools for the nobility.

*St Anthony Mary Zaccaria* founded the Barnabites (Clerks Regular of St Paul), who built schools and colleges and educated outstanding figures in the fields of research.

*The Jesuits, founded by St Ignatius of Loyola*, exercised a great influence in the period of Renaissance humanism and the Counter-Reformation. Their educational method was based on a double tradition: that of the scholastics who exalted intellectual analysis and learning as an end in itself, and that of humanists who attributed to education an important role for the entire society. The Jesuits created a synthesis of the two traditions. Both intellectual competence and the preparation for and dedication to service constitute the aim of education. Education had to enable the student to become both good and well-instructed. Both pietas (holiness) and eruditio (erudition) were necessary.

At the outset *the Piarists, founded by St Joseph Calasanz*, worked almost exclusively with the children of the poor. In Trastevere, Rome, they founded the first free school for the poor in Europe. They attached great importance to teaching arithmetic, geometry, drawing and architecture. They wanted to train boys to master the necessary tools to equip them for an activity with which they could earn an honest living.

*St. John de la Salle* founded the *Brothers of the Christian Schools*<sup>19</sup>, a congregation dedicated exclusively to education, consisting solely of teachers who were consecrated lay religious.

*St. William Chaminade* founded the *Marianists* who desired to counter the de-Christianization of the French Revolution. The *Marists*, founded by *Marcellin-Joseph-Benôit Champagnat*, also sought to oppose the growing secularization in the first half of the 19th century.

Don Bosco was an innovative educator who founded the *Salesians*, and together with *St. Domenica Maria Mazzarello*, also the *Daughters of Mary Help of Christians*. They were inspired by the principle of preventive education to form honest citizens and good Christians. Don Bosco confronted the social problem of youth; he was concerned with the poor and abandoned young people, unruly as a group and being a danger to the moral and social order. Religious and recreational activities, reading and writing classes, professional schools and job training, prevention in terms of assistance (food, clothing, lodging, instruction) and preventive education, meaning that the failings and

---

<sup>19</sup> This saint John Bosco spent most of his life in o around Turin in italy anf founded the order of salesians for the education af Young boys. Cf. Jowitt, D. *Christianity. A concise history*. Ibadan: kraft books limited 2010, 200

deviations from the rules were not repressed or punished, but prevented from happening. At the same time, he fostered all that might contribute to the growth of the young people.

On the other hand, it is worthy of mention the contribution of the female religious groups. They too have made a great contribution to the instruction and education of girls and young women, and now also that of boys. Since the Middle Ages, the education of women outside the family was mainly connected with the education provided in convents to whom families, especially the nobility, entrusted their daughters at an early age for their human and Christian formation.

*St Angela Merici* founded the Society of St Ursula (Ursulines) which then developed into various forms of consecrated life: communities of virgins grouped into associations, living in their own family and work place, colleges of virgins bound to God with private vows, traditional monasteries and congregations that lived a community life. All these experiences were based on Angela Merici's spiritual doctrine, which had three essential dimensions: total consecration to God, complete dedication to charitable works, including teaching and education, the fulfilment of a bond of sacred charity in personal relationships, inspired by a family style. From this basic inspiration many religious congregations came into being, who were dedicated to the educational apostolate.

## **Consecrated persons and educational development**

From what has been discussed above without doubt consecrated persons have made tremendous contributions towards educational development in the world throughout the centuries, right from the first century and this without doubt is what has facilitated personal and cooperate development of the people of all nations. In this way, the consecrated persons have been great instruments in the quest for educational development in the world at large. As we have seen, obviously in most parts of the world, schools at all levels are run by the Church and most of these schools are under the management and direction of one religious order or congregation. Both the female and male religious groups are the key actors in this practice of running schools and they have always worked so hard and very dedicated to keep the Church at the forefront as an indispensable agent of development<sup>20</sup>.

---

<sup>20</sup> Saint Augustine of hippo is a great example of someone very equipped for educational activities. He was a great educationist. His impact was felt in the whole world and at all times and moments. His thinking and thoughts has passed all geographical locations. It crossed the african territory were all started and made great influence in europe. As regards to its influence at all moments, it can be said in the afirmative that this great saint did not only educated to comtemporaries, that is people of his time, so many people and so many centuries after him. No wander then like it can be seen from what posidius said, Posidius said: *a los afortunados que*

## **Contributions of consecrated persons towards providing quality education<sup>21</sup>**

From a survey made some years ago by the Congregation for Catholic Education, the congregation asked the various religious communities about their activities in the educational line. Hundreds of documents arrived from around the world from which we can see the great impact of consecrated person in the educational development worldwide and from it a great wealth of ideas and experiences can be drawn. It is important that this treasure of pedagogical knowledge, prepared by consecrated persons who in humility and generosity, in the various parts of the world, work in the

---

*podieron oírle los educó con su palabra; a los que no tuvieron esa suerte, con sus textos* (that is for those fortunate to hear him – Saint Augustine-, he thought them with his words and for those who never had that opportunity he thought them with his writings. Cf. San Agustín: perspectivas sobre la educación, an article written by Fr. Pío de Luis Vizcaíno a spanish augustinian priest in the magazine *Misión y educación*. A publication of the province of Jesus of Philipines an augustinian province. Publication no. 39, 2017-2018. See also *Obras completas de San Agustín. Posidio, Vida de San Agustin*, 31 Vol. I, 2nd edition. Madrid: BAC 1950, 427-429.

<sup>21</sup> This part of the work follow closely (and in some points literally) the commentary elaborated by Joseph Pittau, S.J in the article *mission of consecrated persons in the school*. Cf. <https://www.ewtn.com/library/CURIA/cceschol.htm>. Accessed 21/10/2018. 18:21h

educational apostolate, not be dispersed but be available for reciprocal enrichment.

The first information given is the situation in Zimbabwe. A glance at the Church of Zimbabwe in Africa, shows us that in 1997 there were 74 Catholic elementary schools and 56 secondary schools, with 23 priests, 18 religious brothers and 142 sisters, that is 7% of the teaching staff, with 8% in secondary schools and the remaining 5% in the elementary schools (cf. 1997, Annual Report of ZCBC Education Commission, Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference).

Another information recorded takes us from Africa to Asia. To take an example from Asia, we can look at South Korea, one of the nations whose vocations are the most numerous. In South Korea there are 300 Catholic schools with 500 priests and consecrated persons who represent 11% of the teaching staff of 4,500 persons. On the other hand, in nursery schools, which account for 75% of the Catholic schools in South Korea, one teacher out of five is a consecrated person, and almost all are women religious (cf. Statistics of the Catholic Church in Korea: 2001, Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea).

In Asia, 90% of baptized Catholics come from Catholic schools. According to the information documented, nursery school children are still very open to the Christian values, and their parents, whose contact with

school diminishes in proportion to the children's age, are often attracted to the faith or strengthened in the faith through their children. The Bishops of Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Thailand and other countries testify to the importance of the Catholic school for evangelization. Many Bishops even say that 90% of the baptized had their first contact with the faith through their Catholic schooling. Consecrated persons, men and women, can introduce children to the spirit of prayer and holiness partly by their teaching, but especially by the life they live, consecrated to the Lord and full of joy. This work by the consecrated persons does not only contribute to the development of education in such places but also to evangelization.

To conclude this part it would be interesting to make a particular example to see clearly the role played by this consecrated persons. In that line we make available here the role played especially by the female consecrated persons in educational development in Africa. According to a documentation made in an article, there has been an overwhelming affirmation acknowledging the contributions made by the religious sisters towards providing essential human services ranging from running of hospitals, schools, orphanages and pastoral care such as teaching catechism, visiting the sick Largely, these contributions in the area of providing educational services in Africa have greatly affected human development as education is one of the major catalysts (UN, September 2010).

The schools that religious sisters run range from kindergarten, nursery to primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. In most cases, these schools belong to the Church and sometimes to the religious congregations of the Church or to other non-governmental organizations. In all the various categories of schools, they have been generous in providing the needed personnel that staff the school. Most of these schools have been outstanding in their performance such as is the case of Queen of the Holy Rosary Schools in Nigeria where the sisters since 1928 have managed and staffed 224 primary schools, 11 secondary/high schools, 13 teacher training colleges, and one commercial school. In the same way, the Holy Rosary Sisters had expanded their educational services to South Africa in 1940, Sierra Leone in 1948, Kenya and Cameroon in 1956, and Ethiopia in 1975. In these countries, they have opened and managed an additional 17 primary schools, 11 high schools and four teacher training colleges including six vocational schools.

Like the Holy Rosary Sisters, many other Catholic women's religious institutes in Africa have opened and managed schools, for instance; Holy Child Sisters run schools both in Nigeria and Ghana. As well, the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa run schools in Algeria, Tunisia and Mauritania in the Maghreb; Mali, Burkina-Faso and Ghana in West Africa; Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Kenya, Uganda, Malawi,

Mozambique, and Tanzania in Eastern Africa. Apart from these international religious institutes of women, there are a good number of indigenous women religious institutes that run schools including the Daughters of Divine Love, Eucharist Heart Sisters and Nativity Sisters in Nigeria, and in South Africa, we have the Montebello Sisters and Daughters of St. Francis. The list is endless regarding the number of schools that religious sisters run and staff across africa<sup>22</sup>.

## **Conclusion**

From the above it can be seen that the role of consecrated person in educational development is something obvious and has been active from the beginning till today. No wonder then of the 16 documents elaborated by Vatican II there are various documents specially oriented for educators like *Gaudium et Spes*, the decrees *Optatam Totius* and *Inter Mirifica* and the declaration *Gravissimum* education is that treat explicitly the theme of education. The church especially through the religious group has been in the fore front of educational development throughout the centuries. It is in this line also that various popes throughout the ages call the attention of the various religious group not to forget its mission and task in aspects of education. John Paul the

---

<sup>22</sup> Cf. <https://isdsnet.com/ijds-v2n2-86.pdf>. Eze, C., Lindegger, G.C. and Rakoczy, S. (2013), "Educational development in Africa: The prospects and challenges of Catholic religious sisters", *International Journal of Development and Sustainability*, Vol. 2 No. 2. Accessed 21/10/2018. 19:31h

second for example in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on 25 March, 1996, says:

The Church has always recognized that education is an essential dimension of her mission. The Master of her inner life is the Holy Spirit, who penetrates the innermost depths of every human heart and knows the secret unfolding of history. Consecrated persons because of their special consecration are able to be especially effective in educational activities and to offer a specific contribution to the work of other educators. This task of theirs is one of the most significant manifestations of that motherhood which the Church, in the image of Mary, exercises on behalf of all her children. It is for this reason that the Synod emphatically urged consecrated persons to take up again, wherever possible, the mission of education in schools of every kind and level, and in Universities and Institutions of higher learning<sup>23</sup>.

It is also worthy of mention the document consecrated persons and their mission in schools reflections and guidelines congregation for catholic education 28th October 2002. In the second part emphasize the role of consecrated person in education which is strictly an important part of evangelization. A profile of

---

<sup>23</sup> Cf. the document *Vita consecrata* n. 96-97

consecrated persons clearly shows how their educational commitment in schools is suited to the nature of the consecrated life. In fact thanks to their experience of the particular gifts of the Spirit, their careful listening to the Word, their constant practice of discernment and their rich heritage of pedagogical traditions amassed since the establishment of their Institutes give life to educational undertakings



# CONSECRATED LIFE AND OPTION FOR THE POOR

Chukwuebuka Charles Ugonwafor, OSA

Centro Estudio Teologico Augustiniano, Valladolid,  
Spain

## **Introduction**

It is understood that by the virtue of sacramental baptism a Christian is consecrated to God, through Jesus Christ by the Power of the Holy Spirit. By the virtue of baptism, a Christian is invited to partake in the salvific mystery of Jesus Christ made manifest in this world through the Church. By baptism, we who are members of the Church, recognizing that we partake in the same sacramental equality as People/Children of God, are all called to the same mission of Christ. The reference made to this *sacramental equality*, does not blind itself to the fact that there exists different vocational status in the Church<sup>1</sup> as St. Paul rightly postulated the existence of

---

<sup>1</sup> VEGA, L.G., *Teología sistemática de la vida religiosa*. Instituto Teológico de Vida Religiosa, Madrid. 1976. pp 225-276, highlights in this book, a post conciliar problem that all theologians of the religious life need to look into. The Dogmatic Constitution, *Lumen Gentium* (chap. 6: 43-44) and the Decree *Perfectae Caritatis* (n.5) jointly affirms that the religious consecration is rooted in the baptismal consecration which is fundamental. The religious consecration looks to consecrate us intimately by the way of full expression of the

various charisms, ministers and activities all of the Same Spirit, of the Same Lord (1 Cor. 12,4-6; Eph 4,11-13). Each member of the Church is to exercise the mission of Christ according to his or her calling.

---

baptismal consecration. Now there exists two groups who tend to hold either end of the rope without any hope of reconciliation. The First group holds that since the baptism is the fundamental consecration, it is the *only* important consecration, while the Second group avers that the most important consecration is that which is *special, peculiar* and *expresses fully and intimately* the baptismal consecration. Hence, we see in the first group the non-relevance of religious consecration while in the second group we see the tendency to water down to nothing, the place of baptismal consecration. The author proffers various thesis to resolve this problem: 1). The religious consecration is rooted in the baptismal consecration and it is Christ-in his Church- that is the Main figure because he is the one that consecrates us to his Father. 2). The baptismal consecration is projected towards fulfillment by the virtue of these ways: Matrimony, Holy Orders and Religious Life. 3). In the journey towards the full realization of the Kingdom, Christ, in his Church, offers a new and special consecration which consummates that of baptismal consecration...and under the religious consecration, by the action of the Church *opus operantis Ecclesiae* consecrates to the Father the totality of one's life through existential projection of Virginity, Poverty, Obedience such as experienced and lived in a Community of evangelical fraternity.

The Consecrated life is one of the various vocations that exists and is recognized by the Church. The idea of this work is to reiterate, with various conceptual foundations, the active role the consecrated life plays (or should play) in carrying out the evangelical task towards the poor in our world today that is paradoxical. The paradoxical nature of our world is marked by the sensibility and exaltation of Man's capacity to dominate and explore his surrounding for his own benefit. The ever-rising popularity of the breakthrough in Science, Medicine and Technology. The recognition of the rights of human person via laws and decrees, acts of solidarity that underlies various humanitarian organization. We are living in the triumphant age of Man.

But on the other hand, in spite of all these progress and triumphs, we cannot deny that we are living in a context marked by famine, wars, malnutrition, poverty and illnesses, all of which threaten the well-being of Man. We live in a society in which there are families who cannot access all or some basic necessities of life. The Capitalist and Socialist economic systems have failed to distribute, with justice and equity, the benefit of the common good no thanks to the powerful few, who are driven by egoistic and selfish purposes. There is a large scale of poverty that coexists side by side with the breakthroughs and triumphs that are tended to make life better for Man.

## SEGMENT A: THE CONSECRATED LIFE.

### A. Definition and Fundaments of the Consecrated Life

The consecrated life is a stable form of life by which the faithful in following Christ, by the action of the Holy Spirit, dedicate themselves completely to God, who is loved most of all, so that, having been dedicated by a new and special title to his honor, to the building up of the Church, and to the salvation of the world, they strive for the perfection of charity in the service of the kingdom of God and, having been made an outstanding sign in the Church, foretell the heavenly glory (Canon, 573§1)<sup>2</sup>. St. John Paul II, views the consecrated life as a gift of God the Father to his Church through the Holy Spirit, this *gift* is profoundly rooted in the examples and teachings of Jesus Christ (*Vita Consecrata*, 1). Pope Francis also describes the consecrated life as a gift to the Church, born of the Church, grows in the Church, and

---

<sup>2</sup> The two sections of Canon 573 give a wholesome understanding to the what the Consecrated life is. This is so because it views the consecrated life with two basic elements: First is *Theological* that highlights the following of Jesus Christ through the action of the Holy Spirit in total consecration to God for the good of the Church and in the service of the Kingdom through the vows of Obedience, Poverty and Chastity. The Second element is *juridical* that is a stable form of life, erected canonically by the competent authority of the Church, chosen voluntarily by the faithful and willingly admitted by the institutes.

that is entirely directed to the Church (Apostolic Letter to the Consecrated Persons, III, 5).

The sole aim of the consecrated life, is to follow Christ *sequela Christi* by professing and living out the evangelical counsels - poverty, chastity and obedience. These counsels, considered as the fundamental characteristics of Jesus, have a typical and permanent visibility in the world, in that the faithful are drawn towards the mystery of the Kingdom of God that is made manifest in the history of Man but will be fully realized in Heaven (VC, 1).

It is clear that one cannot define the consecrated life without referring to Christ and his fundamental characteristics which has come to be known as the evangelical counsels. The centrality of Jesus Christ in the theme of the consecrated life does not exclude the validity and action of the Blessed Trinity ceaselessly at work in the consecrated life. The vocation to this Life is purely of the Father's initiative who demands the response of those he has chosen to this life. The *Sequela Christi* is an invitation to all, to make access to the Father through him who is the way (cf. Jn.14,6) but to some he has called to a complete and total consecration and followership that involves the radical abandonment of everything to live intimately with him going with him wherever he went (cf. Mt. 19,27; Ap. 14,4b). This radical abandonment is made manifest through the evangelical counsels in the lives of those who have opted to follow

him closely. The vocation to the Consecrated life is related with the work of the Holy Spirit, for it is under his influence that the attraction to this life is perceived and that those who have left themselves to be guided by him, are made to carry within them the special presence of the Resurrected Lord (VC, 17-19).

The definition and understanding of what the consecrated life cannot be said to be complete without referring to its Ecclesial dimension. The desire to follow Christ is definitely not an individual ingenuity, rather it is an expression of the faith received in the community, the Church. The foundation of faith is laid by the Church through baptism and nourished constantly through the eucharist and other sacraments. It is this same community, the bride of Christ, that plays an active role in the interpretation of the Christological characters – evangelical counsels- of the consecrated life. The identity of a consecrated person is a miniature representation of the Church which is the body of which Christ is the Head -cf. Eph. 5,23 (*The Consecrated Life and its Role in the Church and the World*, 41). This is clearly seen from the fact that the profession of the evangelical counsels is intimately connected with the mystery of Christ, and has the duty of making visible the way of life which Jesus himself chose and indicated as an absolute eschatological value (VC, 29).

The understanding of what the consecrated life is, must explore every aspect that vitalizes it, that is- the

Trinitarian and Ecclesial features- this is so because a one-sided explanation does not enrich its understanding. The Trinitarian aspect which serves as the basic foundation must never be excluded or separated from the medium (The Church) through which it transmits and nourishes the consecrated life in the socio-historical context of Man. It is obvious then that a consecrated life linked tightly to the Church, bereaved of the Trinitarian confession is absurd and only functions as a *society of people conditioned by temporal and spatial benefits*.

## **B. Historical Evolution of the Consecrated Life<sup>3</sup> and Various Forms of the Consecrated Life**

**Earliest historical forms of the Consecrated Life (III-XII):** the very first forms of consecrated life that assumes virginity or celibacy is said to have stemmed from the imitation of the life of Jesus. New forms of living this way of life- **hermits**- started to spring up in the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> century and it is characterized by the living in solitude, separated from the family and secular engagements in order to attain holiness and be entirely dedicated to God in prayer. St. Anthony is the prominent name here. From the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the hermitical life started to transform into **Cenobitic Life**, that is communal life. It was around this time, especially from St. Pachomius, that organized monastic setting under a superior and the rule started to take prominence. The achievement of St. Pachomius is

---

<sup>3</sup> RUIZ, T.B., *Los miembros de los institutos de vida consagrada* 224-227 in *Derecho Canónico I: El derecho del pueblo de Dios*. Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Madrid. 2006.

that his idea opened up monastic possibilities to Christians that could not keep up with the high level ascetism practiced in hermit circle.

The rules of St. Basil, St. Augustine and St. Benedict are worthy of note too. The characteristic of this new monastic form of life is the emphasis on virginity as the basic element required and, living communally under one Rule.

**Consecrated life and apostolic activity (XII-XVI):** with the monastic life flourishing, there came a new form of consecrated life which tended to combine contemplative life and apostolic and pastoral life. In this time, we can mention the Canon regulars of St. Augustine. In the XIII century, by the fourth council of Lateran's decree to avoid the abnormal multiplication of religious institutions, sprung the Mendicant Orders- The Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians and Carmelites- the members of these orders are friars who live a fraternal community life, dedicated to apostolic and scholarly activities and this was the fundamental modification brought about by the Mendicants.

In the XVI century, we have the historical appearance of a new form of religious life known as the Clerics Regular, dedicated to Teaching and caring for the sick. The Jesuits, The Brothers of St. John of God are examples of this form of life.

**Religious Congregations (XVI- XX):** prior to the appearance of the Clerics Regular, the solemnity of vows (the Mendicants) and the strict closure (female religious) were the determined and accepted forms of religious life. The appearance of the Clerics Regular changed the attitude to the essentiality of solemn vows; Leo XIII's *Conditae a Christo* approved of the Religious Congregations and simple vows.

**Secular institutes of Consecrated life (XX- PRESENT):** in this epoch sprung a new form the religious life, influenced by the anticlerical and antireligious movements, that did not dispense of the traditional elements adapted to the Religious life: Communal life, the Habit, public vows etc. It rather approved only of Consecration and Secularity as the two basic elements to living out this life. Pius XII's *Provida Mater Ecclesia* approved of this way of life in 1947.

The consecrated life is like a tree with many branches that has been planted by God, it is rooted in the gospel and yields fruit in each age and epoch of the Church. The act of living out the evangelical counsels through different charisms through the ages thereby making perennially present the mystery of Christ, in the Church and in the World is attributed to the incessant work of the Holy Spirit (VC, *ibid*). From brief historical presentation in the foregone, we can deduce various modes by which the consecrated life is lived and recognized by the Church.

- The Eremitical Life.
- The Consecrated Virgins.
- Religious Life.
- Apostolic Societies.
- Secular Institutes.

All of these forms have in common the radical intent to follow Christ intimately and dedicating of one's life, in entirety, for the mission of the Kingdom of God. The difference is noted by the way of living out this personal and wholesome dedication to Christ because each one of them has its charism and spirituality.

## **SEGMENT B: OPTION FOR THE POOR.**

### **A. Towards Understanding the Term: Option for the Poor**

In the first segment, a brief presentation of the concept and foundations (theological and historical) occupies the center stage. In this segment, the focus is on the option for the poor. The intention is to give a description of what the term entails in general, making references to various sources that would give a far-reaching understanding.

The term *option for the poor* has an unquestionable connection with the Liberation Theology that began in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Latin America. While its first usage is attributed to Pedro Arrupe SJ, Superior General of the Jesuits in 1968, Gustavo Gutierrez is known to be a front runner in championing this point in his concept of

Theology<sup>4</sup>. Since the Second Vatican Council, the attitude of the Church towards the poor is clearly demonstrated in her magisterium and her practical life (The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 182)<sup>5</sup>.

The option for the poor consists in the voluntary decision that leads one to be incarnated in the world of the poor, so as to assume with historical realism the cause of integral liberation<sup>6</sup>. This preferential option for the poor is not the attitude that springs from the feeling of superiority over the poor, in that lending a hand becomes some sort of rendering a favor, rather it is the demonstration of the nature of the Church as the sign of the Kingdom of God, a kingdom of love in its horizontal

---

<sup>4</sup> GUTIÉRREZ, G., *Teología de la Liberación. Perspectivas*, Ediciones Sígueme, Salamanca, 1972 pp. 40-41. In this work, we can see that Gustavo's concept of theology, is that which is an epicenter of transformation that protests against the trampled human dignity. It is the critical reflection of the lives of the impoverished through the lens of the word of God.

<sup>5</sup> Reaffirms the usage of the term *preferential option for the poor*, which is described as an *option or a special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity to which the whole tradition of the church bears witness*.

<sup>6</sup> LOIS, J., *Opción por los pobres. Síntesis Doctrinal*, 9 in VIGIL J.M (ed) *La opción por los pobres*, Sal Terrae, Santander. 1991

and vertical dimension<sup>7</sup>. The term as it is, can definitely be dated with exactitude, but what it symbolizes, the act in itself is not 20<sup>th</sup> century phenomenon. But it is sure that the intent to identify with the poor of the society is not all new.

José Luis Sicre in his book demonstrates chronologically that in the Ancient Oriental empires, there existed (and recorded) traits of Kings and rulers identifying with the weak, the poor in their communities. In Egypt, around 2654-2190 BC the era of the great pharaonic constructions, Herkhuf in his autobiography, writes on his achievements especially with the poor, the hungry, the naked and all these he did because he desires to appear just before the great god. The Autobiography of Khety (c. 2190-2040 BC) tells of a governor who was able to feed his subjects especially the needy during the time of famine in Egypt<sup>8</sup>. From this little presentation we can infer that as far back as 3000 BC there existed the special

---

<sup>7</sup> RAYGADA, A.G., *El Quehacer de la Teología según la teología de la liberación de Gustavo Gutiérrez (Tesina de la licenciatura)*, Estudio Teológico Agustiniano, Valladolid. 2018 p. 6

<sup>8</sup> SICRE, J.L., *Con los pobres de la tierra*, Ediciones Cristiandad, Madrid. 1984. pp 19- 46. Sicre extensively treated the theme of social justice in the Ancient Civilization to demonstrate the fallacy of a French television program that postulated that humanity got to know basic ethical principles from Moses. Taking his sources from ancient scripts and rolls, he arrived at demonstrating that the concern for the needy in the society pre-dates Moses.

interest for the needy and weak of the society that is, the hungry, the naked, the orphans. All of these stems from the conviction that these too deserve to be treated with respect and worthy attention. Interestingly, these ethical actions do not go unrewarded by the gods.

### **B. Option for the poor: A theological- christological mandate in the sacred scripture.**

The Old testament Hebraic vocabulary offers us this understanding when we refer to the Poor, that is, the group of persons *without dignity* that live in the land of Israel. In this group includes 'ébed (the slave), ger (the foreign immigrant), miskén (the person looked upon with contempt), helká (the abandoned), 'ebyôn (the beggar, the oppressed), 'anaw-'anawîm (the needy)<sup>9</sup> to this list we can also add- the widow, the orphan.

We can draw that these persons considered as those without dignity, are casualties of a society with a disbalanced socio-economic setting that only favors a few of the society. However, the lucidity of a socio-economic deprivation does not mean that there are not other ways of understanding what it means to be poor in the Old testament. Joseph Blenkinsopp avers that by the time of the composition of the Third part of Isaiah (that is, 56-66) between 538 BC and 510 BC, the concept of

---

<sup>9</sup> CAMACHO, I.- RINCÓN, R.- HIGUERA, G., *Praxis cristiana.3: Opción por la justicia y la libertad*, Paulinas, Madrid, 1986 pp. 29-30

who the poor were has acquired a religious connotation, in that the poor are not necessarily seen as persons without economic dignity, rather as a people of God<sup>10</sup>.

The reference to the option of the poor in the old testament is a characteristic of the just person who pleases God. As it is known one cannot be said to be just without establishing a good union with YHWH through the laws and precepts. In these precepts exists not only religious or cultic injunctions but also, humanitarian rules that tend to defend the rights of the poor in the society. **The Pentateuch** contains various guidelines that upholds and defends the dignity and rights of the poor ones in the community. The root of these guidelines and precepts springs from the exodus experience of the Israelites from Egypt. The liberation of the people of Israel from the oppression and inexplicable hardship of the Egyptians by God through Moses, made the Israelites have a concrete concept of YHWH as a liberator and defender of the poor and the oppressed<sup>11</sup> (and not as the Creator of the Universe as this was a latter theological formulation in the exilic era). This singular experience is what is going to influence the various codes that are in the Pentateuch.

---

<sup>10</sup> BLENKINSOPP, J., *El Libro de Isaías (56-66)*, Ediciones Sígueme, Salamanca. 2017. p 265.

<sup>11</sup> FABRIS, R. *La Opción por los Pobres en la Biblia*, Editorial Verbo Divino, Navarra. 1992 p. 80-81.

In the *Covenant code* of Exodus 20,22- 23,19, *The Holiness code* of Leviticus 17:1 - 26:46, *The Deuteronomic code* of Deuteronomy 12-26 we can sum up various precepts that defend the rights of the poor and the foreigner. These codes succinctly condemn any form of maltreatment of the foreigner, the abuse of the widow and the orphan and the need to help these persons because the Israelites were once in the same condition in Egypt<sup>12</sup>. It is even interesting to see that religious practices like The Sabbath (Ex. 20, 8-10), The Sabbatical year (Ex. 21,2-6; 23,11: Lev. 25, 2-7: Dt 15, 1-18), The Jubilee Year (Lev 25, 8-22) and the Triennial Tithe (Deut. 14,28) all have positive effects on the poor in the society, this initiative stems from experience of a just and faithful God that liberated the Israelites from Egypt<sup>13</sup>.

A look into the section of the **Prophets** on the question of the option for the poor would also be beneficial. The general overview of the prophets and the prophetic tradition can be summarized in these context- The fidelity to God through the covenant and the love of God and neighbor is what guarantees living in freedom. The prophets, as mouthpiece of God, proclaimed the will of God and brought to the conscience of the people, the importance of being faithful to him. The aspect of the

---

<sup>12</sup> Cf. LÓPEZ, F.G., *El Pentateuco*, 3ª edición, Verbo Divino, Estella (Navarra). 2008. pp. 197-200; 233-38; 298-309

<sup>13</sup> Cf. OLEA- GONZÁLEZ, J.V., *Teología Moral Social: Fundamentación Bíblica* (Lecture notes) Estudio Teológico Agustiniiano, Valladolid. 2017 p.11

option for the poor comes as a way of manifesting this love of neighbor, in this way religion and liturgical practice should have a positive influence in the social component of a community.

The Book of **Amos** captures the deplorable situation of the northern kingdom (Israel) in the pre-exilic era, the prophet on his part does not leave any stone unturned at the time of criticizing the inhuman exploitation of the poor ones by the rich. Amos' social criticism is based in a theological-ethical understanding that is to be manifested in human relation, a personal experience and the typical traditions of Israel<sup>14</sup>. **Isaiah**, in the Southern kingdom of Judah, toes in the line of Amos of denouncing the oppression of the poor. Isaiah's criticism is constructed in a society where cultic and liturgical practices are appreciated but the obligation and responsibility to the poor are rarely taken to note, that is to say the act of living out the covenant is only reduced to religious rites (1,1-17). The condemnation and criticism against the magistrates, priests and prophets takes a center stage in the words of **Micah**. These three groups are the main reason why there is poverty and injustice in the land (3,9-11). This same line of view is common also in the criticism of Jeremiah, Ezekiel<sup>15</sup>.

---

<sup>14</sup> SICRE, J.L., *ibid.* 159-161

<sup>15</sup> FABRIS, R., *ibid.* 109-111

In the New Testament, we find that the terrain of the manifestation of The Revelation of God takes a new approach. The Letter to the Hebrews helps us in understanding this new mode:

*Long time ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in the last days he has spoken to us by a Son whom he appointed heir of all things through whom he also created the worlds. (Heb. 1,1-2).*

The central of the message of Jesus Christ, is the Kingdom of God. This we have recorded in the gospels-Mark, Matthew and Luke- that the good news that Jesus preached revolves around the Kingdom of God as stated by Mk 1:14-15, Mt 4,23, Lk 4,43. This is also proved by the number of times the word *The Kingdom of God* appeared especially in the gospels in the discourses of Jesus Christ<sup>16</sup>. This Kerygma of the Kingdom of God by

---

<sup>16</sup> DUNN, J., *Jesús recordado: el cristianismo en sus comienzos I*. Verbo Divino, Estella. 2009 pp. 445-449. The frequency at which the word appears in the gospels has spurred a certain desire in the research on the Historical Jesus to know whether it was a word primarily used by Jesus himself or if it was based on the creativity of the evangelists in their respective communities. James Dunn believes that the use of the kingdom of God was certainly active both in the generation of the second temple and the primitive Christian community but not so used frequently as in the Jesus tradition. The point he makes is that we cannot reject the possibility that in the parables and the preaching of Jesus Christ, there existed the

Jesus Christ is a dynamic reality that has far reaching effects be it in the religious- liturgical sphere, the ethical or moral compromise of a society and an Individual. It is in the whole scheme of the Kingdom of God that men are called to a whole new level of fraternity with one another in Christ.

We cannot fail to recognize that social context that Jesus lived in was one greatly characterized with a great percentage of the people living under poverty. The term *poor* in the Gospels refers to those who are economically dispossessed of material goods, the manual workers who earn meagre salary, the slaves, the prostitutes, the shepherds, the unlearned. These set of persons discriminated in the socio-cultural circle, did not find any refuge in the religious space too, as the result of falling short various pharisaical precepts<sup>17</sup>.

Jesus Christ in this social context preached the Kingdom of God that has a special intent for those who have been marginalized and discriminated upon by the existent social and religious setting of his time. To demonstrate that this Kingdom of God is not a metaphorical or utopian phrase, Jesus preached to the people by the use of parables and miracles (signs) to cement strongly that

---

use of the Kingdom of God by Christ himself and that it was central to his message and mission

<sup>17</sup> OLEA GONZÁLEZ J.V., *ibid.* 25

the reality of this Kingdom that has come and already manifesting among Men.

In Luke 4,18-19 we read a Christological fulfillment of the text of Isaiah 61,1-3. Before beginning to narrate the activity of Jesus, Luke makes it very clear to his readers what the passion and the goal of Jesus Christ was. The Spirit of God in Jesus is sending him to the poor, directing his life towards the needy, oppressed and humiliated. The "option for the poor" is not an invention of the twentieth-century theologians or a trend that came into circulation after Vatican II. It is the option of the Spirit of God, which animates the whole life of Jesus and of which we, his followers have to introduce constantly and consistently in our world today<sup>18</sup>. Later in 7,18-23, Jesus responds to John the Baptist in a concise manner to let him know that he (Jesus) is the one who was to come. Jesus refers once again to the category of people who form part of the global enterprise of the Poor.

There are two sets of beatitudes in the gospels: Matthew (5,3-12) is one, as Luke possesses another set (6,20-23). The two sets of beatitudes have a lot in common as much as what differentiates them. While Matthew has eight beatitudes plus one constructed in a distinct form, Luke has four beatitudes and we may add the subsequent woe sayings of (6,24-26).

---

<sup>18</sup> PAGOLA, J. A., *El Camino abierto por Jesús: Lucas 3*, PPC, Madrid. 2012. pp 105- 116

It is noted that both beatitudes have these set of people as subjects of the beatitudes: The poor, the hungry, those who weep and the persecuted. It becomes clear to one that the poor are going to be in the thick of the mission of Jesus, since the kingdom of God is promised to them. The reason for this is that God, whose Kingdom Jesus is preaching, is a God of justice and cannot reign where injustice prevails. The poor, the oppressed, the hungry, the persecuted have been granted the heritage of the kingdom of God not by their own doing but by the attitude of God towards them<sup>19</sup>.

We can refer to the two banquets mentioned in the Gospels -Matthew 22, 1-10 and Luke 14, 16-24- the text of St. Luke would favor us here. The host who sent invitations to important personalities had to take a radical turn after seeing that the guests did not want to come for individual reasons. We all know how the parable ended. If we read it in the light of the person Jesus Christ, we realize that Jesus justifies God's option for the poor that in Luke's list are: the lame, the blind, the crippled. These are the poor, the clients of God because God acts as a master who calls the poor after being ignored by the guests<sup>20</sup>. The fact that Jesus also ate with the poor signifies that, yes, it is possible to rise above the social stigmatization of the Poor.

---

<sup>19</sup> FABRIS, R., *ibid.* 25-32

<sup>20</sup> FABRIS, R., *ibid.* 71-74

Matthew 25,31-46 presents another interesting set of Jesus' discourse on the poor, in the context of the final judgement. Jesus makes us understand that compassion and being compassionate is what guarantees one a place on his right hand and more concretely, compassion to the poor. This text clearly has the identity of Jesus as a judge who identifies himself with the poor *Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family you did it to me*. Therefore, helping any of these- The Hungry, The Stranger, The Naked, The Sick- means that it is Jesus who is helped, one cannot help but notice the evident Christological identity vested upon the poor, who live among us. St. Augustine helps us in understanding this when he states that you (we) have Christ seated in Heaven; on earth begging (through the poor)<sup>21</sup>.

The miracles (and signs) of Jesus demonstrated especially in healing infirmities, are ways of showing that the Kingdom of God is already taking its foothold in the history of salvation by its ability to free the sick from their shackles of pain. These signs, are intended to pass a

---

<sup>21</sup> CF. ST. AUGUSTINE *Commentary on Psalm 36, 3,6* in *Obras de San Agustín*, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Madrid. 1964. This the original Latin text *Habetis Christum in caelo sedentem, in terra petentem*.

message to social structures built on deceit, injustice and oppression that it is possible to change for the better<sup>22</sup>.

### **C. The early Christians and the option for the poor.**

The foregone section discussed the option for the poor as having its firm base in the vision of God which was further emphasized by Jesus Christ in his parables and miracles. In the early history of Christianity, the primitive Christians will also include this attitude in their missionary and daily labor. The general component of the Christian attitude has the practice of alms giving side by side other practices like fasting and prayer.

The community life that characterized the life of the earliest Christian community in Jerusalem as recounted by Luke, tells us the benefit of this way of living *there was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned land or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet and it was distributed to each as any had need* (Acts. 4,34-35). By this we see a presentation of a radical implementation of the gospel of Jesus.

Also, we can cast our minds to the institution of the Seven Deacons in Acts 6:1-6. The bond of contention that led to the creation of the office of the deacons in the early

---

<sup>22</sup> SOBRINO, J., *Opción por los pobres y seguimiento de Cristo*, 39 in VIGIL, J. M (ED) *Opción por los pobres*. Editorial Sal Terrae, Santander, 1991.

church's life was the issue of segregation of the Hellenists from the daily distribution carried out by the Jewish Christians. The twelve, at the time of confirming the seven young men nominated for the office of *diakonia*, affirmed at the same time the different but complementary functions between the two groups- The twelve shall be dedicated to prayer and service of the word of God, while the Seven will focus on the daily distribution. What we should take from this is that the deep union of the members of the early Christian community in Jerusalem, had its expression in the assistance of the poor and the needy. Hence while the twelve by the authority of Jesus Christ satisfied the spiritual hunger of her members through the word and breaking of bread, the Seven satisfied the human necessities of the community<sup>23</sup>.

St. Paul does not make any explicit reference as to the care for the poor and the needy, giving that his letters were brought about by occasional need to clarify certain problems or for specific purposes. But one can be certain that Paul believed in the equality of all who are called to share in the mystery of Christ the Lord (Gal. 3,28-29; Rom. 10,12). The problem of division at the time of celebrating the Lord's supper among members of the community of Corinthians presented Paul with the intent of correcting the wrong practice of the rich members who segregated themselves from those who

---

<sup>23</sup> Fabris, R., *ibid.* 150

are below them in social status<sup>24</sup>. Again, we can refer to a duty Paul mentioned while narrating what transpired in the council of Jerusalem, which Luke narrates in Acts 15. In Gal. 2,10 Paul has this to tell *They asked only for one thing, that we remember the poor, which was actually what I was eager to do*. This obligation which Paul was eager carry out is also recorded in 1Cor. 16,1-4 where Paul appeals to the Christians in Corinthians telling them that the collection is for the saints in Jerusalem.

St. James' characterization of a Christian life has the outlook for the poor. In his letter it is noted that listening to the word, which is at the beginning of the Christian journey, must be translated into a corresponding life, characterized by the unity between the word and life, between doctrine and praxis, between faith and works (2,14-26). But what directly concerns this work, is his criticism against favoritism or partiality in the favor of the rich in the community at the expense of the poor ones (2, 1-13). This partial attitude shows that it is not acceptable according to the criterion of God, who chose the poor to make them rich heirs of his Kingdom. Fabris describes it very well in his summary of this text of St. James, "The option for the poor that the gospel reveals to us, as the principle of life and praxis of Christians, it is the action of the law of freedom, a perfect and real law

---

<sup>24</sup> ÁLVAREZ C. D., *Corpus Paulinos (Lecture note)*, Estudio Teológico Agustiniano, Valladolid. 2017. pp.26-27

that acts not with words but with actions, in a praxis of solidarity and active love”<sup>25</sup>.

In the developing history of Christianity in the Roman empire, Christians were famed to have maintained a moral way of life that differed from that of the pagans, this was a result of the lessons from the person and gospel of Jesus Christ. The Christian morality was demonstrated first in hospitality, in that it was a service rendered to Christ himself impersonated in the guest. The care for the Poor was the highest office of the bishop of the community. There were two types of income through which the community helped the poor: The spontaneous contribution and alms. They also collected dresses and shoes. Furthermore, this attitude of generosity too was extended to the orphans and widows. It must be considered that orphaned children lived in a time of great risk and rape in ancient Roman society. Christians had a benevolent attitude towards orphans. The bishop is designated as the Father of the community and the person responsible for the action of the community. After the Constantinian peace, specific reception centers for orphaned children were created. The Christian community also took into her care, poor widows<sup>26</sup>.

---

<sup>25</sup> FABRIS, R., *ibid* 155-157

<sup>26</sup> GÓMEZ, J. A., *Historia de la Iglesia I: Edad Antigua*, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Madrid. 2001 pp.169-179

It is easy to see that the Christians made effort to live as Christ did, replicating all that he said about the Kingdom of God. If Christ identified with the poor in his actions and in his words especially of Mt. 25, 31ss, the Christians did not do anything less than recognizing in the poor, the needy, the personhood of Jesus Christ. This is the primary influence of the Christian life in general, that is, living as Christ lived, and it does not restrict itself to moral codes or liturgical practices, it is a life, lived in constant reference to God and to neighbor.

#### **D. The Catholic social teaching and the option for the poor.**

The magisterium, the teaching office of the Church, is known to have been entrusted the task of interpreting the sacred scripture and the sacred tradition in the person of Jesus Christ (Dei Verbum, 10) but the scope of the magisterium is not only restricted to the interpretation of the sacred scripture and the sacred tradition. Historical events help us understand that the teaching office of the Church has, in one form or the other, made efforts in making its voice heard in the socio-political setup of the human history. This particular function is enshrined in the catholic social teaching of the church by which the church takes upon herself the proclamation that the Lord has commended to her, making known the freedom and redemption wrought by Christ (CSDC, 63). The Catholic Social Teaching is a process of reflection that implies the totality of the Church but that has its decisive expression

in the documents of the social magisterium, by which the basic principles are not only formed but also, responses are elaborated with regards to the existent social problem of each historic moment<sup>27</sup>.

Leo XIII encyclical on capital and labour resonates that the function of the church is not restricted to the spiritual circle alone but also in the things that concerns Man in his earthly existence. This is what authorizes the Church to pay a special attention to the poor and care for them in the way that she can (*Rerum Novarum*, 28-31)<sup>28</sup>. If he alludes to the Church's duty towards the poor, Leo XIII does not fail to call the State into recognizing her duty of protecting the rights of the citizens especially of the poor (RN, 37).

In his encyclical on Christianity and Social Progress, John XXIII makes his point to the nations who enjoy the

---

<sup>27</sup> CAMACHO, I., *Doctrina Social de la Iglesia. Quince claves para su comprensión*, Desclée de Brouwer, Bilbao 2000, pp 21-22.

<sup>28</sup> It is important to note that in these paragraphs of the encyclical, Leo XIII tries to establish the Christian attitude of charity at the same time maintaining the balance of the preaching of the gospel. Christian morality, when adequately and completely practiced, leads of itself to temporal prosperity, for it merits the blessing of that God who is the source of all blessings. The Church cannot be silent nor turn a blind eye to the reality that surrounds her. The Church's intention on the act of charity to the poor is that they may have a better condition of life (28).

better living. The Principle of Solidarity is cited as to why nations with better economic status must see it as their obligation to collaborate with those nations that do not enjoy so much as the former, for it is in this way that lasting peace is achieved (Mater et Magistra, 157).

Paul VI condemned vehemently the lifestyle of extravagance and wastage in the face of the glaring reality of millions of persons who do not have access to some or any of the fundamental basic human amenity (*Populorum progressio*, 53). The eradication of the poverty that exists in our world can only be steered by an action based on genuine love, personal effort and commitment (PP. 75).

Benedict XVI recognizes that there should be a connection between creating a Just society and carrying out acts of charity. This relationship is necessary because charitable acts do not change the status quo of the poor in our society reason, being that it is carried out by the rich to tranquilize their consciences. While clearly stating that charity is a function of the church, Benedict XVI, does not fail to mention the need to do more and specifically, to create a just society which is to be the agenda of the political sphere of the society. Thus, the option for the poor implicates both the Church and Politics (*Deus caritas est*, 26-29)<sup>29</sup>.

---

<sup>29</sup> In order to effect tangible and realistic changes to the lives of the poor, the society must have the notion of being just to

Pope Francis holds that the kerygma (the gospel of the kingdom of God) has a social dimension (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 177). Our confession of faith in the Trinity is that which impulses us to open up to others. This is the base from which he treats the theme of social inclusion of the poor as an important task of the Christian. This task stems from a correct understanding of what solidarity is. It presumes the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few (EG, 188). The option of the poor is a theological category because it is God who shows the poor his mercy first and our attitude to this duty should not be

---

each person of the society. The function of procuring Justice in the society is mainly the function of politics and not a direct obligation of the Church. This understanding recognizes the autonomy of politics and the church (religion). Although justice is an obligation of the state, she must carry it out under reason, that requires constant purification from ethical blindness caused by the dazzling effect of power and special interests. This purification is the duty of faith.

On the other hand, the Church's charitable organizations, constitute an *opus proprium*, a task agreeable to her, in which she does not cooperate collaterally, but acts as a subject with direct responsibility, doing what corresponds to her nature. The Church can never be exempted from practicing charity as an organized activity of believers, and on the other hand, there will never be a situation where the charity of each individual Christian is unnecessary, because in addition to justice, man needs and will always need, love.

that which characterized by activism rather it should an attitude of attentiveness, a true concern which considers the other person as we consider ourselves. He adverts us against making excuses of incompatibility of our lifestyle demands and sparing time to be close to the poor (EG, 198-201).

## **SECTION C: THE CONSECRATED LIFE AND OPTION FOR THE POOR: RELATIONSHIP, CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS.**

Until now, this work has treated separately the two major concepts upon which it is centered- The Consecrated Life and the option for the poor- with the aim of understanding better the principal thread by which the work is guided. This segment is aimed at examining these two realities in order to extract what unites them, no matter how minute the factor might be. It shall also examine the challenges that affect the proper correspondence that should exist between the life and the option for the poor and proffer solutions to the challenges raised.

### **A. The relationship between the consecrated life and the option for the poor.**

#### **• The Jesus Factor- Incarnation**

It is an undeniable fact that one called to the Consecrated Life has the desire to follow Jesus Christ closely, a followership that demands a total and radical commitment (Mk. 1,16-20; Lk. 9,57-62). This radical and total followership avails one the opportunity to perceive

the socio-historic context from the Jesus-point of view and live it out.

What example then does or can a consecrated person receive from Jesus Christ? If the Kingdom of God preached by Jesus had a fundamental interest in the poor and the marginalized of the society in Palestine, it will be more interesting to note that from the commencement of his human life, that is, at the Incarnation, that He not only became Man, but was also poor. The incarnation of Jesus is an ontological radical option for the poor.

The Prologue of the gospel of St. John 1,1-14, is the presentation of the general scope through which the gospel of St. John should be read and understood. It has been interpreted that John presents us with the Divine Pre-existent state of Jesus who became flesh, *sarx* (v.14), St. Paul's famous Christological hymn in his letter to the Philippians (2,6ss) described this reality of Christ as *Kenosis*. In this sense the evangelist, John, includes not only the true human nature of Christ but also the frailty of his human condition<sup>30</sup>.

With the help of the prologue of St. John and the Christological hymn of St. Paul to the Philippians, one cannot be at fault to note that the preexistent status of the Word and his incarnation-kenosis find their unity in

---

<sup>30</sup> SALA, R., *Cristología Dogmática (lecture notes)* Estudio Teológico Agustiniano, Valladolid. 2017. p. 69

the Person of Jesus Christ, who died and resurrected. The Kenosis of Jesus Christ, of assuming truly the human flesh and nature in its entirety should not only be understood only from the viewpoint of his divinity, and this is what Paul's Christological hymn is all about, that is, a Human existential kenosis. Christ is understood as an obedient servant who selflessly offered himself freely for the sake of others, this selfless act is not characterized by power, riches and autonomy rather by his humble obedience to the Father<sup>31</sup>, an obedience that took him to die on the Cross. It is he who in all his richness accepted, out of love, to share in the humanity of man and assumed upon himself not only poverty and weakness but also death- the ultimate consequence.

And this should definitely be the first port of call when referring to the option for the poor because in it we see Him who was rich, yet for our sakes became poor (cf.2 Cor.8,9) coming in contact with us, sharing and feeling our joys and sadness, recognizing in the poor their pain and needs, all of these in his own humanity. The option for the poor only makes more meaning for a consecrated person who desires to follow Christ intimately.

- **The element of the vow of poverty.**

It is indisputable that the vow of poverty as professed by the consecrated person- together with the vows of obedience and charity- springs from the person of

---

<sup>31</sup> VEGA, L.G., *ibid.* 83

Christ<sup>32</sup> and of the desire to imitate him. Understanding what the vow entails will help in stating that the consecrated person is directly implied in the question of the option for the poor.

The evangelical poverty cannot fully be realized in the consecrated person if it is only about understanding it in the sense of not possessing material goods because being poor (evangelically) is an internal personal decision, and like Jesus, it is that which springs from within and affects the entirety of the person. In this regard, the beatitude of the poor pronounced by Jesus becomes the perfect understanding of what the vow of poverty tends to incarnate in the life of a consecrated person- a life identical with that of Christ and that which makes the religious person sensible to the plight of men around him or her<sup>33</sup>. The vow of evangelical poverty is the response of the consecrated life in a world that is

---

<sup>32</sup> AZEVEDO, M., *Los religiosos vocación y misión: un enfoque exigente y actual*, Sociedad de Educación Atenas, Madrid, 1987. p.45. Marcello in his reference to two aspects of poverty in the person of Christ first is what he refers to as the ontological poverty and this is enshrined in the incarnation of Christ. The second aspect is the poverty of possession (of having) which shows the conscious affirmation and the experimented precariousness of things and their incapacity of guaranteeing man the true happiness. These two aspects in the person of Christ tells of being free ontologically in spite of not possessing.

<sup>33</sup> AZEVEDO, M., *ibid* 47

challenged by the materialistic attitude in the world, which craves possession, heedless of the needs and sufferings of the weakest and the lack of concern for the balance of natural resources (VC, 89).

A closer look into the situation of most religious congregations today injects one with a certain dose of ambiguity, in the sense that while holding to the evangelical vow of poverty, these congregations have at their disposal some great wealth of assets scattered around them and have in them members who by their qualifications do not fail to attract the attention of the civil society, hence the tussle of identifying who the consecrated person is becomes really difficult- are the religious congregations and orders on the side of the rich or the poor? Are they a privileged third group (or the middle class) between the rich and the poor?<sup>34</sup>.

---

<sup>34</sup> This ambiguity is an evident fact to which I as a religious, have tried to reconcile with the evangelical poverty that I profess and my personal reality, probably because I am still in my formative stage of my religious life I may not fully understand the panorama between the two. But I am conscious of the fact that my tuition for studies, my health bills, accommodation and feeding are not footed by me so how can I claim to even be poor when I am not on top of the situation that sees to my personal welfare in comparison to a young person my age on the other side of the fence who struggles to make ends meet. I am easily accepted and can blend in perfectly with those who are comfortable because I am a religious and thanks to the many gracious philanthropic

Not to lose sight of the prize here, the focus is on the evangelical poverty and the mission of the option for the poor, because despite the glowing ambiguity that seems to exist between the life of a religious and the duty to the poor, there is a great number of religious whose lives manifest the correspondence between the evangelical poverty and the praxis of the option for the poor.

The evangelical vow of poverty instills in the religious the outward demonstration of the solidarity to those whom the society in all spheres and criteria have neglected. A sense of austerity imbibed by this evangelical watchdog has to be willingly accepted within the personal reality of the religious, failure of which will only convert the solidarity acts to miss the mark of reaching these persons and convert to a mere 'touristic presence' with regards to the question of the option for the poor which does not lead to any internal conversion no matter the astonishment that we feel<sup>35</sup>.

St. John Paul II, presents perfectly the correlation between the evangelical vow of poverty and the option for the poor. Consecrated persons are therefore asked to

---

donations of people who see to my being sustained. But the fundamental question in the face of this reality is How I can really and radically live out the evangelical poverty. I think this question does not require a once and for all answer, rather a consistent and renewed response vis a vis the charism of my religious life.

<sup>35</sup> Azevedo, M., *ibid.* 62

bear a renewed and vigorous evangelical witness to self-denial and restraint, in a form of fraternal life inspired by principles of simplicity and hospitality, also as an example to those who are indifferent to the needs of their neighbor. This witness will of course be accompanied by a preferential love for the poor and will be shown especially by sharing the conditions of life of the most neglected. the consecrated life shares in the radical poverty embraced by the Lord, and fulfils its specific role in the salvific mystery of his Incarnation and redeeming death (VC, 90).

### **The Socio-historic factor.**

I was privileged to be in a workshop for the young Augustinian Religious in October 2018 which took place in Madrid. Among the things that we needed to do, aside the interactive sessions, was to embark on a little excursion to the Church of San Anton (Iglesia Social de San Antón) located also in Madrid. A Church, under the care of a lay Non- Governmental organization known as *Mensajeros de la Paz* (Messengers of Peace) founded by P. Ángel Garcia Rodríguez a Spanish catholic priest, ordained for Catholic Archdiocese of Oviedo.

It did not occur to me that this excursion was not the normal conventional cultural-touristic visit to different basilicas and churches with magnificent architectural details. I was wrong to have built an image of the church and I refused to quench my inquisitiveness by searching the internet (which is absurd for me). I was disappointed

by the structure I was seeing as we approached the church because it was not carrying the normal look, no thanks to patches of black soot from a fire incident that took place years ago.

My disappointment did not last long as it was overshadowed by the wonder that my vision presented me. It is a Church, yes because I could see the altar and the tabernacle and the confessional booths; but it was something else - A home for those who do not have shelter (literally!). It was not empty as there were people in it, tourists and people without shelter, one could see a good number of boxes and luggage belonging to people who live, eat and clean up inside the Church (because there are restrooms behind the altar). The pews are constructed in such way that there is a platform on which food is served and eaten. The Church accommodates everyone in need of shelter and food. To demonstrate that what is done in the church and the services rendered are not borne out of activism, it offers Wi-Fi services to these people and Television sets that emits live broadcast from the Vatican when the Pope celebrates Mass, Live football matches (All matches of the last edition of the FIFA World Cup were televised live) and News.

Our visit did not end there, as we were invited to a Restaurant *RobinHood* another arm of this NGO that offers food for free to people who cannot afford to. I ate my supper on a table with others, many of whom are not

capable to pay for their meal. Early exchange of pleasantries took place between my fellow table companions and I. I was astonished by what I was seeing and how events were unfolding before my eyes. I asked one of those with whom I ate, what his story was. He was glad to share that he had travelled from Ecuador to Spain with his immediate family to look for a greener pasture in 2000 as the economic situation in his country at that time was nothing favorable. Fast forward to 2008 when Spain went into economic recession that crippled various families' financial income, my interlocutor was affected, he sent his family back to Ecuador but he has not been able to go back to his country (that is doing better now than before) for lack of finance. As he was telling his story I noticed that he had a crutch close to his seat, I asked what it was for. He told me that he got into an accident in his place of work of recent, and he was relieved of work to go and recuperate, but it would have been difficult were it not have been for the NGO because he has no insurance as of the time of speaking.

I have tried to detail this personal experience to drive a point, which is, the real existence of the poor in our midst. The Church and the restaurant had a very good number of people in dire need of either or both shelter and food. It is important to realize that in our time, like as of centuries past, that there are poor people around us and in an interesting manner, it is not easy to detect those who have been left desolate and are lacking in one or all basic necessities of life because many of them do

not give us that impression by their appearance anymore. In a developed city like Madrid there is the temptation of being anaesthetized into thinking that only the few numbers of beggars we see on the streets are all that there are with regards to the poor forgetting completely the immigrants, those who are without shelter (I witnessed a group of persons too who sleep on the streets), or people in the situation of my table companion.

As religious, we are called to live our lives in this concrete historical moment that we find ourselves and that means to be linked and connected to others, allowing ourselves to experience the other person's joys and plights, taking to note the painful situation that is lived by the man, woman or child who has been socially excluded<sup>36</sup> because this mission with reference to the religious life is not that which is reserved to a few; as religious we are to incarnate ourselves, following Jesus, in the historical dimension and the social questions of our world today.

Our vow of poverty makes us free from being slaves to possession and egoistic gains and helps us to be objective in our criticism against injustice, thereby helping us to exercise a true form of solidarity with those

---

<sup>36</sup> GONZÁLEZ, A. I., *Pobres y solidarios. Vivir compasivamente en medio de la historia* p.79 in VIDA RELIGIOSA MONOGRÁFICO *La buena noticia del Reino: Criterios y valores para una minoría significativa* (vol.124) Buen Suceso, Madrid. 2018

in need. Our conscience is triggered deeply when we come in contact with these people who are poor, History and time brings us in proximity to them which in turn makes us reflect on how we have been living out the gospel of the Kingdom of God, which is not just about a personal relationship with God nor are our loving response to God be demonstrated by small personal gestures to individuals in need; rather it is about loving God who reigns in our world. This love should set the pace for an impact of universal fraternity, justice, peace and dignity on the society (EG, 180).

### **The prophetic-solidarity factor.**

The demonstration of solidarity with those in need is not to be left to acts of charitable donations and little personal acts of alms giving, rather it should tend further towards making the lives of these individuals in need better. And this can only be done when as religious we assume the duty of being prophets, criticizing injustice and oppression rooted in the various socio-economic systems and structures of political entities.

Solidarity and the dignity of the human person complement themselves in that it excludes the accentuation of an isolated individualism on one extreme and on the other extreme, the collectivism that restricts the individual freedom and autonomy<sup>37</sup>. The principle of Solidarity affirms the relation between

---

<sup>37</sup> OLEA GONZÁLEZ J. V., *Teología Moral Social: Introducción*, 11

persons, social groups and the society at large expressing it through the anthropological-ethical union and the vocation to an ethical responsibility of each and every person. That is to say each person is responsible for the good of the other<sup>38</sup> (in this case especially for those in need).

It is important to stress that solidarity is not same as alms-giving or donation, rather it is an attitude, driven by the desire of helping each and every person to realize their individual potentials for the good of the society. For us, Religious and Consecrated, Solidarity has a theological foundation, it ceases therefore, to be a social obligation when we recognize that in the history of salvation God auto-reveals himself to us, and demonstrates clearly the side he is on through the person of Jesus Christ by the sign of his life, passion and resurrection. Hence, we see God who has identified with us, poor as we are, in our own history.

Pope Francis clearly stated that the distinctive sign of the consecrated life is Prophecy, it is in this way that the religious follows the Lord. A religious must never abandon prophecy. As prophets we receive from God, the ability to scrutinize the times in which we live and interpret events. We are able to discern and denounce the evil of sin and injustice. Prophets tend to be on the

---

<sup>38</sup> GALINDO GARCÍA, A., *Moral Socioeconómica*, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Madrid 1996. p.16

side of the poor and the powerless, for they know that God himself is on their side (Letter to all Consecrated People, II, 2).

As prophets, we cannot overlook the task of defending the poor. We are called to be prophets of the kingdom of God on earth, a kingdom which among other things, frowns against the injustice, oppression, harsh realities that impede the full realization of the citizens of the Kingdom. The Prophets in the biblical tradition from the time of Amos never passed on the chance of criticizing and condemning all forms of social injustices of their time. The Religious must never shy away from truthfully bringing to notice of those who in charge the glaring disbalance in the society, the great chasm that cuts between the unbelievable display of wealth and the horrible and deplorable living condition of the marginalized.

### **B. Challenges of the relationship between the consecrated life and the mission of the option for the poor.**

**The deficient understanding of the vow of poverty:** It is important to know that the vow of poverty is not a theory or an abstract injunction that does not have any connection between its profession and its praxis. There are cases of religious to whom the vow of poverty is mainly a spiritual enterprise, failing to note that being poor in spirit always reflects in the totality of the person in question. There is a great chasm at the time of

reconciling the life of a religious who is excellent in giving powerful talks and demonstration as to what evangelical poverty is and his or her questionable attitude towards material possession, vacations, allowance and titles.

**The Christ-less focus of the Religious:** the basic fundament of the Consecrated and religious life is to follow Jesus Christ closely. The Option for the poor viewed from this *sequela Christi* attitude ceases to form an appendix to the mission, it rather becomes an important part of the mission of the life. A religious loses his or her identity when this is missing and it becomes evident in certain attitudes demonstrated by him or her. The characteristics of the religious person is determined by that of Jesus Christ, living contrary to these characteristics supposes a life lived and directed by one's individual ingenuity.

Losing the Christological dimension of our lives draws us down to the level of uniformed social workers and our concern is shifted from the gospel. It is even worse when it is on a whole level of the religious community. The poor under our care will not be so much affected by their own personal situation than they are affected by the scandal we cause.

**Materialism in the consecrated life:** It is true that we are humans, therefore the need of material goods for the sustenance of all that pertains to our life and mission.

Our connection to material goods is determined by the need of one or of the community, this helps to check the situation of having more than we need. The strain to the mission towards the poor becomes evident when we become attached to these things and become slaves to them. A religious dominated by the passion of possession, who views every want as need (or even creating them unnecessarily) and cannot pass up the chance of riding the latest model of cars, electronic gadgets and honorary titles will definitely find it difficult to share his benefits to the poor.

**The attitude of those who seem to be in need:** In our society, especially in Nigeria where there is a great number of poor persons it is possible for a religious to constantly meet them whenever they maybe and lend the necessary assistance as it should. Some religious communities that are in charge of parishes have founded special social groups to help with the welfare of these people who have found themselves in the unfortunate situation that they are in. But the problem is the ability to discern and figure out who and who are in real need of the assistance rendered and who is not, given that in Nigeria some would even claim to be poor while they are not or they are just lazy to find themselves a befitting job. This, of course, raises suspicion in the conscience of the religious who is out to help for fear of helping the wrong person. The supposedly poor individual has taken up begging as a profession and it is really difficult to differentiate one from the other.

**The Socio-economic status of the society:** we live in a Society driven by an insatiable desire of accumulating material benefits caused by an unhealthy egoistic competition to be superior. Countless promotions and advertisement presented us by the media is not helping at all as it is no longer anything other than the option for personal goods. The Human person is considered from the economic power he or she is able to possess and control. There is the attitude of generalizing the poor situation existent in our society, an abstract understanding one created by a faceless phenomenon to the question of the poor.

The quest for power and control has driven men throughout history to do despicable things in the name of preserving a personal legacy at the detriment of the masses. There is an irreconcilable boundary that cuts between the rich who are always richer and the poor.

Nigeria, as it is, has seemingly succumbed to the illness of corruption and the alarming trend of chop-I-chop syndrome in the echelons of power is gradually becoming a culture despite countless promises and orientation of fighting corruption. It is therefore difficult to reach the poor in the best way possible, because of the alarming increase in poverty. In a society such as this, a religious can only do so much with the little at his or her disposal. It is a situation that can make a religious to fall into being inactive when it comes to the praxis of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### **C. Solutions to the challenges.**

It is important to understand that the vocation to the religious and consecrated life is one that requires constant renewal both on a personal and communal level, given the situation that we live in. To do so, we must constantly review our lives with the demands of the of Jesus Christ, learning from him the meaning and practice of love (Apostolic letter, I,2) This is a missionary aspect directed to none other than ourselves when we open our hearts to the promptings of the spirit of Christ which will in turn make us true signs of Christ in the world (VC, 25).

There is the need to have a complete initial process of formation for those who are aspiring to be religious. A wholesome formation process that views the formandi from every aspect of his or her life. A formation that is honest and sincere that will seek to enhance the good qualities of the formandi and help him or her to put them in good use; picking out the weak spots in order to correct unwanted responses to the life in question. Formators are to be companions and not agents of the mechanical application of rules and conducts of each Institute of Religious Orders and Congregations, with the focus of habilitating the spiritual, psychological, theological and pastoral growth of the formandi. There should be a fraternal aura around the formator and formandi so that counsels and criticisms are given and received with love and sincere gratitude. The initial stage of formation should not be understood as temporal

rather as a process that leads one even after solemn or final vows (VC, 65-69).

It is necessary to have a good understanding of what evangelical poverty means and the demands of the vow itself. A good approach to poverty, as has been said more than once, should be from the person of Jesus Christ. A life of poverty following that of Christ for the sake of the gospel will have to be a remove whatever appear as an obstacle, adherence to elements of worldly power, influence, money, Comfort, non-availability. Only those who are existentially poor will find the practical norm to live it in such a way that it penetrates all the dimensions of its being, its evangelical life and its dedication to the announcement of the gospel.<sup>39</sup>

In our dehumanized society, we are called to build a new world. We are to be the signs that question the society overwhelmed by the desire to possess; signs and hope of a new society. This, will only take place when we assume our prophetic tasks, if from our fraternal life we -by the austerity of life, by sharing the goods, by the constant attitude of service, reconciliation- become the examples, that puts into crisis the Intra-mundane values  
40.

---

<sup>39</sup> VEGA, L. G., *ibid.* 359; ROBLES, A., *Los Religiosos ante la sociedad de consumo*, in *Religiosos en un mundo inhumano*, Instituto Teológico de Vida Religiosa, Madrid. 1982. 146

<sup>40</sup> ROBLES, A., *ibid* 145

## D. Conclusion.

The intention of this work through various clarifications is to reaffirm the role of the consecrated life and her mission to towards the poor. This has been done by assessing the two realities independently and later present various connecting ports between them. To wrap up this segment therefore, it is important to note that the religious and consecrated persons are to be involved in the option of the poor, a mission which requires a serious effort to view the world, society, the Church and Humanity at large from the perspective of the poor, taking to cognizance their urgencies and needs, their values and calls, their possible and valid contribution towards the construction of a just society.

This different perception, starting from the poor, will make possible the effective change in the criteria and decision processes, whether on the ecclesial, social or cultural level. It will allow us to put ourselves at the service of the poor and, therefore, an effective transformation of the current world and the quality of our presence and religious apostolate<sup>41</sup>.

In this way, our desire to follow Christ will not be only spiritual affair or just relegated to the sanctum of the of personal life without influence on societal and national life...without a right to offer an opinion on events

---

<sup>41</sup> AZEVEDO, M., *ibid* 77

affecting the society (EG, 183), our obligation and duty as religious and consecrated persons is not that of quietism and being restricted to our liturgical or sacramental actions, we should not be afraid to bring the poor closer , make them accepted, for they too, like us, are Children of God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.

### **Bibliography**

FRANCIS, *Apostolic letter to all Consecrated people on the occasion of the year of the consecrated life.* 2014

ÁLVAREZ, C. D., *Corpus Paulinos, Estudio Teológico Agustiniano, Valladolid.* 2017.

AZEVEDO, M., *Los religiosos vocación y misión: un enfoque exigente y actual, Sociedad de Educación Atenas, Madrid* 1987.

BENEDICT XVI *Deus Caritas est: Encyclical letter On Christian Love* 2005.

BLENKINSOPP, J., *El Libro de Isaías (56-66), Ediciones Sígueme, Salamanca* 2017.

CAMACHO, I.- RINCÓN, R.- HIGUERA, G., *Praxis cristiana.3: Opción por la justicia y la libertad, Paulinas, Madrid* 1986.

CAMACHO, I., *Doctrina Social de la Iglesia. Quince claves para su comprensión, Desclée de Brouwer, Bilbao,* 2000.

DUNN, J., *Jesús recordado: el cristianismo en sus comienzos I, Verbo Divino, Estella* 2009.

FABRIS, R., *La Opción por los Pobres en la Biblia, Editorial Verbo Divino, Navarra* 1992.

- FRANCIS *Evangelii Gaudium: Apostolic Exhortation on the proclamation of the Gospel in Today's world.* 2013.
- GALINDO GARCÍA, A., *Moral Socioeconómica*, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Madrid 1996.
- GÓMEZ, J. A *Historia de la Iglesia I: Edad Antigua*, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Madrid. 2001.
- GONZÁLEZ, A. I., *Pobres y solidarios. Vivir compasivamente en medio de la historia (79-95) in VIDA RELIGIOSA MONOGRÁFICO La buena noticia del Reino: Criterios y valores para una minoría significativa (vol.124) Buen Suceso, Madrid 2018.*
- GUTIÉRREZ, G., *Teología de la Liberación. Perspectivas*, Ediciones Sígueme, Salamanca 1972.
- JOHN PAUL II *Vita Consecrata: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on The Consecrated Life And Its Mission In The Church And In The World* 1996.
- JOHN XXIII *Mater et Magistra: Encyclical on Christianity And Social Progress* 1961.
- LEO XIII *Rerum Novarum: On Capital and Labour.* 1891.
- LÓPEZ, F.G., *El Pentateuco, 3ª edición*, Verbo Divino, Estella (Navarra) 2008.
- OLEA- GONZÁLEZ, J.V., *Teología Moral Social, Estudio Teológico Agustiniiano*, Valladolid, 2017.
- PAGOLA, J. A., *El Camino abierto por Jesús: Lucas 3*, PPC, Madrid 2012
- PAUL VI *Populorum progressio: Encyclical on The Development of Peoples* 1967.

- PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE  
*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*,  
Libreria Editrice Vaticana. 2006
- RAYGADA, A.G., *El Quehacer de la Teología según la teología de la liberación de Gustavo Gutiérrez* (Licentiate Thesis), Estudio Teológico Agustiniano, Valladolid 2018.
- ROBLES, A., *Los Religiosos ante la sociedad de consumo* (125-151), in *Religiosos en un mundo inhumano*, Instituto Teológico de Vida Religiosa, Madrid 1982.
- RUIZ, T.B., *Los miembros de los institutos de vida consagrada* (224-308) in *Derecho Canónico I: El derecho del pueblo de Dios*. Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Madrid 2006.
- SALA, R., *Cristología Dogmática*, Estudio Teológico Agustiniano, Valladolid. 2017
- SICRE, J.L., *Con los pobres de la tierra*, Ediciones Cristiandad, Madrid 1984.
- ST. AUGUSTINE *Commentary on Psalm 36, 3,6*, in *Obras de San Agustín*, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Madrid 1964.
- VEGA, L.G., *Teología sistemática de la vida religiosa*, Instituto Teológico de Vida Religiosa, Madrid 1976
- VIGIL J.M (ed) *La opción por los pobres*, Sal Terrae, Santander. 1991.



# **CONSECRATED PERSONS AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS: THE 'GREEN' VOW?**

Kizito Uzoma Ndugbu, SMMM

Federal University of Technology, Owerri

## **Introduction**

Today, there is a loud and wide awareness that our existence is threatened not only by the arms race, regional conflicts and continued injustices among peoples and nations, but also by a lack of due respect for nature, by the plundering of natural resources and by a progressive decline in the quality of life. The sense of precariousness and insecurity that such a situation engenders is a seedbed for collective selfishness, disregard for others and dishonesty.

Faced with the widespread destruction of the environment, people everywhere are coming to understand that we cannot continue to use the goods of the earth as we have in the past. This, no doubt, began with vast social changes following World War II; making the protection of natural environment a shared social priority, and environmental politics; a major public concern.

With contemporary environmental politics driven by the idea of a global ecological crisis that threatened the very

existence of humanity, it is no doubt that the very vocation that incarnates the Gospel – Consecrated life – sharing in Christ’s risks and hopes; and so wakes up the world to God’s love and beauty<sup>1</sup>, must be part of the movement of actively insisting that the relationship between human society and the natural world be properly rewarding; bringing out that good which God saw (Gen.1:31).

## **II. Environment, Environmentalism, Environmental Politics?**

Understandably, to explain the genesis of the modern preoccupation with the environment, environmentalism and environmental politics, most scholars have emphasized a transition from an older generation of place-based conservation issues, such as parks, public lands, and wilderness, to a newer generation of environmental issues focused on clean air and water, toxics and hazardous waste, and other threats to human life and health <sup>2</sup>. No doubt, such transition has been important to the dynamics of the modern environmental movement, but it does not explain the organization and transformation of the environmental positions and opposition that have come to characterize today polarities in the environmental debate.

The environment encompasses everything which surrounds us- the air which we breath, the soil on which we stand, water, living and non-living things around As

“the sum total of all conditions”<sup>3</sup>, the environment can be understood as the sum total of the conditions within which organisations live. The environment includes “external conditions and factors”<sup>4</sup> living and non-living which affect an organism or other specified system during its life time. As such, environment means and includes the air, water, soil, plant and animal etc., all of which we interact with and which influence you either positively or negatively depending on how we control or make use of them. We are also part of the environment.

Consequent of the understanding that we are part of the environment, environmentalism is the movement that seeks to improve and protect the quality of the natural environment through changes to environmentally harmful human activities; through the adoption of forms of political, economic, and social organization that are believed to be necessary for, or at least conducive to, the benign treatment of the environment by humans, and through a reassessment of humanity's relationship with nature. In various ways, environmentalism claims that living things other than humans, and the natural environment as a whole, are deserving of consideration in reasoning about the morality of political, economic, and social policies. When it takes this stance towards nations, policy makers, it gives birth to environmental politics.

Environmentalism was centrifugal to the human-centred and life-centred orientations<sup>5</sup>, which defined the contents of environmental politics. The ‘human-centred’ or “shallow” ecology focuses mainly on the negative consequences of environmental degradation has on human beings and their interests – health, recreation, economy, quality of life. For this side of the coin, their defining feature is that it considers moral obligations humans have to the environment as deriving from obligations that humans have to each other – and, less crucially, to the future generations of humans – rather than from any obligation to other living things or to the environment as a whole. In current parlance, we can liken the members of this group to the ‘Light Greens’. For them, there is no denying that the environment is in danger. Yet, any way to provide a solution must be through pragmatic and small changes.

Obviously, inasmuch as human needs and wants propel most of our actions, it is important we know that humans are not the centre of the earth. The human-centred approach to environment has every inclination of a mechanized disposition to nonhuman nature, as such leading to a form of human chauvinism. As such, the environment is only instrumental and so should be continually exploited to feed human greed. This is not good!

The ‘life-centered’ or deep ecology claims that nature has an inherent moral worth that is not dependent on its

usefulness to human beings, and this intrinsic worth necessitates direct obligations to the environment. As such, protecting the environment, as well as individual creatures and species is a moral obligation. The life-centred approach to environmental politics, we may identify as the 'Dark Greens' believe that human beings and other elements of the natural environment, both living and often nonliving, are members of a single moral and ecological community.

Obviously, the varying perspectives of how to view the environment vis-a-vis social organisation has continued to encouraged irresponsible development. A fact, which calls for a change of the way we look at the environment. It is important to know that, the enduring and growing partisan division in environmental politics does not mean that environmental concerns map neatly onto party policies. Historians have consistently showed that relationship is complex, and is often affected as much by regional politics or personal concerns, as by party affiliations<sup>6</sup>.

Truth is, any side of the environmentalist divide may have difficulty in promoting environmental policies because of ideological reasons. In a context of unemployment, where workers have no real power, where employment is seen and understood as fundamental and that anybody who wants a job should be able to find one, - forcing the protection of the environment would mean cutting jobs, for example

species of fish are still caught even though they are endangered because the government is aware that by banning certain types of fish there would be job loss. Indeed, environmental ideologies though based on scientific facts need to be married with moral and existential realities. This saves it from downplaying the role of humans on earth, and making it all the more unappealing. This is the context where the Church has and will continue to be partners in environmental politics.

### **III. Pope Francis' *Laudato Si*: The Danger of a Single Reading**

At various times, the Church has been vocal about the plummeting ecological crisis. Pope St. Paul VI<sup>7</sup> had warned that by an ill-considered exploitation of nature humanity risks destroying it and become in turn the victim of this degradation. Pope St. John Paul II<sup>8</sup>, maintaining that the environmental crisis is basically a moral problem sues for an improved relation to the environment eschewing greed and selfishness.

The Church believes that the Genesis accounts of creation are indicative of God's reign over creation, a creation He saw beauty in, and enjoined man to make it actual. As such, we are stewards of the earth. The environment is a gift. The Church understands that environmental degradation is not only a health danger, an economic

catastrophe, or an aesthetic blight but also sacrilegious, sinful, and an offense against God. The basic Christian message includes the motivation for committed action to make the earth a better place: more in line with the Creator's presumed intents<sup>9</sup>. It has a public critic of greed, self-centeredness, materialism, and the hubris of an over-emphasis on human rationalism and exuberant humanism that there are many reasons to expect a favourable result from engaging in pro-environmental work in religious contexts.

Pope Francis' *Laudato Si*\* is yet another imbalance of truth whose context counts and syntax matters. The social encyclical, in recent times, have come to characterise the Church's current preoccupation with environmental politics.

Francis 1's *Laudato Si* cannot be easily fanned into disappearance by careless arguments, it deserves a close reading. To ask whether *Laudato Si* got the science of climate change is to miss the strong point rather badly. The encyclical has no intention to "prove" anything about climate change, and so those who awaited his side in the great polarizing debate argument between light greens and dark greens had better looked elsewhere. The Church cannot and does not claim to speak with the same authority on matters of economics and science as it does when pronouncing on matters of faith and morals. Surely, Christ did not bequeath to the Church a mission in political, economic or social order but a religious one,

and so she does not propose or establish systems or models of social organization<sup>10</sup>.

A single reading of *Laudato Si*, have led to zealoting stance that its pronouncements on global warming are magisterial teaching with the same gravity as the Church's teaching on abortion<sup>11</sup>. While this is worse than wrong, it is an embarrassment to the Church. Even, Francis had stated that in *Laudato Si*, the Church does not presume to settle scientific questions or to replace politics; but seeks to encourage an honest and open debate<sup>12</sup> as such global warming theories are contestable.

It is not surprising to over-indulge the *Laudato Si*. This is especially so at a time when the narcissism of excessive speech characterizing our modern world goes on to produce a form of detestable exteriorization,<sup>13</sup> in which man wallows on the surface of himself, making noise so as to not hear God. This makes it urgent then for the modern world, in the face of environment crisis to regain a faith perspective to save it from destruction. The Church cannot confine itself to a merely social vision.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, while *Laudato Si* reaches out to those who thought that, Christianity has nothing left to add to the equations of life; it invites us to ponder that "there can be no ecology without an adequate

anthropology''<sup>15</sup>. We cannot understand creation; make our life and living better, unless we begin to understand ourselves. And we cannot understand ourselves if we continue to abuse creation of which we are parts and stewards of. We are only privileged parts and witnesses to the glory and splendour of God evident in all his works especially in man. In Francis' *Laudato Si*, we must encounter a voice that is not dwelling in the scientific *binocularized* calculations which often coated with economic and political shades and forms have continued to cloud the underlying spiritual chaos. It is a voice from the Church's convinced and lived understanding of the gift of creation and the place of man in this gift- a subject about which the Church speaks and teaches with authority-regardless of whether one agrees or not.

The culture of waste has come to characterize today's mentality which makes persons be seen and treated as mere objects such as to allow the invisible forces of market to regulate the economy and politics, and consider their impact on society and nature as collateral damage. This is clarion scream of *Laudato Si*. Surely, *Laudato Si* as an optic of God's mercy {mercy, we must know, is the interpretative key to the Gospel of Jesus} does have answer to the great issues of our time-ecological conversion: WE NEED TO CHANGE. This is *Laudato Si* call for action. We need to know that everything is connected, nothing is indifferent to us; pollution, deforestation, monoculture, extinction-all in our bid and have to manipulate nature, stifles life and

living of its richness. Just like charity, which must begin at home; *Laudato Si* call for change must begin with us: consecrated persons. Yes. We are called to wake the world to God's glory in his creation, which must involve a new definition of freedom as an enrichment arising from taking up responsibility<sup>15</sup> for the world.

#### **IV. The Vow to be Green: the example of St. Francis of Assisi**

A vow is a deliberate promise made either to God, another or to oneself. Point is, it has an element of voluntariness and commitment. This is exactly what is required in finding an enduring understanding and solution for the need for us to change to safeguard our common home - earth.

The vow to be green is a deliberate decision to commit oneself to a fraternity with creation. It is an invitation to a common responsibility. It calls for a new way of looking at things: at our earth to hear its cry as its continuing degradation plunges humanity into deeper tragedy; at ourselves to enthrone the evolution of tenderness against the current crisis of modern anthropocentrism that defines human life and living as means; at our science and technology to checkmate the tendency of deep and melancholic dissatisfaction with interpersonal relations, or a harmful sense of isolations evident in today's obsession with a consumerist lifestyle that increases inequality and "throw-away" culture.

For the consecrated persons, environmental politics requires us to take the 'green vow'. This is the vow to learn something about the material relationship of the earth and humanity, and understand this relationship more broadly as a spiritual community. This is the way exemplified for us by St. Francis of Assisi, and he is indeed the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically<sup>16</sup>.

St. Francis of Assisi is beloved by people for his gentleness and love for all creation. But painting him, and looking up to him as the patron saint of "the environment" overlooks an important distinction. Yes, he is often seen with a bird on his shoulder, pacified a wolf, called sun, moon and stars brothers and sisters, he was only in love with creation. And this is because he was in love with the Creator, and consequently with human beings, animals and even inanimate objects that adorn the heavens and the earth. This does not mean that he saw all creatures as his equals. No. Also, he does not have anything in common with animal rights that would teach that adult whales and chimpanzees are actually superior to human foetuses and infants in both dignity and value; and so would save the whales but allow both abortion and infanticide.

The example St. Francis portends for the consecrated persons is not to see the environment coldly and

scientifically as “the environment”, which renders our call and life to mere politically correct games as it lowers its standards to fit modernity. Rather, in the fashion of St.

Francis, to approach the environment, creation, all created things as the expression of God’s beauty, as the gift of God’s love, as a window to the new creation. Reckless exploitation would never fit with such a vision. But neither would secular environmentalism<sup>17</sup>.

In the example of St. Francis, understanding created things around us as gifts of God would lead us to live by a steward ethics. A steward ethics whereby we treat others as we would want them treat us. It leads us to walk the walk and talk the talk by showing through daily actions what it means to be called to be joyful: love more, care more, forgive more, embrace more, love more intensely and leave the rest in God’s hands.

Characteristic of our vocational identity in alignment with St. Francis of Assisi would make us understand that justice breaks down where there is greed, and where dominion is interpreted wrongly as possession, exploitation and manipulation. Taking the vow of green, we are called to lay bare what Benedict XVI called “the grammar of creation”. The grammar that, consumerism, cash and convenience *commodify* life. They render life empty, trade-off relationships and make us strangers to each other and to our environment.

The green vow for the consecrated persons as the-should-be attitude to environmental politics necessitates the call to action to see: more in the less, and beauty in the small. It involves seeing the prospect in little beginnings, the greatness in doing the ordinary in extraordinary ways. This is the truth of the fact of Incarnation. The only legitimate image of Jesus is the image of the God-Man, one person and two natures<sup>18</sup>.

Jesus lives out of a transcendence which first reduces humankind to wondering silence and then to a riot of metaphors, thus there is no one way of *absolutizing* the image of Jesus, but by the simple way. Why? Jesus is a cultural constant, one of those ineluctable societal facts which everybody at one time or another must confront. Only the small can save the earth! The small is: developing a serene attentiveness, an attitude seen in the "hello" or "good morning", we say to people we meet on the road and the encouragement we offer each other on our life journey.

## **V. Conclusion**

At a time when secularism tends to disfigure the sacred with the promise of making it modern, the Church, as part of her social mission must, and have risen to the responsibility of encouraging all to be responsible to the care of the earth and sustenance of the environment.

It is not the mission of the Church to solve all the social problems of the world, and so she should not be part of any advocacy of globalist goals of open borders, limiting of national sovereignty, massive redistribution of wealth from rich nations to poor ones, strengthening and establishment of world governance entities – a form international socialism<sup>19</sup>. This can and unfortunately so, place her in a corner where she either has to disappear or change her doctrines and teachings so as to allow for the emergence of a religion without borders and a new global ethics, and secular environmentalism, and so be cut off from all the foundational references of revealed truth; leaving it ambivalent and devoid of content.

Therefore, the consecrated person are particularly saddled with the responsibility of showing, following the example of St. Francis of Assisi, that eschewing selfishness by selfless living, the dictatorship of noise by the power of silence, materialism by gratuitous sharing, brute by compassion, confrontation by consultation, exploitation by respect, my good by our good, mediocrity by excellence, nepotism by equity, lies by truth, degradation by preservation, having by being; they would lead the way to safeguard the earth, God's gift to us.

## END NOTES

1. Uzoma Kizito Ndugbu, "Mutual Relations between the Consecrated Persons and the Aged: Disturbing Leaks and Obvious Links", in *Consecrated Persons and Mutual Relations* (The Dynamics of Collaboration with the Ecology of Mission). Ikechukwu A. Kanu (ed.) Lagos: Decent Global, 2018; 153
2. Philip Shabeff, *Earth Rising: American Environmentalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. Washington, 2000; 3-4. See also, Scott Hamilton Dewey, *Don't Breathe the Air: Air Pollution and US Environmental Politics, 1945- 1970*. College Station, 2000
3. C.J. Barrow, *Development and the Environment* (1st Ed.). New York: Longman Groups Ltd, 1995: 35
4. George Tyler Miller, *Living in the Environment: Principles, Connections, and Solutions*. Belmont California: Brooks/Cole, 1994
5. Lorraine Elliot, *Environmentalism*, accessed on 6 October, 2018 from <https://www.britannica.com>topic>environmentalism>
6. James Morton Turner, *The Spectre of Environmentalism: Wilderness, Environmental*

*Politics, and the Evolution of the New Right*, accessed on 10 October, 2018 from <https://www.historycooperative.org/spectre-of-environmentalism-wilderness-environmental-politics-and-the-evolution-of-the-new-right>>

7. Paul VI, Apostolic Letter, *Octogesima Adveniens* (14 May, 1971), nn. 2, 8
8. John Paul II, Papal Encyclical, *Redemptoris Hominis* (4 March, 1979), nn. 8, 15, 16, Papal Encyclical, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, (30 December, 1987), n.34
9. R.S. Gottlieb, *Saving the world: Religion and politics in the environmental movement*. In Roger Gottlieb (Ed.), *Liberating Faith: Religious Voices for Justice, Peace and Ecological Wisdom*, 2003

\* **Laudato Si** is the second encyclical of Pope Francis. The 184 pages and 45,000 words social encyclical has the subtitle “On care for our common home”. The work calls for the revolution of normalcy. Criticising consumerism and irresponsible development, it reflects on the perils of social media. Pope Francis’ encyclical reaching out to those who thought Christianity has nothing left to add to the equation of life, calls us to a new way of doing things. The message of the encyclical is: to make development sustainable, we must save our environment; by first of all saving us from what

- we have become: greedy, selfish, exploitative, manipulative and mean.
10. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *The Compendium of the Social Teaching of the Church*, Vaticana: Liberia Editrice, 2004; 68
  11. Life Site News, December 18, 2015. Archbishop Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo, grand chancellor of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences was alleged to have insisted in *zealotful* outburst, that Pope Francis' pronouncements, in **Laudato Si**, on global warming are magisterial teaching with the same gravity as the Church's teaching on abortion. This is rather worse than wrong, and an embarrassment to the Church. It shows a failure to underscore the distinction between the theological dimension of **Laudato Si** and its empirical, scientific, economic claims. Truth is, the Church cannot because it does not claim to speak with the same authority on matters of economics and science as it does when pronouncing on matters of faith and morals; otherwise it should be open to at least the empirical *modus operandi* of such areas. As such, the pronouncements in **Laudato Si** are contestable; they are not dogmas.
  12. Pope Francis, Papal Encyclical, *Laudato Si* (24 May, 2015), n.118
  13. Robert Cardinal Sarah & Nicholas Diat, *The*

- Power of Silence: Against the Dictatorship of Noise, (Ignatius Press, 2017), 194
14. Ibid. p.218
  15. Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, Op. Cit. n.118
  16. Ibid. n.10
  17. Marcellino D’Ambrosio, St. Francis, Animals and the Environment, September 18, 2018, accessed 14 October, 2018 from <https://www.crossroadsinitiative.com/st.francis-animals-and-the-environment>
  18. Kizito Uzoma Ndugbu, Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s (Mark 12:17): An Imperative for Social Responsibility, an Unpublished STB Thesis, Urban Pontifical University, Rome, 2011, 35
  19. Robert Cardinal Sarah & Nicholas Diat, Op. Cit. p.10.

## **CONSECRATED PERSONS AND WITNESSING IN NIGERIA POLITICAL CONTEXT**

Jude A. Ofuani, CMF

Claretian Theologate, Ibadan

### **Introduction**

Recently the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria released a communiqué at the end of their Second Plenary Meeting held in Sokoto (North-West Region) between 6<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> of September 2018. In the communiqué, the CBCN charged Priests to avoid partisan politics through endorsement of candidates. This of course is in consonance with the laws of the Church as stated in the Code of the Canon Law concerning priests and Religious and their participation in partisan politics. It is however good to note that they did not ban Priests and Religious to be ignorant of the political terrain they live in. Because the human person as we know it is a political being, no one can claim to be totally apolitical. That would be a conscious deception of natural facts.

The truth is that the Catholic Church overtime, has maintained a kind of separation policy between Church and State and or politics by extension. By so doing, it is maintained that Church based politicking is not acceptable due to the fact that the Church and State differ essentially in their finality as well as in their

methodology, however both are at the service of humanity. As Stan Anih puts it “noted that the layman who is the son of the Church is equally the child of the State.”<sup>1</sup> It is on the above background that this essay would consider the attitude, roles and above all how best Consecrated Persons can witness in a sophisticated political society like Nigeria.

### **Consecrated Persons and Prophetic Mission**

In the scriptures, prophets in Israel were men and women called specifically by God to become his mouth piece, those who become harbingers of the good news, men and women who reprimanded leaders who failed to do their duties towards the people. Above all else, as directed by God, the prophet’s message was always addressed and communicated to the people of his time. To these, the prophet through his message bears witness to the mind of God.

Biblically, prophets are persons seduced by God (Jer. 20:7), at the same time, impassioned by God and his covenant. They are persons that see the historical reality with the eyes of God and at the same time, feel it with their heart (cf. 1 Sam 12:2-75). Above all they participate in the compassion for the poor and the people.<sup>2</sup> It then

---

<sup>1</sup> Stan Anih, *The Church, State and Patrician Politicking: Third Millennium Politics in Nigeria*, (Enugu: Snaap Press Ltd., 2002), p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Jesus M Palacios, “In Prophetic Mission – Vocational and Formative Dimension,” in *Missionary Challenges of Today:*

becomes pertinent then that Consecrated Men and Women must read the signs of times; this would help in having always witnesses to the needs of the day. The Religious takes up as a responsibility the task of showing to the world that there is hope and their lives are a sign of it also.

Consecrated persons should not by any means miss this mark of their mission as prophets in a nation like Nigeria. They must be faithful to their consequences with all radicality. Knowing full well that challenges are tests or hurdles over which one must pass in order to prove ones worth, whether as a human being or as an agent in a particular field.

### **Consecrated Persons as Witnesses in Political Nigerian Society**

The roles of Consecrated Persons as a matter of fact represent for them a prophetic imperative that does not admit any form of compromising principles. The point is what is the *locus standi* for Consecrated Persons in determining the performance of their roles?

The problem posed by the whole idea of the role a Consecrated Person is the general traditional views of confining the functions of priests and Religious to

---

*The Nigerian Claretian Experience* (In commemoration of the silver jubilee of the Nigerian Claretians), Edited by Wence C. Madu & Chrys N. Ogbozo, (Owerri: Claretian Publications, 1998), p. 46.

human operations that are exclusively specified as “religious.” Accordingly, the argument is based on the fact that the foundation of the clergy’s being is the divine. As a result, his concern according to Matthew Nwoko is the “*rei divina* (thing of the divine).”<sup>3</sup> The fact remains that the Consecrated Person cannot be separated from the service of the people; because they cannot serve God outside the service of the people.

There is no gainsaying the fact that the human person is both a political and a religious being. Hence, both politics and religion are of the integral nature of the human person. Again, we can deduce that the life and mission of the Consecrated Person has its primary relevance in the society, all in imitation of the Master, Jesus Christ who is the author of vocations. Therefore, Jesus was not ignorant of the political situation of his time; politics as a matter of fact was not contrary to his mission. Instead our Lord so to speak, humanized and divinized politics in a sense for the good of humanity.

Jesus in his time openly confronted those who perpetrated the unjust status quo, the lawyers, scribes, Pharisees and a host of others. Therefore, he directly shared in the political situation and sentiments of the society of his time. It would hence, be pretence on the part of any Consecrated Person to shy away from the

---

<sup>3</sup> Matthew I. Nwoko, *The Clergy & Politics*, (Owerri: Claretian Institute of Philosophy, 1993), p.8.

political happenings of the Nigerian society and dangerous to be totally ignorant to the political terrain of Nigeria all in the name of spirituality, that is no spirituality at all, it is naivety and naivety should not be seen as a trait of any Consecrated Person. Ignorant of the law, the saying goes, is no excuse – “*ignorantia juris non excusat.*” It is merely showing a *les affaires* attitude towards issues that truly matter.

As important figures in the society, Consecrated Men and Women in Nigeria should get more sophisticated with the daily challenges of ordinary Nigerian and endeavour to promote the right values in the society. They should promote love and peace in the face of ethnic conflicts, they should promote tolerance amidst religious crisis and intolerance. They should be prophetic in speech and action by standing always for truth by speaking out with regards to credibility in government dealings. They should promote right conduct in elections and the Nigerian society at large, especially as we are in a system that engages in embezzlement/corruption, graft, nepotism, abuse of power and democracy and lack of transparency with public funds.

Consecrated Persons should note that part of their roles in witnessing today in Nigeria political context is by ensuring that they do not stand by the fence, but they should rather get involved in making our society sane again. As Consecrated Persons, we must bring to the

consciousness of those who hold public offices/democratic positions that were created by majority votes of the masses that “they must remember that the reality of human solidarity carries with it not only the benefits but also very grave obligations of accountability to the community.”<sup>4</sup>

### **The Consecrated Persons and the Fight for Social Justice**

It should be noted that the Social Teachings of the Catholic Church generally deals with the Church’s teachings on building a society, with its simple application of those principles of social doctrines, such as: the principles of the human person, solidarity, participation and of course that of common good. Hence, in his Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* of 1931, Pope Pius XI states: “Certainly it is not the Church’s province to lead humanity to merely passing and worldly prosperity, it is her mission to lead men (and women) to eternal felicity. The Church thinks it wrong to interfere without reason in temporal affair.”

According to the late Bishop Albert Obiefuna of the Archdiocese of Onitsha, “The prophets in the religious history of Israel were men who were so totally taken with the over-powering presence of Yahweh that they become deeply hurt whenever they saw Yahweh’s

---

<sup>4</sup> Stan Anih, *The Church, State and Patrician Politicking: Third Millennium Politics in Nigeria*, p. 76.

people living in a manner foreign to the ideal of Israel's vocation and covenant with Yahweh. They were part of the people of Yahweh, quality of their lives and by their words they constantly told their brothers and sisters 'Israel come back to Yahweh your God.'" (Hosea 14:2-3).<sup>5</sup>

Consecrated Persons therefore, by their religious profession are objects of change to the nation, maintaining the values that stood at the heart of the Church's teachings and above all standing high and strong for justice. Just like Jesus, politics in our time should not be contrary to our mission as it wasn't contrary to the mission of the master who as earlier mentioned humanized and divinized politics for the good of humanity.

Among Consecrated Persons today is the tendency always to take solace in escapism from addressing the suffering and challenges of our time. These challenges could be political, social, cultural or even economic. Hence, there is the temptation to isolate and insulate ourselves from the plight being faced by the people we minister to in particular and the public in general. Consecrated Persons are afraid kind of to stand for justice. A very pertinent question is: What would Jesus

---

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Chilota Elochukwu, *The Prophetic Function of Religious Life*, (Enugu: Congregation of the Daughters of Divine Love Publications, 1989), p. 11.

had done if he were to be in our present day society? Would he remain silent and allow injustices prevail?

Pope Francis during a morning Mass at the Casa Santa Marta on Monday October 8, 2018 in his homily on the Good Samaritan urged the lay faithful and more so, Pastors to reflect on what it means to be Christian. A call to be “earnest Christians,” Christians who are not afraid to get their hands dirty, nor their clothes, when they draw near,” and who like the Samaritan, “pay for others.”

According to the Holy Father, the following are the bandits in the parable of the Good Samaritan: The brigands who beat the man up leaving him half dead; the priest who when he saw the wounded man passed by, without taking into account his mission, thinking only of the imminent “hour of Mass”; this was also the action of the Levite, “a cultured man of the Law.” The emphasis of the Pope is on the phrase “passing by,” a concept which he states must enter our hearts, a phrase that brings to our consciousness the idea of “it is not my duty to help,” the priest and Levite were too focused on official duties. But the Samaritan who was a merchant was travelling for business too. He did not look at his wrist watch; he did not look at the blood. Instead he came close and helped. He got himself stained and dirty. For him a part of humanity is laying there helplessly, he took good care of him. This should be the attitude of a Consecrated Person towards the political

situation and injustices that lingers in our country Nigeria. Consecrated Persons who are ready to get their hands dirty, who are ready to make extra sacrifices without counting costs just for the good of humanity, that is what the Nigeria society and Church needs now than ever.

It is however coincidental too that we are at this point in history celebrating the Canonization of Archbishop Oscar Romero a Prelate of the Catholic Church in El Salvador, canonized by Pope Francis alongside six others on 15<sup>th</sup> of October, 2019. A man who couldn't bear the injustices melted on his people and he vowed to fight for justice even at the expense of his own life. He finally paid with his life, as he was murdered right at the altar during consecration at Mass in 1980. He remains a great example for Pastors and Consecrated Persons in general in our contemporary world where justice is denied the poor masses even on a broad day light. This is important because it has come to the point that Consecrated Men and Women can no longer pretend to be themselves guiltless and innocent of the reality of the crimes of social and political injustices of our world today. As a matter of fact, Consecrated Persons should now than ever hold themselves responsible to a larger extent for several injustices that prevail due to negligence and indifference shown by us. According to Nwoko, our guilt stem from several reasons, first, it stems from our hypocritical silence and isolationist attitude rationalized extensively by the

famous traditional neutrality imperative. The second can be traced to the contribution of the links with the exploiting and unjust socio-political powers.<sup>6</sup> Above all else, Consecrated persons must note that the imperative of universal ministration of the Gospels forbids us from excluding anyone or group from their pastoral care.

At the Synod on Young People, Bishop Andrew Nkae of Mamfe Diocese in Cameroon, states that “One of the biggest problems we have in Africa Church with our young people is that most of them are unemployed; they see the natural resources of their countries being carried away to other places and they are frustrated because of the wars, the instability and lack of good governance. In such a case, the Church should insist more on the social participation of the Church in development programmes.” This is an obvious call on the fact that the Church cannot simply walk away leaving everything to government and above all neglecting the interest of the poor masses who constitute a majority of her members. Even Jesus himself challenged his disciples: “Give them something to eat yourselves.” The Church then must start doing something and speak for the justice of the people.

It is on this background that Consecrated Men and Women as a matter of fact ought to be providing or better put, stand as a spiritual parenting. So then, in

---

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Matthew I. Nwoko, *The Clergy & Politics*, p. 81.

preaching the Gospel, the Consecrated Person must see it as a role to stand also for justice and make option for the poor. The Consecrated Person should be the voice of the voiceless and fight to give back their voices to them.

## **Conclusion**

Above all reasonable doubts, Consecrated Persons must note that silence in the face of evil, oppression and above all injustice, is not neutrality and we shouldn't glory in it. It simply indicates how much value we give to humanity as humans. We must not forget this singular fact that: "the oldest culture in the world today, is the culture of being human." Let humanity count for us and simplistically speaking, Consecrated Persons should not just sit and allow injustice prevail before their own faces when they can in actuality, defend or stop it by all means possible. They can do a lot more in helping the masses make good choices at elections period, not by endorsement of candidates, but simply by bringing into the consciousness of the people, the needs of the country, the place of their faith and fate in the next four years of power, the need for the youth to shun election violence.

Consecrated Men and Women can teach the masses the evil in selling their votes today for a bag of rice or salt at the expense of their future and those of the next generation. They could help young people see the need to enter into politics and bring into their consciousness the fact that the youths are not just so-called "Leaders of

tomorrow” that never comes day light as long as Nigerian politics is concern, but that they are “Stakeholders of today.” Let Consecrated Men and Women be acquainted with the political happenings of Nigeria and let it reflect in their pastoral works and ministries.

# **CONSECRATED PERSONS AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**

Samuel Ifeanyi Aliba

Catholic Diocese of Zaria Kaduna

## **Introduction**

It is mostly held that mankind is a political being by nature. This being the case, he or she tries at each and every given opportunity to play a role in the political life of his society and to take part in deciding what common goals of the society are and the best way of achieving these goals. Often times, this process of political participation is filled with so much intrigues that discourages many from getting deeply involved in the process. It is against the backdrop of these intrigues that many concerned persons ask; should the clergy 'leave the altar and join politics'? Should consecrated persons participate in politics? How should they participate? Are there limits to their participation?... Answers to most of these questions and many more would constitute our preoccupation in this piece. Before then, some clarifications are necessary.

## **Consecrated Persons In Perspective**

Consecrated persons according to Kanu (2015) are the members of Religious Institutes and Societies of Apostolic Life. The Code of Canon Law (1983) teaches

that they are lay persons or clerics who assume the evangelical counsels by means of a sacred bond, and become members of an Institute of Consecrated life according to the law of the Church. They totally dedicate themselves to God with the goal of pursuing perfection in Charity by faithfully embracing the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. In this sense, consecrated persons respond freely to the invitation of the Holy Spirit to follow Christ the poor, the celibate the obedient son, more closely, thus becoming in this life a sign of the life to come.

The very first paragraph in the 1996 Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* sets the scene for a current understanding of Consecrated life. It states 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' in the midst of the world and the eyes of the faithful are directed towards the mystery of the Kingdom of God already at work in history, even as it awaits its full realisation in heaven." Thus, Consecrated Life is not an appendage to the Church, nor an optional extra, it is part of the living breathing Church.

Noteworthy, is the very idea of Consecration as explained by Kanu (2015). It is derived from the word

'holy' or 'holiness'. In Hebrew it is *qadosh* and in Greek *hagios*; these are translated to mean 'to consecrate' (cf. Leviticus 15:31; Ezekiel 14:7). In Numbers 6:5-7, 12, the Nazirites were referred to as consecrated because of their vows to God. This makes the person holy, a consecration that separates the person from others. Thus the word consecration implies a setting apart or a separation. This separation does not imply superiority, or complete severance from those the consecrated are called to serve. *Lumen Gentium* (1964) says "The state which is constituted by the profession of the evangelical counsels, though it does not belong to the hierarchical structure of the Church, nevertheless, undeniably belongs to the life and holiness of the Church" (No. 44). From the foregone, it is pertinent to state that the use of the term "Consecrated persons" within this piece is meant to refer to three categories of persons which are: the Lay Consecrated Life (lay people who though consecrated, remain "in the world" and often exercise careers while giving a priority in their lives to prayer, witness and service), Female Religious (who consecrate themselves to God through promises of poverty, chastity and obedience, and often times live and work in their various communities) and the Male Religious who may be either Priests or Brothers. While the Religious Priest receives the sacrament of Holy Orders, the Religious Brother does not. However, they are both under the authority of their own superiors and serve the local diocese through the works of their Order or Congregation located there.

## Politics and Political Participation

**Politics:** According to the Wikipedia online Dictionary, politics (from the Greek *Politiká*, meaning "affairs of the cities") is the process of making decisions that apply to the members of a group. It refers to achieving and exercising positions of governance - organized control over a human community, particularly a state. Hence, it can be said to be the activities, actions, and policies that are used to gain and hold power in a government or to influence a government.

However, it is necessary to also note that, politics is a multifaceted word. It has a set of fairly specific meanings that are descriptive and nonjudgmental (such as "the art or science of government" and "political principles"), but often does carry a connotation of dishonest malpractice. Politics is exercised on a wide range of social levels, from clans and tribes of traditional societies, through modern local governments, companies and institutions up to sovereign states, to the international level.

**Political Participation:** Arriving at a Consensus on the true meaning of Political participation has remained unattainable as new convictions are being added to the subject matter on seasonal bases. Scholars have however attempted to conceptualize the meaning of Political participation in different ways.

However, in literal terms, political participation is the involvement of every member, organisation and groups in a nation in the entire political process. It is also the process through which the individual plays a role in the political life of his society and has the opportunity to take part in deciding what common goals of the society are and the best way of achieving these goals. The individual is central in this system and can exist as a sole entity or part of a group. The Political set up is not complete with the leaders in governance but the people which are a core aspect of the society in any political system especially democracy. The leader does not decide what the people wants, it is the people that decide what they need at any given point in time. Thus, the people do not only decide the national values but decides who should govern them.

In another perspective, Awolowo and Aluko (2010) stressed that the essence of Political participation in any society, either civilised or primitive, is to seek control of power, acquisition of power and to influence decision making. Political participation is a means of contributing one's quota to the political system and overall development of the nation. In Awolowo and Aluko's perspective, political participation is viewed from the point of view of wanting to lead or govern the people. The perspective and scope of political participation is wide and can be viewed from two ends; the desire of the individual to select who governs them and the desire of other individuals to govern the people.

In the later, focus is to seek control of power which may be bent on some social, political economic, personal or ideological motives and in a way, influence decision making.

Furthermore, Awoleso (2014) defines political participation as 'Voluntary activities shared by members of a society in the selection of their rulers and directly or indirectly involves in the formation of public policies'. The individual in this light is seen as a member of the society, the bigger conglomerate of individuals who will at the end of the day be governed by their rulers. Political participation involves the citizens taking part in their political system thereby contributing their quota in the political system and the overall development of the nation. To further buttress this point, Falade (2014) describes political participation as an aspect of political behaviour which focuses on the way individuals take part in politics. It encompasses a wide range of political activities such as voting, contesting elective post, belonging to a political party, holding public office, attending political rallies, and meetings and so on. It also refers to the involvement of the Citizens of a Country in the formulation and implementation of policies for their governance, and their participation in the Choice of their leaders.

These forms of Political Participation includes:

- Involvement in Campaigns: Some Citizens participate in Politics by attending Political Party

Rallies to enable them to identify the Policies, programmes, and political party candidates contesting elections.

- Voting During Elections: The Citizens of a Country participate in Politics by voting the candidate of their Choice during elections.
- Holding Political Offices: There are people that participate in Politics so that they can hold or occupy political offices. They offices may be elective or non elective, e.g office of the President, Governor, Minister or Commissioner.
- Analysing Political Issues: Some People participate in Politics by discussing and analysing the major political events in Society. Such discussions may focus on personalities and manifestoes of candidates and political parties contesting elections and may take place in non formal situations or through the Mass media. The analysis affords voters the opportunity of assessing the Candidates critically before casting their vote.
- Contesting Elections: Qualified active (Political) Participants may decide to stand as candidates seeking election into public offices.
- Supporting Candidates During Elections: Citizens participate in Politics by supporting the candidate of their choice during elections. Such support helps the Candidate to win elections in order to control the machinery of Government.

- Membership of Pressure Group: Individuals can form Pressure groups to influence Political events.
- Dissemination of Party Propaganda: A good number of People participate in politics by disseminating party information and policy objectives to influence the electorate to vote for their candidates during elections. Others serve as polling agents for candidates at elections.
- Protest/Criticism and Petitions: Some People get involved in Politics by criticising candidates for elections and government appointment. Such people sometimes write petitions against politicians and government officials, and may suggest alternative solutions to the problems facing government.
- Financial and Material Assistance to Political Parties: Some wealthy individuals participate in Politics by sponsoring the ideas, programmes and objectives of Candidates and Political party of their choice. In the case of a Political Party, such assistance helps them to secure a good party secretariat and other requirements that could assist them in winning elections.

### **Consecrated Persons and Political Participation**

At a first glance, most people would often opine that Consecrated Persons should have no business with politics and political participation, especially against the backdrop of how it is practiced here in Nigeria (Here in

our clime, politics is often seen as a dirty game inundated with intrigues and all kinds of anomalies). This position that Consecrated persons should have no business with politics and political participation is also against the backdrop of their calling, which posits them as being totally dedicated to God with the goal of pursuing perfection in Charity by faithfully embracing the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. In the same vein, there are some other who propose that consecrated persons should be actively involved in politics and participate effectively.

However, an examination of what it entails to participate in political affairs as discussed above reveals that a Consecrated person cannot be totally uninvolved from politics and political affairs, but there are limitations to the extent he or she can be involved. From the aforementioned discussions, a consecrated person is firstly a citizen of the World who is destined (and working earnestly) towards becoming a citizen of Heaven after our earthly pilgrimage. Therefore he or she is to be involved in the positive human endeavours that would foster the establishment of God's kingdom on Earth.

In regards to their level of involvement in politics, consecrated persons should be able to play a role in the political life of the society and also take part in deciding what common goals of the society are and the best way of achieving these goals. They should contribute their

quota to the political system and overall development of the nation by being involved in the formulation and implementation of policies for their governance, and participation in the choice of their leaders. Therefore, consecrated persons can participate in politics and political life by Voting during elections and analysing political issues. They could also be involved in Protest/Criticism and Petitions that does not in any way pose a scandal to their vocation and prophetic calling.

Consequently, consecrated persons have limits in their involvement in politics and political life. In recourse to Canon 285 of the 1983 Codex Iuris Canonici, the law prohibits members of the Catholic clergy from doing things that are "unbecoming" or "foreign to the clerical state". In addition, it prohibits diocesan priests and bishops from serving in "public offices which entail a participation in the exercise of civil power". Therefore, this inadvertently implies that consecrated persons are not expected to contest elective post, belong to a political party, holding public office, attending political rallies, and meetings, etc. They are also not expected to be involved in political campaigns/propaganda nor offer financial or material assistance to political parties, since these aforementioned actions would be seen to be inimical to the very idea of their vocation/calling and to the laws of the Church.

While addressing a general audience in July, 1993, Pope John Paul II said that "Jesus never wanted to be

involved in a political movement, and fled from every attempt to draw him into earthly questions and affairs. The kingdom he came to establish does not belong to this world. For this reason, he said to those who wanted to take a stand regarding the civil power: 'Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.'" In following Christ, the Pope said in that speech - titled "Priests Do Not Have a Political Mission" - a priest "must renounce involvement in political activity, especially by not taking sides."

Furthermore, limits of participation for consecrated persons in politics and political affairs should largely exclude endorsing any political candidate or party publicly or from the pulpit. Consecrated persons have the prophetic mandate to; stand for the truth, expose ugly situations through constructive criticisms, point the way forward, serve as the moral compass of the society, help people make informed choices by objectively presenting them with different options and encourage people to vote freely and according to their conscience without compromising standards. Since the Church strives to remain apolitical, consecrated persons should follow suit and avoid any actions that could betray their calling and state of life.

Nevertheless, it is to be stated that while there are no constitutional, legal, or civil restrictions on consecrated persons for office in most places, the Church has

vehemently forbidden it, due to the backlash of some negative experiences it has had in the past.

## **Conclusion**

It is pertinent to note that Christ did not bequeath to the Church a mission in the political, economic or social order: the purpose he assigned to it was a religious one. But this religious mission can be the source of commitment, direction, and vigour to establish and consolidate the community of men according to the law of God. (*Gaudium et Spes*, no.42). Hence, consecrated men and women, can help in grooming people to form a just and well ordered human society through religious admonitions.

While they are also called to be interested and participate in some aspects of the political life of a nation, they are barred from partisanship, obviously to gain the neutrality of the sheep that they pastor. They are also barred from some aspect of the political life that would be inimical to their state of life and prophetic calling. As consecrated persons, your involvement must be guided by the social teachings of the Church. You don't have to be partisan, but you can add meaning to true leadership by our admonishments, advice and encouragement. We must, like Christ, minister the message of salvation in the process. The truth is to be spoken within the right perspective and context.

## **References**

- John Paul II (1996). Post-Synodal Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, no. 1. Nairobi: Paulines Publications.
- Kanu, I. A (2015). *Consecrated Persons as Agents of Pastoral Care of the Family*. Nigerian JORAS: A Publication of Good Shepherd Major Seminary. Vol. 5.
- Lumen Gentium* (1964). In A. Flannery (Ed.) *Documents of the Second Vatican Council*. Dublin: St. Pauls Publications.
- Sani, E. N (2015). Political Participation and Political Apathy in Nigeria (2011-2015): Case Study of Undergraduate Students of the University of Jos. A Publication of Brics International Resource Solutions.
- The Code of Canon Law (1983). Bangalore: Theological Publications in India.



## CONSECRATED PERSONS AND ELECTIONS

Kingsley Nonso Ogbu, SMMM

Sons of Mary Mother of Mercy Generalaye, Umuahia

### **Introduction**

As the sayings go, “no man is an island” and “a tree does not make a forest”. Man was not made to be in isolation but to enjoy the insulation and protection of companionship. As such the creator made them male and female (cf. Gen 1:27), a primordial union of “interpersonal communion”<sup>1</sup> which created a special avenue for the satisfaction of the relational need of the human person by which he/she is a social being. It brings about the precious presence of the other with whom the human person must necessarily relate, in order to grow. For “if he (the human person) does not enter into relations with others, he/she can neither live nor develop his/her potentials”<sup>2</sup>

Be that as it may, the circle of human relationships expands with time as the number of persons to relate with increase and the dimensions of relation unfold. The constant unfolding of the human personalities equally develops a peculiar complexity in the

---

<sup>1</sup> Okoli Ernest, *Religion and Social Responsibility in Africa*, Awka: Fab Anenih Nig Ltd. 2015 p. 2

<sup>2</sup> *Gaudium et Spes* 12

interpersonal relationships with one another in the human group or society. Multifora demands arise thereby introducing pressure or tension in the system. In response to this, humans develop varying capacities of empowerment and sophistication following the natural principle of adaptation in order to cope with and control the social system. Since all fingers are not equal, some persons develop more capacities to cope than the others and thus tend to wield more power with which they control others and the affairs of the society. This *status quo ante* ignites rivalry as well as competition in the society as many strive against others for power and control in the scheme of things. Thus politics begins and ensues.

The very idea of politics is a wide spread and age-long phenomenon. It is a given fact that man is a political being. Wherever human beings gather in a group or society, politics is an inevitable experience of the human consciousness. Clearly taking this stand long ago in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, Aristotle in his Politics believes that “man is a political animal”<sup>3</sup> because he is a social creature with the power of speech and moral reasoning. For him,

the state is a creation of nature and man is  
by nature a political animal and he who by

---

<sup>3</sup> Files.libertyfund.org//pll//quotes/164.htn, Published 17<sup>th</sup> March 2008 and accessed 18<sup>th</sup> October 2018, 12;10pm

nature and not by mere accident is without a state, is neither above humanity or below it; he is the tribeless, lawless, heartless one whom Homera denounces – the outcast who is a lover of war; he may be compared to a bird which flies alone<sup>4</sup>

Consequently, it is the case that no human person can do without politics in his/her daily living. Politics according to Chambers 21<sup>st</sup> Century Dictionary (Updated Edition) is the science or business of government. It is the acquisition of power or getting one's way. Over the ages, many methods have been used to play politics and gain power, pending the type of government system operated by a particular state. Yet these are not without their attendant squabbles that create tension in the society. The wake of this societal pressure which when untamed deteriorates into fracas in the state of nature, necessitates the formation of a formal system of control empowered to oversee the administration of the society for proper satisfaction of human social needs and to protect the fundamental rights of the individuals. Thus government ensues by this very provision.

Government which according to Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (New Edition for Advanced Learners) is a group of people who govern a country,

---

<sup>4</sup> Complete Works of Aristotle

wield the power to control the state and make all decisions about taxes, laws, public services etc. there are different types of government yet in them all, somebody must necessarily take the lead to spearhead activities and show others the way forward; to encourage, persuade and convince others. This leader emerges to assume his responsibilities by the mandate given to him either by inheritance, appointment or by election. In the interest of this work, our scope focuses on election as a means of gaining mandate to lead in a democratic government and the involvement of consecrated persons in this process.

### **Consecrated Persons**

Across the ages people have been observed, who set themselves aside for the purpose of dedicating themselves entirely to a particular concept, idea, practice or belief. Each of them according to the circumstance that conduce to his/her state of life, lives an extra-ordinary life style for the sake of what they believe in and hope for. From the earliest times, people had one form of dedication or the other, at one point in time or another. Most times, these dedications are directed to what is taken to be superior to humanity; that which has confounded man in his rational thinking and has posed a sort of mystery to him. These mysteries interfere with the day to day life of the human kind, making it imperative for man to seek understanding of a higher kind of knowledge. Thence emerges the need for man to live in close observance of these supernatural

good, for the good of the whole human race. Those who undertake this kind of life of communion with the supernatural or divine, devote themselves to this course and take priority in making the most effort to get a clearer vision and hold of this ultimate good.

In history, men and women had offered themselves to some mysterious lifestyles in their quest to get to terms with that which transcends the ordinary human mind. These become consecrated persons whose major aim is to seek after truth as to what pertains to natural existence in connection to the supernatural reality. Thus consecrated life emanates from this purview of consecration. Consecration according to Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary is a derivation from its verbal word "consecrate" which means to state officially in a religious ceremony that something is holy and can be used for religious purposes. It could also mean to give something or somebody or yourself to a special purpose, especially a religious one.

As regards individuals, consecration denotes the sanctification of one for the purpose of sanctifying others through him. To this effect Canon 573§1 states "consecration separates one from the purely temporal,, secular and profane and devotes him/her to divine and eternal things. This in concrete is principally striving for perfection of the practice of the supreme, infused and theological virtue of charity, by which we love God

above all things for himself and ourselves and the neighbor for the love of God”<sup>5</sup>.

The idea of consecration had existed long since the beginning of man’s religious encounters in history. In Exodus 13:1,2,11-16; we see where God told Moses to consecrate to him all the first born of every womb in Israel. Also in Exodus 40:1-15, God directed Moses to consecrate the sanctuary as well as Aaron and his sons to serve him in the priesthood. Consecration therefore has been a long-standing practice among the peoples. There has been several oracle figures that stood as mediators between the divine and the human. These people are consecrated persons and are given to a life of constant communion with the gods. Hence they live consecrated lives.

Consecrated life is a vocation to a solemn life style of striving after perfection by the observance of holy rules and vows. It is a form of life which an individual freely and willingly embraces for the sake of the love of God, sanctification of self and that of others. “This life can best be summarized as one of universal and total supernatural love. The original consecration of such a life is by baptism by which charity is infused”.<sup>6</sup> It is a life of solemn devotion which an individual takes upon

---

<sup>5</sup> Antonio Royo, *Teologia della Perfezione Cristiana*. Italy: San Paolo Edizioni, 2009 n. 254

<sup>6</sup> Dogmatic Constitution of the Church no. 44

himself/herself in answer to a divine call, taking vows or other sacred bonds which would bind him/her to the life of Christ. "The consecrated life is a mystical death."<sup>7</sup> It is a life of sacrifice, a life of total and radical loving of Christ. Consecrated life is a transformation of an individual life into a typical episode of the life of Christ.

### **Primitive Concept of Consecrated Persons**

In the traditional setting, taking African Traditional Religion (ATR) as a paradigm, consecrated life not being left out appears as a vital aspect of every religious heritage. The consecrated persons are the custodians of each religious belief and as such are of utmost importance for the up-keep and growth of that religion. However, consecrated persons are of different categories. There are chief priests and priests of deities, diviners and other oracle-figures who live in constant communion with the gods. They are consulted in spiritual/religious matters or when situations confound the human mind.

Many places of the Igbo cultural/religious heritage also have the Osu Caste system, a class of persons who by their ancestral lineage are consecrated or rather offered to the gods in an ancient practice, perpetrated when for

---

<sup>7</sup> Basil Cole, OP & Paul Coner, OP, *A New Catechism of Consecrated Life: Help for Perplexed Postulants and Novices in the Third Millenium*. India: Asia Trading Coroporation, Bangalore 1999, 17 n. 25

instance calamity or plague befall a community and people are lost at what to do in order to salvage the land. They consult oracles, priests or diviners to know the will of the gods and if it is learnt that the calamity in the land is as a result of people's evil, a sacrifice is made to appease the gods and cleanse the land. Oftentimes a victim that transcends mere animal is required. Hence human beings are used as the victim. This victim is offered as a living sacrifice to the gods and is after all allowed to live in solitude around the shrine, in constant services of the gods. Whatever the victim comes in contact with, is assumed to be consecrated to the gods. If for instance the 'Osu' marries a woman, that woman and the children she begets are exclusively set apart for the gods.

### **Consecrated Persons in the Biblical Era**

Going through the ancient times, looking at the Old and New Testaments, there are ample examples of consecrated persons. In Genesis 14:17 we see Melchizedek king of Salem, who was a great high priest. It was he who blessed Abraham after Abraham's conquest and victory over Chedorlaomer and the other kings. History has it that Melchizedek is a point of contradiction. He was a mysterious person who has no ancestry. His life was a continuous offering of sacrifice for the people, thus he sanctified and blessed them. We can also see Samuel who from his tender age was sacrificed to God in fulfillment of his mother's vow which was taken before his birth. He equally remained

in God's service (cf. 1Sam 1:9-28; 2:18-21; 3). Also, the Levites among the Israelites were a consecrated people for God (cf. Numbers 18).

In the New Testament, we see Simeon and Anna (cf. Lk 2:22-40) who lived consecrated lives. According to the scriptures, Simeon was an upright and devout man. He is most likely a priest to have officiated in the "purification" exercise of Mary in the temple according to Mosaic law and the "redemption" of Jesus Christ. Anna on the other hand was a woman dedicated to God and the qualified interpreter of his intentions. She was a prophetess (cf. Lk 2:36) who prophesied at the dedication of Christ and had lived in the temple till she was eighty-four years, serving God with fasting and prayer after being married for only seven years.

Astounding and above all is Christ the great high priest who offered himself as a perfect sacrifice to sanctify and salvage the human kind, an ideal manifestation of perfect charity. By inference, consecrated persons adapt their lives in imitation of Christ in self-emptying and self-outpouring for the fulfillment of the human race. It is a state of dedication in which an individual offers up his/her whole self willingly to God, for own sanctification and salvation and that of human kind. This is a life of fulfillment and answer to a divine vocation. It is a solemn and total declaration of oneself for God, following Christ's injunction (cf. Mtt 10:37)

As the scripture shows, no one takes the honour of being a consecrated person upon himself. But all are called as Aaron was called to serve (cf. Heb. 5:4a). Each in his own peculiar way is chosen and called by the divine as Moses was chosen to be the leader of the Israelites (see Ex 3). According to Canon 574§2 of the code, a special call or invitation from God is necessary for the consecrated life. This is termed divine vocation. It means an interior illumination and inspiration of the Holy Spirit that entrance into the consecrated life is the will of God for the particular person. It is an invitation or counsel, not a command of God. "This call is an inclination given to you by the Holy Spirit to leave your life in the world and follow Jesus through the evangelical counsels, either by leaving the world for religious life as such, or staying in the world and sanctifying it from within".<sup>8</sup>

### **Consecrated Person in the Contemporary Era**

Every child of God is a consecrated person. According to Bishop Lucius I. Ugorji in his homily on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2018, "...all of us are consecrated to God by baptism. Baptism is the center of our religious life..."<sup>9</sup> Baptism makes us Christ's faithful. According to Canon 204, "Christ's faithful are those who, since they are incorporated into Christ through baptism, are

---

<sup>8</sup> Basil Cole & Paul Conner, *A New Catechism of the Consecrated Life*

<sup>9</sup> Sons Newsletter Vol. 3 No. 2, Umuahia: Sons Digital Press, October 2018-April 2019, p. 6

constituted the people of God. For this reason they participate in their own way in the priestly, prophetic and kingly role of Christ. They are called, each according to his or her particular condition, to exercise the mission which God entrusted to the Church to fulfill in the world”<sup>10</sup> Every Christian therefore by the virtue of baptism is consecrated a prophet, a priest and a king. However, though all who are baptized are consecrated by the virtue of baptism through which charity is infused, there exists a deeper state of consecrated life in deeper love for God and freedom in his service, which all do not embrace. It is a state in which one “in response to the call of Holy Spirit, gives oneself totally and in a more radical way to God by vows or other sacred bonds”.<sup>11</sup> Commenting on this state of consecrated life Mary Bride Njoku avers:

Religious consecration being a deepening of baptismal consecration is not meant to make the religious more sacred than they are by baptism nor is it supposed to set them apart from those who are already set apart, that is to say; it does not in any way mean “a double setting apart”. Instead religious consecration is an intensification

---

<sup>10</sup> The Code of Canon Law (New revised English Edition), Bangalore: Theological Publications in India

<sup>11</sup> Basil Cole & Paul Conner, *A New Catechism of the Consecrated Life*

of the initial baptismal setting apart from the world<sup>12</sup>

This is the religious life. Therefore consecrated persons in the modern era are of varying degrees. There are lay persons, religious persons and priests.

Lay persons are consecrated by the virtue of baptism only while religious persons besides being baptized, add more to their consecrated life and advance by the virtue of religious profession of the evangelical counsels. Canon 573§1 states that “Life consecrated by the profession of evangelical counsels is a stable form of living by which a 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 dedicated themselves to his honour, the development of the Church and the salvation of the world by a new special title, they strive for perfection of charity in service to the kingdom of God and, having become an outstanding sign in the Church, they may foretell the heavenly glory”.<sup>13</sup> Highest in the degree of consecrated persons is the clergy which includes the deacon, the priest and the bishop.

## **Purpose of Consecrated Life**

---

<sup>12</sup> Mary Bride Njoku, *Consecrated Life Towards deepening its Understanding*. Enugu: Snaap Press Limited, 2014 p.14

<sup>13</sup> The Code of the Canon Law (New revised English Edition), Bangalore: Theological publications in India

“Consecrated life according to the code of Canon law, appertain to sanctity of the Church. It appertains to the life of holiness of the Church which is evident. The general purpose of consecrated life is to strive for the perfection of charity in Christ, which is sanctity. The primary purpose of the apostolate whether direct in apostolic institutes or indirect by prayer, austerity and witnessing to Christ in contemplative institutes, is to lead others to sanctity of life”<sup>14</sup>

## **Election**

From the long pre-biblical past, the concept of election has been a relevant issue even in the bible, in the religious society as well as in the civil society. It has its origin in the choice of God for Israel over other nations of the world, to be his own people (cf. Deut 10:15). Election hence denotes a process of choosing or setting someone apart for a purpose.

Elections were used as early in history as the ancient Greece and ancient Rome and throughout the medieval period to select rulers such as the Holy Roman Emperor and the Pope. In Vedic period of India, the Raja (chiefs) of a gana (a tribal organization) was apparently elected by the gana. The Raja belonged to the noble Kshatriya varna (warrior class), and was typically a son of the previous Raja. However, the gana members had the final say in his election. Even during the Sangam period

---

<sup>14</sup> Joseph Gallen, Canon Law for Religious

people elected their representatives by casting their votes and the ballot boxes (usually a pot) were tied by rope and sealed. After the election, the votes were taken out and counted.<sup>15</sup>

The modern “election”, which consists of public elections of government officials, didn’t emerge until the beginning of 17<sup>th</sup> century when the idea of representative government took hold in North America and Europe, often dominated the electorate and continue to do so in many countries. Since then it has been the usual mechanism by which modern representative democracy has operated<sup>16</sup>.

According to Rogger Gibbins et al (in Encyclopedia Britannica Inc. 2018), election is a formal process of selecting a person for public office or of accepting or rejecting a political proposition by voting<sup>17</sup>.

Election is the most essential aspect of every democratic government which is the most popular system of government in the world today and Nigeria is one of world countries that practice democracy. Election is therefore a very sensitive exercise in the Nigerian polity.

---

<sup>15</sup> [www.wikipedia.org/wiki/election](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/election); accessed on 6<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2018, 5:59pm

<sup>16</sup> [www.britanica.com;accessed](http://www.britanica.com;accessed) on 6<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2018, 2:45pm

<sup>17</sup> [www.britanica.com;accessed](http://www.britanica.com;accessed) on 6<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2018, 2:45pm

Alas! The sacredness of election in our country has been defiled. It has been so bastardized that it now carries tension, thuggery, electoral malpractices, kidnapping, killings and all what not. This has become so bad that there is no longer sanity and sanctity in elections. Hence there is a glaring need to set things in the right direction.

Consequently, all hands need to be on deck for the authentic rescue mission that election in our society needs. Everybody has to be involved in the renewal of our politics and government, through concerted effort to transform elections. This therefore implies that every citizen, with no exemption of consecrated persons, has a role to play in this mission of restoration.

### **Roles of Consecrated Persons in Election**

Given the inevitability of politics in the human society and considering the prime place of election in politics especially as practiced in Nigeria, it is necessary or rather pertinent that consecrated should participate in election as a matter of their civil duty and as a demand of Christian charity. This is also in line with their sacred aim, purpose and mission to sanctify the human society and bring the kingdom of God on earth. Their participation therefore has to be according to their various states and capacities, to the extent they can/or are allowed to participate. As Onyeocha says, “our primary duty as priests is not only to administer the sacraments but also to preach the gospel. This job must

be well done”<sup>18</sup> to do well the spreading of the gospel in the society demands more than just a pulpit sermon or homily. It equally takes an active participation in the life of the society so as to feel its pulse and sanctify it from within.

The onus therefore lies on the members of the society especially the Christians who are the heirs of God’s kingdom to bring the reign of the kingdom of God and transform the sorry state of things. To achieve this requires active involvement in the light of Pope John XXIII (*Pacem in Terris* 1963, n. 146) who exhorts Christians to imbibe active involvement and transformation of the social order with the leaven of the gospel. In the Holy Father’s words:

Once more we exhort our sons to take active part in public life, to work together for the benefit of the whole human race, as well as for their own political communities. It is vitally necessary for them to endeavour, in the light of Christian faith, and with love as their guide, to ensure that every institution, whether economic, social, cultural or political, be such not to obstruct but rather to facilitate man’s self-

---

<sup>18</sup> Anthony Ekendu Onyeocha, *The Priest: Retreat Talks to Priests* Vol. 3, Nigeria: Osprey Publications Owerri

betterment, both in the natural and in the supernatural order<sup>19</sup>

Reaffirming the above idea, Vatican II Council also firmly exhorted Christians to match their Christian belief with their public lives and political choices. In this regard the council avers:

This council exhorts Christians, as citizens of two cities, to strive to discharge their earthly duties conscientiously and in response to the gospel spirit. They are mistaken who, knowing that we have here no abiding city but seek the one that is to come, think they may therefore shirk their earthly responsibilities... This split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserve to be counted as one of the more serious errors of our age. Long since, the prophets of the Old Testament fought vehemently against the scandal and even more so did Jesus Christ himself in the New Testament threaten it with grave punishment. Therefore there is no false opposition between professional and social activities on the one part, and religious life on the other.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Emeka Ngwoke, *The Eucharist and Social Responsibility Towards the Poor*. Enugu: Snaap Press Ltd, 2005, p. 172

<sup>20</sup> Vatican II Council, 1965, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 43

Notwithstanding the green light for direct participation of consecrated persons in politics and election as seen above, this research work is not oblivious of the prior disapproving stand of the Church as regards direct participation of priests in Politicking. Canon 285 par. 3 of the Code states clearly that:

the Church forbids the clergy and religious to seek or accept public positions which carry with them the exercise of power. However, the clergy and religious, and, for that matter, Church leaders in general, cannot but be involved in politics, of one type or another. It is their duty to condemn unequivocally political and economic policies that are unjust, exploitative, oppressive and dehumanizing”<sup>21</sup>.

Going further, the Statement approves that consecrated persons (priests and religious)

...should as a matter of obligation, be interested in the conditions of life of their compatriots, speaking out fearlessly for the voiceless and championing the cause of the powerless. On the other hand they have to approve, praise, encourage and support good policies that contribute to the

---

<sup>21</sup> West African Journal of Ecclesiastical Studies (WAJES) No. 4, Statement of the AECWA Bishops on the Involvement of the Clergy and Religious in Active or Party Politics. Banjul, The Gambia, 1992 p. 5

common good and promise the general welfare of the citizenry.

The clergy and religious too have the right, in some cases, duty to proffer advice on matters affecting the public life. None of all these is active politics <sup>22</sup>

By implication, consecrated persons are to participate in election but in two varying degrees according the intensity of their consecratedness and level of participation in public life. They are therefore to participate actively and inactively, by their direct and indirect involvement in politics and election.

Consecrated persons by the virtue of baptism, who are in their various capacities as lay Christians, are to participate directly in politics and election by voting and contesting as a matter of genuine rescue mission. On the other hand, religious and priests who are consecrated in a deeper manner, based on their canonical dispositions should also participate indirectly in politics and election through prayer, sensitization of the people by the publicity at their disposal, being the voice of the voiceless and proffering advice to politicians, on matters that affect public life. This is in line with retaining the prophetic voice of the Church by which she is the conscience of the state.

---

<sup>22</sup> WAJES No. 4, 1992

Nevertheless, being voice of the voiceless is not an option to turn the pulpit into a campaign stage but to create awareness and educate the people on proper observance of civic duties based on the moral dictates of a right conscience. This will influence the people to develop the right attitude toward the society and insist on getting things done properly in the society. For As Martin Luther King Jnr said,

The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state. It must be the guide and the critic of the state, and never its tool. If the Church does not recapture its prophetic zeal, it will become an irrelevant social club without moral or spiritual authority.<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, the advocacy for increased participation of consecrated persons in politics, is adrem to the biblical injunction of Christ to his 'would-be' followers, to carry their cross and follow behind him (cf. Mtt 16:24-26 ) This is reflected in the James' clarification pertaining work and prayer as a more effective expression of a living faith in Christ (cf. James 2:14-26). St. Paul in also emphasizes the importance of work as a matter of temporal survival when he said to the Thessalonians, "the one who is unwilling to work, shall not eat." (2Thess 3:10). Shall Christians sit back, folding their arms and complaining of the bad condition of our society and politics when they can get involved and

---

23

make a difference? Practically no. if Christians who are capable of bringing genuine change of order in our disordered society refuse to try, then we shall have no moral gut to complain.

Unfortunately though, many who get into politics to make a change get changed for worse themselves and this is the Church's moral justification for disallowing the active participation of Priests and religious in politics. However, abuse does not remove use and we shall not give up hope of getting a better society by divine intervention through our prayer and effort. The direct and indirect participation of consecrated persons in election can be justified by a pragmatic appreciation of Christ's injunction to his disciples to watch and pray. Prayer depicts the faith of consecrated persons that God can and will take care of elections in the polity. Yet we know that since faith and action work together and faith is made perfect in action (cf. James 2: 22), participation of consecrated persons in politics and election is inevitable. Faith alone is not enough that is why St. James advocates for work as an intrinsic part of the faith our prayer depicts.

Furthermore, the delicacy of the Nigerian situation makes the need for work through participation of consecrated persons in election more imperative. Prayer alone is not the right option. Hence Bishop Akubueze has this to say:

I must remind you that we cannot pray our way out of our problem in Nigeria. Prayer alone will not solve our problems. We need to pray and work. Nations are not built through all night crusades; nations are not built through all-night deliverance sessions; nations are not built through unending deliverance sessions to remove generational curses. Nations are built through capacity building and through empowerment of citizens. We must put God in all we do. But we must not wait for him to do what he has given us the wisdom and intelligence to do.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, if not for the dicey nature of election and politics generally in Nigeria which may affect the Churching by causing rifts along party lines among the Christians and making the Church a breeding ground of strife and dissension, direct active participation of consecrated persons would have availed our nation of a more sanitizing and transformational effect in/of our polity. Just as the consecrated person of old like Melchizedech, Moses and the seventy-two elders, Nehemiah and Ezra who engaged in direct active involvement in the politics of their nation at the time,

---

<sup>24</sup> Augustine Akubueze, Address at the 2018 Anthony Cardinal Okogie Annual Lecture. Lagos, Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> October, 2018

led the people in the right direction to salvation, consecrated persons who have the knowledge, wisdom and charisma can engage fully in direct active politics and rescue this nation from the kingdom of darkness and its evil forces that hold it to ransom.

Culturally too, the participation of the consecrated persons in politics or election is not alien to African society where the priests are equally political leaders. This is because religion is a vital part of the African life. Religion and politics are so intertwined that there is hardly a discrepancy that there is hardly a discrepancy between the two. Writing on this view, Okolo avers:

in traditional Africa, the strict dichotomy between the secular and sacred; religion and politics is completely alien. For Africans, dual attitude to life is cultural imposition from the West; part and parcel of the “cultural package” which African received, with no questions asked, in the name of civilization and Christianity. For the traditional African, to be political was at the same time to be religious.<sup>25</sup>

Little wonder why a catholic priest could be popularly and democratically elected in 1982 as governor of Benue state Nigeria, a decade after the Holy Father made it

---

<sup>25</sup> Okolo B. Chukwudum, *The African Synod: Hope for the Continent's Liberation*. Kenya: AMECEA Gaba Publication, 1994, p. 39

clear to the Nigerian priests when he said, “party politics is not for you.”<sup>26</sup> Though the disobedience of the said clergy to the Holy See is highly condemnable, the fact of that incidence gives credence to the reality that African Christians would want their religious leaders to be their political leaders also and this could be an integrated African Christian heritage, at the service of the Church. For as Prof. Kanu rightly said, “there is nothing wrong if the African cultural heritage is placed at the service of the Church”<sup>27</sup> Such application will enhance the inculturation and taking root of Christianity into the African consciousness, for stability and sustenance. As we know in the history of Christianity in North Africa, Christianity failed because it did not take root in the Northern African culture. Thus participation of consecrated persons in politics and elections will help facilitate the incarnation of Christianity into the African political consciousness and create a conducive environment for the growth, development and advancement of the Christian heritage.

---

<sup>26</sup> Okolo B. Chukwudum, *The African Synod: Hope for the Continent’s Liberation*. Kenya: AMECEA Gaba Publication, 1994, p. 38

<sup>27</sup> Kanu Anthony, *Collaboration Within the Ecology of Mission: An African Cultural Context*, a Lecture delivered at the second International Conference of the Theological Institute of Consecrated Life in Africa (TICLA) on Collaborative Ministry in Mission. Enugu, 14<sup>th</sup> November, 2018

Be that as it may, there could be ways in which the Nigerian Church can be directly involved in the politics of her society for the sake of bettering the lives of her children. This is a practical attempt in wading the storms and political implication of involved in the missionary mandate of the Church to preach the gospel to all nations. Of a crucial point is the fact that the Church has developed many adapted wings and features in many fronts of the temporal life, as an avenue to drive home her teachings and achieve her missionary mandate. Many of these features like the Social Development Justice and Peace (SoDeJuPe), the educational system, Economic apparatuses like banks and industries, serve to secure the Church's survival and sustenance as an institution that is self-reliant. It equally goes a long way to preach the gospel of salvation in a more practical way by providing job security for many citizens of her local society, who are exposed to the dangers and hazards caused by the evil administration of her local countries that steal mandate and come to power through bad politics and rigged elections.

In a similar way if not in the same vein, the Church can as well be actively relevant in the politics of her local countries. New dycastries and wings run by consecrated persons who are experts, can spring up and develop a fortified political platform that can practically challenge the evils of the Nigerian polity and other similar ones with a more solid voice, a more serious outfit and a

more concrete action that can pose a strong threat of non-violent overthrow of the status quo. This could be a more pragmatic preaching than the constant routine job of conscientization of the dead consciences of the power players who have refused to repent and by whose whims and caprices we are plundered at will. It will equally serve as a more tangible sting of the gadfly to wake them up from their political slumber.

Since the many political platforms in Nigeria are polluted, compromised, corrupt and porous, the Church can advance her own platform on which her members can rally round and form a springboard from which they can ensure to project into the scheme of affairs in the polity. This will form a serene ground of execution and achievement, for the many Christians who burn with zeal to bring about genuine change but whose effort get contaminated, thwarted and diverted in the course of their association with the corrupt political systems. It will thus become an umbrella for the born charismatic leaders within the Church to sail out into the political sea and bring about the desired transformation in the society.

The point is that politics and election in Nigeria may be a deep sea very vast and wide with storms that can make sailing a rugged experience. Thus the church like a ship can decide to be safe in her harbor by not sailing. But by so doing, we will not realize our full God-given potentials. As Grace Hopper, an American Computer

Programmer (1906-1992) puts it, “a ship in port is safe, but that is not what ships are for. Sail out to see and do new things.” In remaining safe in her harbor, a ship cannot realize its full purpose which is to sail out into the sea, wade through storms of new experiences and convey passengers and cargo to the appointed destination. Similarly, staying away from elections or electioneering in particular and politics in general is a somewhat safe ground for the Church and consecrated persons. But such safety may deny the full actualization of the Church’s mission and potentials. Meanwhile, just like the Jesus-Peter fishing episode (cf. Lk 5:4), we cannot estimate the gigantic success we can and shall record in this direction, for the ages to come. It will surely engrave the Church deeply in the scheme of things in the state and thereby ensure morality and proper running of the society as we see in some developed countries of the western world. Thus with it we shall have broken new grounds and conquered new fortresses in our mission of evangelization. This will go a long way in getting more answers of the coming of God’s kingdom on earth.



## **CONSECRATED PERSONS AND THE PROMOTION OF JUSTICE IN NIGERIA**

Daniel Mary Onyeayana, CMF

Major Superior, Claretians West Delegation

### **Introduction**

The mission of Consecrated Persons is centered in fulfilling the mission of Christ, to bring justice on earth. At the credo of his mission Christ avowed that “The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor, he has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set the captive free” (cf. Lk. 4:18). Promotion of justice is at the center of all Consecrated Persons’ vocation because their life-style is conditioned by that of Jesus, whom they follow with all sense of commitment and dedication.

With His mission and vision clear to him, Christ stood out in His time to preach and promote justice not regarding whose ox is gored. This flawless and consistent attitude of Jesus was clearly seen in various acts when he fearlessly steps in to make sure justice is applied as at when needed. In the Gospel of Matthew in recurring the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11), the parable of the unjust Judge; (Luke 18:1-8), parable of labourers in the vineyard (Matt. 20:1-16), etc., clearly

underline what he declared in his manifesto of Luke 4:18. With this mind set and concept, the mission of Christ on earth was coloured with seeking for justice to all. His famous aphorism, that he has not come for the healthy, but the sick (cf. Mark 2:17) is also an indication of show the concept of justice steered his ministry.

Jesus' commitment to promoting justice on earth is what the Consecrated Persons are also called to do. And so, in this article we are going to x-ray the ways the Consecrated Persons should promote justice in Nigeria.

**The concept of JUSTICE:** Simply put, justice has to do with right treatment, administering equality and showing respect to all and sundry. Derived from the Latin word *iūstitia*, which is interpreted in English as righteousness, equity. In a broader sense the concept justice include: uprightness, equity, vindication of right, and giving to everyone his or her dues. At the center of the concept of justice is the promotion of human equality and human right.

This is the life style that Consecrated Persons intrinsically are called to emulate, and replicate in their apostolate.

**Justice and Nigeria situation:** As a nation, Nigeria is among the countries in the world that has recorded high rate of injustice in various facets of her life in relationship with the masses. From all parts of life in Nigeria the masses are daily being confronted with the

act of injustice, ranging from the common person in the street to the married woman and her children in their homes. As a democratic nation and more importantly as enshrined in our National Anthem, every Nigerian is supposed to live and flow in an atmosphere of peace, justice and freedom in all its ramifications. But the reverse is the case. Acts of injustices like human trafficking is daily in the increase, abuses of teenagers especially female is almost the order of the day. The most disappointing one is the manner those in authority cause and serve as channels of various acts of injustice in Nigeria. Men and women in uniform with all latitude abuse the right and freedom of the civilians, as a result inflicting on them different kinds of hardships and pains that at times lead to painful death or a very pitiable situation.

The havoc injustice has caused in Nigeria are innumerable such as, unemployment, poor access to medical facilities, dangerous roads, kidnapping, killings, abuses of human rights, corruption in the legal system, and so on.

The honest question in the face of these injustices is who can better the plight of the citizens? who can be their voices, who can fight for their right and plead their cause? who can be their hero? This is where Consecrated Persons should live up to their callings as prophets and vanguards of truth.

## **The Consecrated Persons as agent of Justice**

The nature and the ontology of the vocation of Consecrated persons is to promote justice. Their calling is to respond in a radical manner by bearing witness to the life style of Jesus whose goal is to establish justice in the world. It is, therefore, intrinsic in their vocational life to dispense and promote justice everywhere. In a nation like Nigeria where the common people's voice is being suppressed, Consecrated Persons ought not to seat on the fence and speculate but to stand up to their calling and defend the common person.

In his article on; "The present reality of the religious life basic data on the evangelical life and mission" in "Consecrated life Today" Julian Lopez, opined that: "the commitment to struggle to combat the injustices which are oppressing men and women today (poverty, unemployment, economic and social abuse, racism, male chauvinism, immigration, etc.) has strongly marked the apostolic approach taken by many Consecrated Congregations, and has been taken up in their Constitutions". (cf *Consecrated life today – Charisms in the Church for the World*, International congress Rome 22-27 November 1993. St Paul's Ireland p. 100).

The authenticity of this assertion is that many Consecrated persons are committed to foster justice on the basis of their evangelical option of life. This act of promoting justice should be lived out with passion by Consecrated Persons. This was reechoed in the apostolic

letter of Pope Francis to Consecrated Persons during the year of Consecrated Life to be “the salt of the earth and light of the world”. This exaltation that is specifically addressed to the Consecrated Person underlines the nature of their mission on earth. The Consecrated Person is to spice the life of citizens especially, those whose rights are abused.

Taking Nigeria as a case study consecrated persons need to make their voice heard with all sense of duty and responsibility. They are to take the admonition of Pope Francis seriously that “the Consecrated Persons should not be domesticated Lions”. This implies that they should be involved in the daily lives of the common persons (especially the downtrodden), with the singular aim of ensuring that their basic needs are met. Implicitly, fighting for the right of the oppressed is not an option for the Consecrated Persons.

### **The steps the Consecrated Persons are to adopt to foster justice in Nigeria**

**Promoting skills acquisition program:** in recent years, Nigeria has experience a boost in the introduction of different skills acquisition through the instrumentality of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). This channel has not only bettered the lives of many middle class and low class citizens but have, created several job opportunities and the hope of a better future for their families. This is an area where consecrated persons can to help societal and individual development. Some of

these skills involve tailoring, beads making, catering, carpentry, etc.

**Creating job opportunities / employment:** though the consecrated life has the care of souls as their primary mission in the world and not to take up the duty of the state in creating jobs for citizens. However, most consecrated persons are involved in various apostolates that entail the employment of few or several staff. For instance, apostolates such as school, hospital, fashion, catering, etc., all require the employment of staff. Thus, in establishing institutions that create job opportunities, consecrated persons reduce the pains of citizens with a good Job employment.

**Reaching out to those who are abused (sexually, physically, or mentally):** the question of abuse and the lack of respect for the human person is not something that is limited to Africa alone. It is a universal phenomenon that ought to be addressed urgently before “man in his quest to conquer the world destroys himself”. Each day in our streets, schools and offices, markets, churches, etc., abuses, sexually, physically, mentally are recorded. Consecrated Persons ought to at this point in the state of the nation, be the heroes of justice and hope to the masses. Though they may lack the authority to implement a law, they must however be the spoke persons and the first keeper of the law for the good of the nation especially as regards the vulnerable in the society.

**Prophetic witnessing (to the point of martyrdom):** as earlier stated above, ontologically, consecrated persons are called to live the life of justice. It is a call to bear witness to the message of the gospel. Go therefore into the whole world and bear witness to the good news (Mk. 16:15). Since through their consecration they vow to live their lives for the gospel, each, ought to realize his or her mission in bearing witness to the truth of the gospel.

In dealing with justice, the Consecrated Person ought not to compromise his/her faith and Christian ethics. He or she ought to stand by justice and defend it even to the point of death. "The only thing I ask of you says St Ignatius, is to allow me to offer the liberation of my blood to God. I am the wheat of the Lord; may I be ground by the teeth of the beast to become the immaculate bread of Christ". This singular concept therefore, will make all Consecrated Persons not to be domesticated lions, as Pope Francis challenges us.

**Voice of the Voiceless:** in the bid to of promote justice in Nigeria, consecrated persons should come to the aid of all those who are victims of different kinds of oppressions, intimidation, abuses of all kinds. We live in a country where crime is at the increase and those who have the mandate of the people to protect them are doing nothing. To this effect, Consecrated Persons should not lay sublime on their beds and pretend that all is well in the society.

## **Conclusion**

The Consecrated person should foster “*liberté*, (liberty), *égalité*, (equality) and *fraternité* (fraternity)”. No Consecrated Person should remain comfortable in his or her comfort zone while the common people are living in abject poverty, and becoming victims of injustices. In a non-violent manner, Consecrated Persons should make the cry for justice heard through their own strong and fervent voices.

Consecrated Persons should adopt a pro-active attitude that bear witness to restorative justice. The message and the life of Consecrated Persons should reflect God who is a God of justice, who brings healing not condemnation, inclusion not exclusion, forgiveness not punishment.

They should keep in mind the injunction of Micah 6:8 that asked; “what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness?” The lives of Oscar Romero, who refused to keep quiet but called on the government of his time to stop all their acts of injustices, should be a motivation to Consecrated Person.