



# CONSECRATED LIFE

*The Past, the Present  
the Future and  
the Constant Demand  
for Renewal*

*Edited by:*  
*KANU Ikechukwu Anthony, O.S.A*



**THE CONSECRATED LIFE:**  
*The Past, the Present, the Future and  
the Constant Demand for Renewal*

Edited by:  
KANU Ikechukwu Anthony, O.S.A

Copyright © 2015 St Paul Publications, Nigeria.

**ISBN: 978978539085-8**

Cover: Manjoj Pal

*All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or technical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system now existing or to be invented, without written permission from the respective copyright holder.*

*ST PAUL PUBLICATIONS is an activity of the priests and brothers of the Society of St. Paul who proclaim the gospel through the media of social communication.*

*Published by:*

**ST. PAUL PUBLICATIONS**

31 Rotimi Williams Avenue

Bodija, Ibadan

OYO State, NIGERIA

*E-mail Contacts:*

*Editorial: editorsppn@gmail.com*

*Sales: stpaulnigeria@gmail.com*

*sspenugu@gmail.com*

*stpaulsph@gmail.com*

*stbcibadanssp@gmail.com*

*Printed in Nigeria*

*2015*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Dedication</b> - - - - -	<b>vii</b>
<b>Foreword</b> - - - - -	<b>viii</b>
<b>Introduction</b> - - - - -	<b>x</b>
 <b>A History of the Consecrated Life</b>	
<i>Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony, OSA</i> - - -	1
 <b>Consecrated Life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The African Experience</b>	
<i>Marcellinus C. Onyejekwe, Cmf</i> - - -	15
 <b>Perfectae Caritatis and the Constant Demand for Renewal</b>	
<i>Jude Ossai, OSA</i> - - - - -	49
 <b>Consecration and the Evangelical Counsels</b>	
<i>Mary-Sylvia Nwachukwu, DDL</i> - - -	83
 <b>Consecrated Persons and the Profession of Obedience</b>	
<i>Kolawole Chabi, OSA</i> - - - - -	97
 <b>Community Life among Consecrated Persons</b>	
<i>Jude Ossai, OSA</i> - - - - -	113
 <b>Consecrated Persons and Charism</b>	
<i>Oseni J. Osilama Ogunu, OMV</i> - - -	137

*THE CONSECRATED LIFE:  
The Past, the Present, the Future and the Constant Demand for Renewal*

<b>Consecrated Persons and the Academic Apostolate</b>					
<i>Cletus Nwabuzo, O.P.</i>	-	-	-	-	183
<b>Consecrated Persons and Prayer/Worship</b>					
<i>Daniel Aigbona, Csr</i>	-	-	-	-	193
<b>Consecrated Persons and Collaborative Ministry</b>					
<i>Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony, OSA</i>	-	-	-	-	211
<b>Consecrated Life in the Church today</b>					
<i>Florence Adetoun Oso, EHJ</i>	-	-	-	-	223
<b>The Consecrated Life: Its Place and Role In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century</b>					
<i>Lawrence N. Okwuosa, SDV</i>	-	-	-	-	237

## NOTE ON CONTRIBUTORS

1. Rev. Fr. Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony, OSA is a priest of the Order of Saint Augustine. He is the Executive Secretary of the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria (Men). He teaches philosophy and religion at Saint Augustine's Major Seminary, Jos and the Augustinian Institute, Makurdi.
2. Sr. Mary-Sylvia Nwachukwu, DDL is a Sister of the Congregation of the Daughters of Divine Love. She teaches Scripture at the Spiritan International School of Theology, Attakwu, Enugu State.
3. Rev. Fr. Jude Ossai, OSA is a priest of the Order of Saint Augustine of the Province of Nigeria. He taught theology at Saint Augustine's Major Seminary Jos, and is currently the Novice Master of the Augustinian Province of Nigeria.
4. Sr. Florence Adetoun Oso, EHJ is a sister of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus. She teaches theology at Saints Peter and Paul Major Seminary, Ibadan.
5. Rev. Fr. (Dr.) Dan Aigbona C.Ss.R., is a Redemptorist priest, and lectures philosophy at the Seminary of Saints Peter and Paul, Bodija and the Dominican Institute in Ibadan.

*THE CONSECRATED LIFE:*

*The Past, the Present, the Future and the Constant Demand for Renewal*

6. Rev. Fr. Kolawole Chabi, OSA is a Priest of the Order of Saint Augustine, Province of Nigeria. He teaches Patristics at the Augustinian Institute, Rome.
7. Oseni J. O. Ogunu, OMV, a member of the Congregation of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary, is a member of the Formation Team at the *Lanteri Oblate Seminary*, Bodija-Ibadan (Nigeria). He teaches theology at the *Dominican Institute*, Ibadan; he is the Editor of *The African Enchiridion: Documents and Texts of the Catholic Church in the African world*; and the current Editor of *The Catholic Voyage*.
8. Rev. Fr. Cletus Nwabuzo, O. P. is a priest of the Order of Preachers. He teaches theology at the Dominican Institute, Ibadan.
9. Rev. Fr. Marcellinus C. Onyejekwe, Cmf is a priest of the Claretian Missionaries, South East Province of Nigeria.

*THE CONSECRATED LIFE:  
The Past, the Present, the Future and the Constant Demand for Renewal*

**Dedication**  
*To all Nigerian Consecrated Persons*

## FOREWORD

The Year of Consecrated Life proclaimed by the Holy Father, Pope Francis I has three aims: to look to the past with gratitude, to live the present with Passion and embrace the future with hope. These essentially have to do with history and recollection. History, because they have to do with the past, present and future and a recollection because they have to do with the charism and the life of every Institute. This year is therefore a wonderful opportunity to live our experiences of God from the perspective of the varieties of gifts given to the Church through our religious Institutes.

The past reminds us of where we are coming from, the events that have created us to be who we are in the present and the Holy Father says we should look at this with gratitude, and as it is said, "An attitude of gratitude will make our life a beatitude." It is that happiness or if you like, the blessedness that is the sole aim or should be the sole aim of our being part of a Religious Institute. This happiness is in BEING who we should be. It is not so much in our DOING. The emphasis here is on BEING. The Consecrated Life is a call to BE in a state of life before DOING something as a result of our BEING in a state of life.

As Consecrated Persons, in the face of the self affirmation that the world presents to us, there is the need for self-denial. This is paradox of discipleship- if you SAVE, you will LOOSE, but LOOSE to SAVE. What do we want to do? We want to SAVE to SAVE in order to be SAFE. This does not

*THE CONSECRATED LIFE:  
The Past, the Present, the Future and the Constant Demand for Renewal*

work. Jesus says rather: SAVE to LOOSE and be LOST/LOOSE to SAVE and be SAVED. This will call us to:

1. make Sacrifices in the face of Persecution;
2. answer God's call wholeheartedly;
3. give up all so that God will give you all;
4. life of personal witnessing;
5. Faithfulness to the Charism of our Institutes;
6. Let us be people of Prayer. We are, therefore, called first of all to BE Consecrated Persons and then we can work or act as consecrated persons.

This work: *THE CONSECRATED LIFE: The Past, the Present, the Future and the Constant Demand for Renewal*, which has been edited by Rev. Fr. Kanu Anthony, OSA, the Executive Secretary of the Conference of Major Superiors (Men) is the outcome of the Executive Meeting of the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria. Through the various chapters with emphasis on the different fundamental elements of the Consecrated Life, an attempt has been made to provide a roadmap for Consecrated Persons to look to the past with gratitude, to live the present with Passion and embrace the future with hope. This work is the contribution of the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria to the universal pool of literature on the Consecrated Life during this Year of the Consecrated Life. I, therefore, recommend this work to all Consecrated Persons in Nigeria and beyond, and also to all students of theology who aspire to know the nature and integrity of the Consecrated Life.

*Very Rev. Fr. Henry Omonisaye, Cmf*

*President*

*Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria (MEN)*

## **Introduction: History and Recollection**

In retrospect, this book has taken the character of a planned happening. It emerged out of the decision of the Executive Council of the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria (Men) in 2015 to make a contribution to the renewal that the Year of Consecrated Life is aimed at achieving: to look at the past with gratitude<sup>1</sup>, to live the present with passion<sup>2</sup> and to embrace the future with hope<sup>3</sup>. The Roman Pontiff, Pope Francis I, announced that 2015 would be the Year of Consecrated Life, and since November 2014, Religious Institutes and Societies of Apostolic Life all over the world have been putting in great effort at making this year a period of renewal<sup>4</sup>. Pope Francis I expresses the historical, reflective and practical focus of the Year of Consecrated Life thus:

The Year of Consecrated Life challenges us to examine our fidelity to the mission entrusted to us. Are our ministries, our works and our presence consonant with what the Spirit asked of our founders and foundresses? Are they suitable for carrying out today, in society and the Church, those same ministries and works? Do we have the same passion for our people, are we close to them to the point of sharing in their

---

<sup>1</sup> Francis I, *Apostolic Letter of His Holiness to all Consecrated Persons*, No. 1

<sup>2</sup> Francis I, *Apostolic Letter of His Holiness to all Consecrated Persons*, No. 2

<sup>3</sup> Francis I, *Apostolic Letter of His Holiness to all Consecrated Persons*, No. 3

<sup>4</sup> Kanu, A. I., *Quitte Ton Pays: On Consecrated Persons and the Challenges of Family Obligations in Contemporary Africa*, Jos Studies.

*THE CONSECRATED LIFE:  
The Past, the Present, the Future and the Constant Demand for Renewal*

joys and sorrows, thus truly understanding their needs and helping to respond to them?<sup>5</sup>

This work *The Consecrated Life: The Past, the Present, the Future and the Constant Demand for Renewal*, is a product of days and months of searching for an understanding about the renewal of the Consecrated Life and from many efforts to share this understanding with others. This introduction, therefore, focuses on the origins and evolution of this book and the basic assumptions contained within its chapters.

In the first chapter, Rev. Fr. Kanu, A. I. in *A History of the Consecrated Life* developed a typology of the Religious Life that goes back to the 5<sup>th</sup> century Greek world. He connects the high and low periods of the Consecrated Life to the sociological and cultural factors that influenced human history. He beautifully interprets this history with the historical model of growth, decline and changeover. This places the Consecrated Life within the dynamics of challenge and hope, change and stability. In *Consecrated Life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The African Experience*, by Rev. Fr. Marcellinus, C. O. and *Perfectae Caritatis and the Constant Demand for Renewal* by Rev Fr. Jude, O. derived from the papers delivered at the 2015 Annual General Assembly of the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria. Fr. Marcellinus discussed the question of the perception of the Consecrated Life by our world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, while Fr. Jude Ossai observed the need for Religious Institutes and individual religious to constantly go through the process of *aggiornamento*, depending on their

---

<sup>5</sup> Francis 1, *Apostolic Letter of His Holiness to all Consecrated Persons*, No. 2

*THE CONSECRATED LIFE:  
The Past, the Present, the Future and the Constant Demand for Renewal*

Charism, apostolate and social setting; and also the need for the re-interpretation of the vows and the Religious Life in general so as to constantly give them freshness, meaning and prophetic value.

Sr. Mary-Sylvia, N. in her *Consecration and the Evangelical Counsels*, highlights the four dimensions of the Religious Life: the theological, which describes the primary goal of consecration as intimate relationship with God and sharing in His life; the Christological and Pneumatological, which define this sharing in the life of God as a conformation to Christ through the Holy Spirit; and the ecclesial, which describes how consecration disposes the religious for the service of God in the world, that is, in the missionary work of the Church. Fr Kolawole, A., in the next chapter, while concentrating on an aspect of the Evangelical Counsels, that is poverty, understands the Evangelical Counsels as a manifestation of the choice we have freely made to do more than the minimum. Strongly related to the Evangelical Counsels is community life. Fr Jude, O., therefore, explores the theological and ecclesiological foundations of community life, its prophetic values and challenges that arise in concrete historical circumstances. Fr Oseni, O. in chapter seven reflected on Charism, which is a fundamental dimension of the Consecrated Life. He did not ignore the Biblical and Historical nuances of "Charism". He concludes that Charism is a divine gift to founders of Religious Institutes and consecrated persons. Fr Cletus, in chapter eight wrote on *Consecrated Persons and the Academic Apostolate*, contrary to popular opinion, he sees the possibility of a total dedication to God through the academic apostolate. Fr Daniel, in the

*THE CONSECRATED LIFE:  
The Past, the Present, the Future and the Constant Demand for Renewal*

next chapter focused on prayer and Consecrated Persons. He avers that worship in the life of Consecrated Persons is a way of bringing their lives into a cohesiveness within itself as well as bringing oneself into harmony with others in the community.

In the wake of clericalism, parochialism and individualism making their appearance, Fr. Kanu, I. A. in Chapter Ten reflects on collaborative ministry in the church, however, focusing more on collaboration among and between Consecrated Persons as pastoral agents with a unique and specific role to play. The work comes to a close with chapter eleven; here Sr. Florence, O., wrote on *the Consecrated Life in the Church Today*. She examines the fidelity of Consecrated Persons to their consecration, to the mission entrusted to them. She challenged Consecrated Persons to respond to their call by reflecting together on the standard of their consecration, that is, on whether it is writing its great history well into the future.

A cursory glance at the different perspectives on the Consecrated Life, reveals a synthesis of the historical and reflective elements. While the historical allows the consecrated person the opportunity of looking into the past, examining the present and making projections into the future, it is not independent of reflection. The quality and truthfulness of reflection on the historical path would guarantee the joy of the present and the future.

## CHAPTER ONE A History of the Consecrated Life

*By*

*Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony, OSA  
Augustinian Institute, Makurdi*

### **Introduction**

In 2014, the Roman Pontiff, Francis I issued a letter for the **Year of Consecrated Life**, which started throughout the universal Church on the first Sunday of Advent, 30<sup>th</sup> November, to end on the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, 2 February 2016, a period of fourteen months. In this document, the Holy Father wrote that: “During this Year, it would be appropriate for each charismatic family to reflect on its origins and history, in order to thank God who grants the Church a variety of gifts which embellish her and equip her for every good work (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 12)”. From the foregoing, it is evident that recounting our history is essential for preserving our identity, for strengthening our unity as a family and our common sense of belonging. More than an exercise in archaeology or the cultivation of mere nostalgia, it calls for following in the footsteps of past generations in order to grasp the high ideals, and the vision and values which inspired them, beginning with the founders and foundresses and the first communities. In this way we come to see how the charism has been lived over the years, the creativity it has sparked, the difficulties it encountered and the concrete ways those difficulties were surmounted. We may also encounter cases of inconsistency, the result of human weakness and even at times a neglect of some

essential aspects of the charism. Yet everything proves instructive and, taken as a whole, acts as a summons to conversion. To tell our story is to praise God and to thank him for all his gifts. It is from this background that the first chapter of this work begins with the history of the Consecrated Life. As a background to this history that dates back concretely to the Eremitic Age, this chapter begins by discussing the typologies of the Religious Life and developing a model for the interpretation of this history.

### **Typologies of the Religious Life**

Consecrated persons are members of the Religious Institutes and Societies of Apostolic Life<sup>6</sup>, who 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<sup>7</sup>. 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. 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>8</sup>. Although this way of life has been foreshadowed in the ancient era, its beginnings is also traceable to the post-apostolic church that dedicated itself to a gospel-oriented life-

---

<sup>6</sup> Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony, *Africae Munus and Consecrated Persons*, In *The Catholic Voyage: A Publication of the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria*. Vol. 11. January 2015. P.4.

<sup>7</sup> canon 573.2

<sup>8</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

style, to a radical following of Jesus Christ<sup>9</sup>. However, beyond the post-apostolic church, typologies of the consecrated life are observable in the Ancient Era.

A profound examination of the Ancient Era, reveals a retinue of typologies of the consecrated life. At about the 5<sup>th</sup> century of the Greek world, when mythological and religious interpretations were giving way to the philosophical explanation of reality, Heraclitus left his native Ephesus in disgust at the immorality of his fellow citizens, and wandered in the fields outside the city, weeping and eating grass. He rejected the conventional morality of his society, and his own conventional role in it, and became a self-exiled outcast, a citizen of no state, almost a non-human<sup>10</sup>. Although this might sound extreme, it points to the Eremitical Era of the religious life.

At about the 6<sup>th</sup> century, Pythagoras, an ancient Greek philosopher established a community of brotherhood, which was a religious, philosophical and political community of brothers who shared their possessions with one another<sup>11</sup>. They dedicated themselves to the study of religious doctrines, most likely connected to the worship of Apollo, study of mathematics and science. Their fraternal life, asceticism and

---

<sup>9</sup> Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony, *Africae Munus and Consecrated Persons*, In *The Catholic Voyage: A Publication of the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria*. Vol. 11. January 2015. P.4.

<sup>10</sup> Bertrand Russell, *History of Western philosophy*. London: Unwin University Press

<sup>11</sup> Bertrand Russell, *History of Western philosophy*. London: Unwin University Press

contemplation foreshadowed the religious life of the Cenobitic Period.

Similarly, two thousand years ago, at a time when the Jewish soul was turned towards the expectation of the Messiah, there also appeared among the Jews a community of holy men and women, living together in a community, carrying within themselves all of the seeds of Christianity and of future Western civilization. This brotherhood, more or less persecuted and ostracized would bring forth people who would change the face of the world and the course of human history<sup>12</sup>. Indeed, almost all of the principal founders of what would later be called Christianity were Essenes: St. Ann, Joseph and Mary, John the Baptist, Jesus, John the Evangelist, etc.

### **A Historical Model of the Religious Life**

The history of the Religious Life is closely bound to secular history. So much about her high and low periods were based on the sociological and cultural factors that in one way or the other had influence on human history. . According to Armand:

The religious life is but one of the Church's self-expressions in the course of its historical realization. Consequently, the history of the religious life is inseparable from that of the Church as a whole, and the latter bestows its own significance upon it<sup>13</sup>.

---

<sup>12</sup> John Bright, *A History of Israel*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press.

<sup>13</sup> Armand, V. *The evolution of the religious life in its historical and spiritual context*. Abbaye de Scourmont. <http://Scourmont.be/Armand/writings/evolution-eng.htm>.1.

With this connection between the history of the Church, secular history and the religious life, it is, therefore, not surprising that the major developments in the religious life were basically responses to particular crises in the church or secular society of the day or to dramatic social changes in the Church and in the larger cultural and political arena of Western civilization- thus, the religious life can be considered a significant social movement in the history of Western civilization<sup>14</sup>. It is therefore not surprising that particular historical events such as the legalization of Christianity by Constantine, the French Revolution, the emergence of age of enlightenment and the renaissance period exerted a great weight of influence on the development of the religious life. The model of the history of religious life employed in this chapter is one of growth, decline and changeover. The beginning of each age is always the period of its growth, this is usually followed by a decline and then a changeover to another age<sup>15</sup>. It is, therefore, within the construct of this historical model that the historical phases employed in this chapter include: the eremitic age, the cenobitic age, the era of mendicant institutes, the era of apostolic institutes,

### **The Eremitic Age (200-400)**

For more than two centuries, Christians were persecuted in the Roman empire until the 4<sup>th</sup> century, when Constantine legalized Christianity in the Empire of Rome. With this legalization, Christianity became the popular religion in

---

<sup>14</sup> Lawrence Cada, et al, *The shaping of the coming age of the religious life*. New York: Cross Road Book.

<sup>15</sup> Stephen Toulmin, *Human Undersanding*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972.

Rome, however, it lost the self-sacrificing spirit which it possessed during the era of Roman persecution. In reaction, any holy men and women went into the desert, propagating a new kind of martyrdom for the kingdom of God. The Greek word for desert *eremos* is the root word for the eremitic life. Those who lived this kind of life were referred to as hermits. Because of the role which the desert played as the *locus* for the expression of this kind of life, this period is also referred to as the age of the desert. The pioneer of this kind of life who symbolized this new ideal in a way no one else had done was Saint Anthony of the Desert. He provided guidance to many other hermits who were scattered in the deserts of Egypt and Syria in search of the way of perfection. The image of the religious life at the time was that of a holy ascetic. In the desert they prayed and fasted, doing battle with the devil in the wilderness as Christ had done long ago.

### **The Cenobitic Age (400-1200)**

With the passage of time, the eremitic life gave birth to the cenobitic style of life, that is a communal asceticism. The word cenobitic is from the word *cenobium* which means community. As saint Anthony was the pioneer figure of the eremitic life, St Pachomius was the father of the cenobitic life. He adopted the idea of communal patterns. He, with the help of his sister Mary, founded a network of about ten thousand monastic communities for men and women. After Saint Basil visited the monks of Egypt, Palestine and Syria, he founded a monastic community in Asia Minor, with the addition of apostolic service as his innovation. In Palestine, Melania the Elder, a friend of Saint Jerome, promoted communal asceticism. With her experience of famous hermits in Scetis and Nitria, she founded a monastery for women in Jerusalem

and another for men, which she left in the care of her disciple Rufinus. Gradually, from the Eastern half of the Roman empire, this way of religious life spread to the Western half of the Roman empire, especially in Spain and Gaul. The transition from the eremitic to the cenobitic was marked by a couple of circumstances. The Roman empire was weakened by the attacks of the barbarian tribes and monks become more engulfed in doctrinal matters, travelling from place to place begging for more than they needed, sometimes engaging in debauchery, thus, making a nuisance of themselves. This led to a decline in ascetic life and the need for a new phase<sup>16</sup>.

A more systematic beginning of the age of monasticism was started by Saint Benedict with the community he founded in Monte Cassino in 529. They lived under the celebrated rule of Saint Benedict which became very influential even in our times. The rule of Saint Benedict was so influential that virtually all the monasteries lived by his rule. This is the basis for the myth that all monasteries were derived from Monte Cassino. In Africa, Augustine began a community of monks also referred to as Canon Regulars. They lived according to the rule of Saint Augustine in monasteries, sharing their goods in common. Their main purpose of coming together was to live harmoniously in one house intent upon God and in oneness of heart and mind<sup>17</sup>. They called nothing their own but possessed everything in common<sup>18</sup>.

---

<sup>16</sup> Lawrence Cada, et al, *The shaping of the coming age of the religious life*. New York: Cross Road Book.

<sup>17</sup> The Rule of Saint Augustine. No. 1.

<sup>18</sup> The Rule of Saint Augustine. No. 2.

In Ireland, the monastic life was also developing under the guidance of Columban. By the twelfth century, urbanization expanded in Europe with the growth of medieval towns and contact with Arab civilization through the Crusades. With this, the monastic life was becoming inadequate to meet up with the needs of the time. There was serious laxity among religious. Monks felt that they were superior to secular clergy men as a result of their celibacy, which led to the making of celibacy mandatory for all secular clergy men in 1139.

At the same time, the life of the monk was combined with the life of a soldier, which led to the founding of Templars and Teutonic Knights to safeguard pilgrims and places of worship. Gradually they began charging pilgrims and merchants for safeguarding their money and, thus, made so much money from this. With the accumulation of wealth came laxity which made many of the monks to forget the reasons for their being founded and thus the suppression of the Templars by Rome in the thirteenth century. With these developments, it became obvious that there was need for a change<sup>19</sup>.

### **The Era of Mendicant Institutes (1200-1500)**

In response to the demands made by the expanding medieval towns and cities, the Mendicant Orders began to emerge. While the monastic communities were known for their retreat from secular societies, the Mendicant Orders were marked for

---

<sup>19</sup> Lawrence Cada, et al, *The shaping of the coming age of the religious life*. New York: Cross Road Book.

their going out into cities to engage secular life and meet some of its needs in terms of education, teaching in universities, preaching the gospel, defending the faith against heretics and service to the poor. They had a strong sense of loyalty to the hierarchy of the church and guarded the Church's orthodoxy. They were quite traditional and begged for alms to survive. They had no communal owned landed properties and wealth as in the monastic period<sup>20</sup>. They added a new meaning to religious poverty which has come down to the present time. The absence of attachment to individual or communal wealth helped them to move from one place to another for the sake of the gospel without qualms.

The pioneer figures of this age include Saint Francis of Assisi and Dominic, the founders of the Franciscan and Dominican Orders. These Mendicant Orders include: the Order of Friars Preachers, also known as the Dominicans, the Order of Friars Minor, also known as the Franciscans, the Order of the Servants of Mary, also known as the Servite Order, the Order of Saint Augustine, also known as the Augustinians, the Order of our Lady of Mount Carmel, also known as Carmelites. Distinct from the monastic era, they referred to their houses as convents rather than monasteries. By the fifteenth century, the mendicant orders succumbed to the same evil of love for wealth which they earlier came to change. They ate like kings and wore expensive habits, taking little notice of asceticism. More so, the emergence of the Renaissance period with its new humanism and

---

<sup>20</sup> Lawrence Cada, et al, *The shaping of the coming age of the religious life*. New York: Cross Road Book.

secularization of Western Europe, a great need emerged for the survival of the religious life<sup>21</sup>.

### **The Era of Apostolic Institutes (1500-1800)**

The two leading religious institutes during this period were the Ursulines and the Jesuits. This new era was based on the new developments that emerged at the time: there was great emphasis on rationalism, the Renaissance period was mounting and printing has just emerged. Alongside these developments, the Church was immersed in so much decadence; a decadence that would soon attract the reaction of Martin Luther. It is, therefore, not surprising that "From the very start, the Jesuits claimed as theirs the ideal of excellence for the sake of the Lord God: excellence in sanctity and holiness, excellence in the intellectual life, excellence in apostolic zeal, whether it concerned extirpating the heresies of Protestantism to regain the wayward flock, or carrying the message of faith on missionary journeys to the very antipodes" <sup>22</sup> . Founded in the wake of Protestantism, members were freed from commitment to the common life, especially common prayers, which allowed them the opportunity to move around freely to distant places as we see in Francis Xavier. They had very long formation period which equipped them to defend the teachings of the Church even as individuals. They built schools and hospitals, thus providing specific services for the Church and society.

---

<sup>21</sup> Lawrence Cada, et al, *The shaping of the coming age of the religious life*. New York: Cross Road Book.

<sup>22</sup> Lawrence Cada, et al, *The shaping of the coming age of the religious life*. New York: Cross Road Book, 34.

The Ursulines were nuns who emphasized personal holiness as the only dependable way to reform. As a company of virgins, they lived in their homes and provided services to the poor and the infirm. By the nineteenth century, the age of enlightenment put great pressure on the religious life, questioning the rational basis. This made many religious to leave the religious life, such that by the eve of the French Revolution, only about two third of the entire number of religious in Europe remained, and by the end of the French Revolution not up to one third remained. This again opened the door for a new age of the Religious Life.

### **The Era of Teaching Congregations (1800-2015)**

During the French Revolution, the government made an attempt to dechristianize France. Priests and bishops were forced to swear oath of fidelity to the new order that the revolution propagated. After the revolution, Religious Institutes focused on building institutions with the aim of educating the masses. They hoped that they would sow the seed of the faith, disrupted by the French Revolution, in the hearts of the children that they taught; thus institutions became a means of Christianizing the dechristianized. Beyond school apostolate, hospitals were also built. With this change, gradually people regained confidence in the religious life.

During the Second Vatican Council, the religious life reached its highest, surpassing the maximum that had ever been achieved before the French Revolution. However, in the last two decades. There are many withdrawals with very few recruitment. It got to the point that it was almost a shame to

be a religious. They were spat upon on streets and insulted in public places. Many have also been dragged to court and imprisoned for sex offences. Religious houses are closed up and sometimes sold away and have been turned into disco halls, hotels and eateries. This has accounted for many leaving the religious life in search for meaning. While the number keeps decreasing in Europe, in Africa, there is a growing number in the religious life. The diminution of vocations in Europe are due to sex scandals which inundated the media at the beginning of this century. Cases of paedophilia, homosexuality, etc. Consequently many became ashamed of identifying themselves with the church, the clergy and the consecrated life. More so, the political, technological, economic and cultural advancements have disregarded or even done away with religion. God or the sacred is increasingly undermined while the profane is all the more enthroned. The sacred norms and social values no longer make sense. Added to these is the fact that majority of the consecrated persons in the developed countries are in their advanced age, which has apparently reduced their effectiveness, and thus witnessing in those places.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has studied the history of the consecrated life, from the eremitic age through the Cenobitic, Mendicant Institutes, Apostolic Institutes, Teaching Congregations to the present era of the consecrated life. As this chapter moved from one era to another, one easily discovers the interplay of the primary elements of growth, decline and change-over. When the historical model employed by this chapter for the interpretation of the religious life is applied to the present state of the religious life, especially in Europe, one can

conclude that the diminution of vocations to the religious life in Europe is a sign of the period of decline and the hope for a changeover. At this period of decline and the sight of a changeover with many indices of despair, the religious must see himself or herself as living in a period of transition and not lose hope. The religious life will continue to live as long as the church lives.



CHAPTER TWO

*Consecrated Life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The African Experience*

By

*Marcellinus C. Onyejekwe, cmf*

*Claretian Institute, Imo State*

**Introduction**

The topic under review has two parts: the macro and the micro contexts. That is the global or general situation of the consecrated life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; we are talking of the entire Catholic world: in the five continents. Put in a question form, one could ask: how is the consecrated life faring or perceived today in our world?<sup>1</sup>

The second part of our topic focuses on Africa/Nigeria. The African or Nigerian experience calls us to examine as well the situation of the consecrated life in our dear continent and country, with regard to the observed features. In other words, is the situation of Africa the same or do we experience more or less some other outstanding characteristics?

Paying particular attention to Africa/Nigeria tells one that you want to be more conscious of how to address the particular situations of your communities, either as singular entities or as a whole, a people. I think that it is proper and called for since, as active participants, it's our duty to contribute from our concrete experiences to the theory and

---

<sup>1</sup> I take for granted our knowledge of the distinction between “consecrated” and “religious” life. The former embraces the latter so that all religious are consecrated while not all consecrated are religious. Consecrated are all stages in the overall evolution of the forms of special consecration in the Church.

development of the consecrated life ever going on in the universal Church as the Synods and Special Celebrations offer the opportunity.

Before going over to the main business, permit me once more to make this observation: I think it is too early to talk of the 21<sup>st</sup> century features of the consecrated life because the century is still very young to claim any characteristics. We are in 2015 and that means we are only fourteen years into the new century. If anything, we shall be talking of the inflow of the features of the 20<sup>th</sup> century into the 21<sup>st</sup> and perhaps the new phenomena, if any, that may have started raising their heads. On another note, I observe that: "The topic presented inevitably involves a rigorous analysis of data and statistics. It also involves an analysis of facts of life. The world is wide and its issues... wider. The media often carries them.... Perhaps one could... do with a few key figures and then proceed to the... analysis of facts as they bear on the consecrated life."<sup>2</sup>

## **1. Consecrated life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: the Macro or Global Situation**

As noted above, the first part of our topic tasks us to examine the conditions of the consecrated life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century from the general points of view.

### **1.1 *The Positive or Appreciable Features***

The first observation in this regard is that, on a positive note, the consecrated life, actively guided by the Holy Spirit, still

---

<sup>2</sup> IZU M. ONYEOCHA, *The future of the consecrated life: World, African and Nigerian realities*, in VV.AA, *Discipleship and renewal* (edited by Izu M. Onyeocha/Charles I. Amadi), Owerri: Clacom Publications and Enugu: SNAAP Press Ltd, p. 1.

undergoes development. In his post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Vita Consecrata* (nn 12, 62), and in his earlier catechesis, John Paul II underlined this fact. The Church goes on; new challenges arise from which the Spirit, as before, inspires new responses that conform or not to the old ways of special dedication to God. So, in our time, *new or renewed forms* have arisen whose signs were identified from the endings of the previous century. Apart from those new forms of consecrated life, John Paul II (n. 62) also spoke of new forms of the evangelical life, where he underlined that the Spirit continually assists the Church both by fostering in the already existing Institutes a commitment to renewed faithfulness to the founding charism and by giving new charisms to men and women of our own day so that they can start new institutions responding to the challenges of our times. As he said, a sign of this divine intervention is found in the so-called *new foundations*, which display new characteristics compared to those of traditional Foundations. These may be called the Spirit's way of reinvigorating the consecrated lifestyle in the Church.<sup>3</sup>

On another note, the consecrated, in their various forms and numbers, are still, to a large extent, fostering and promoting the mission *ad gentes* of the Church. They are still at the frontiers bearing witness to the paternal and maternal love of the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit, especially among the little brothers and sisters of Christ. *Ad intro*, they also

---

<sup>3</sup> See the document for full texts, very useful; see also: *La vita consacrata – La catechesi di Giovanni Paolo II, dal 28 settembre 1994 al 22 marzo 1995*, Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995, pp. 29 – 32 = *Sviluppi e tendenze della vita consacrata nei tempi piú recenti, 5 ottobre 1994*.

actively sustain the gains of our predecessors in the camp of faith.

## **1.2 *The Negative or worrisome Features***

Today, the consecrated life passes through moments of great changes, which are not experienced in like manners in the different continents and countries. Though talking about the endings of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Rocca noted that religious life is strictly mixed up with elements that bear social, political and cultural tenets, which constitute its strength or weakness.<sup>4</sup> This tells us that, at the world level and concerning concrete issues, the situation of the consecrated life would never be uniform but diverse.

### **1.2.1 *Vocational decline in the old or developed churches***

Going by Wittberg's claim that "One of the most important and vital resources of any religious community is its present and future members,"<sup>5</sup> one can say that now, as before, consecrated life in the western world is threatened by lack of new members. It is numerically poor and so tilts towards extinction than survival. As regards this, Rocca made a comparative study of the continents, covering the years 1966 – 1991. In the charts, Asia (mainly India) and Africa recorded increase in vocation while America, Europe and the Oceania recorded decline. From there, he concluded that religious life does not present itself numerically alike in the various continents. While it grows in the developing parts of the world, it declines notably in the developed countries of

---

<sup>4</sup> G. ROCCA, *Presente e futuro nella vita consacrata*, Roma: Edizioni Dehoniane, 1994, pp. 39 – 40.

<sup>5</sup> PATRICIA WITTEBERG, *Pathways to re-creating religious communities*, New York/Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1996, p. 164.

Europe, America and the Oceania.<sup>6</sup> This isn't without some reasons and, less than being over, they are still very much around, with new ones added, for which the situation persists. Among the reasons are: the socio-cultural changes, the Vatican II reforms, better economies, scandals, etc). On this point, Izu M. Onyeocha recalls that:

Prior to Vatican II, everything seemed to have been spelt out in black and white in the Older Churches of Europe and America, such that one either fitted into it or had to seek his or her future in the secular world. The after effects of the changes inspired by the Council were dramatic. Many could not cope and left. Others could not accept them and left. What began as a trickling leakage gathered strength and became a haemorrhage. The result is that the huge seminaries and convents have lost their membership and most have been closed down as the older religious retire without replacement. The birth control policies ensured that families became smaller and so there were fewer children to opt for religious life in the face of the booming economic times and the imperative to take on secular professions.<sup>7</sup>

Along the same line, Benedict XVI adding his voice noted that, lack of vocations:

is a problem that exists throughout the western world ... the situation in the west... is a world weary of its own culture... that has reached a time when there is no longer any evidence of the need for God, let alone Christ, and when it seems, therefore, that humans

---

<sup>6</sup> GIANCARLO ROCCA, *o.c.*, pp. 46 – 48.

<sup>7</sup> IZU M. ONYEOCHA, *o.c.*, pp. 16 – 17.

could build themselves on their own. In this situation of rationalism closing in on itself, and that regards the sciences as the only model of knowledge, everything else is subjective. Christian life too... becomes a choice that is subjective... arbitrary and no longer the path of life. It therefore naturally becomes difficult to believe and... ever more difficult to offer one's life to the Lord to be his servant. This is certainly a form of suffering which... fits into our time in history and in which we generally see that the so-called great Churches seem to be dying. This is true particularly in Australia, but also in Europe, but not so much in the United States [of America].<sup>8</sup>

At the time of mentioning the factors responsible for the diminution of vocations, especially in the developed countries, one cannot forget the sex scandals the news of which inundated the media at the beginning of this century and millennia: paedophilia, homosexuality, etc, including in high quarters and by highly-placed church personnel. Consequently many became ashamed of identifying themselves with the church, the clergy and the consecrated life. And so, entrance into these vocations suffers a great set back. As Izu rightly said, it's not that the churches of the developing countries are innocent but that the rate may be reduced or the knowledge yet unpublicised. So, they don't yet cause noticeable or phenomenal decline in the number of vocations there.

---

<sup>8</sup> JIM SHEERIN, *Priests for the people – a reflection on the Nigerian priesthood: formation, renewal & ministerial life*, Asokoro-Abuja: Gaudium et Spes Institute, 2008, p. 105. The Pope spoke July 2005, to the priests of Aosta Diocese in Northern Italy. See also VC n 63, par. 1.

For the same fact of lack of new vocations, it's given to understand that majority of the consecrated persons in the developed countries are in their advanced age (60 and above), which apparently means a reduced vitality and vigour in those places.

A good number of religious institutes in the western countries tried to survive by recruiting new vocations from the developing countries. Their experiences were/are not always beautiful. Their vocational necessity became, for many young people of the poorer countries, a golden means of migrating to the developed countries for greener pastures. Generally, many absconded no sooner than they arrived. Others stayed who may have genuine vocations, "But there are added incentives for them to enter which no longer apply in..." the host countries. Continuing, Wittberg recorded some clashes:

Problem arises when Third World entrants view religious life as a "step up" in status. One new Franciscan community in the US, intensely committed to living in poverty among the inner city poor, finally had to allow a number of their Nigerian candidates to leave. These men had come to America for an education and the opportunity to develop their talents in God's service, *not* for a ministry of simple presence to the homeless and drug addicted of the inner city. Similar clashing expectations may arise in other communities.<sup>9</sup>

It's not only Nigerians! When I was in New York, I heard a priest discuss a similar case with the Polish. Wittberg also

---

<sup>9</sup> PATRICIA WITTEBERG, *o.c.*, p. 164, see p. 163.

included Pakistanis, Koreans and the Philippines. The situation motivated new policies: many dioceses and congregations in the USA and Europe decided never to admit anyone unless he/she is already in their countries. But, apart from the ulterior motives of the new entrants, there was/is also a cultural clash between these and their hosts. Thus, there were/are mutual suspicion and exclusion, leading the latter to restricting the former to menial jobs and from participation in the congregational leadership. So, the former feel strange, used and hence seek to leave.

### ***1.2.2 Consecrated life adapted to and threatened by mundane values***

Pope Benedict XVI was quoted as noting that Reforms undertaken by religious orders, aimed at ensuring deeper fidelity to the Gospel, to the church and to the poor, are threatened by too many adaptations to a modern materialistic culture. He said:

Following the Vatican II Council... religious orders revised their constitutions and their way of life with a 'more evangelical, more ecclesial and more apostolic spirit.' But... some concrete choices did not offer the world the authentic and life-giving face of Christ. A desire to modernize and... to speak to contemporary men and women sometimes allowed a 'secularized culture' to penetrate the minds and hearts of some religious. The consequence is that, alongside an undoubtedly generous commitment, capable of witnessing and of total giving, consecrated life today experiences the danger of mediocrity, adopting

bourgeois values and a consumerist mentality.<sup>10</sup> The Pope told the... superiors that the choice to follow Christ always carries with it a renunciation of doing or having other things.

In the developed countries, the political, technological, economic and cultural advancements have disregarded or even done away with religion. God or the sacred is increasingly undermined while the profane is all the more enthroned. The sacred norms and social values no longer make sense; their violation is encouraged, mainly among the youth. The end result is secularism. Profanation or secularism entails the devaluation of the divine, turning the sacred into a social thing, doing away with the most essential element, which is the divine. The profane or the secular relativizes.<sup>11</sup> In the end, all turn out to be a snare to the human person. In other words, development has turned out to be for destruction rather than the preservation of the human species. Painfully the trend is quickly spreading to the developing countries such that the end-results are also being felt even among them.

In these situations, religion and consecrated life are threatened. The adherents, mainly priests and consecrated persons, are rendered irrelevant and useless however they

---

<sup>10</sup> CINDY WOODEN, *Modern culture threatens religious order reforms, Pope says*, in *National Catholic Reporter*, 42 (31), 2/6/2006, p. 6. © 2009 *National Catholic Reporter*, COPYRIGHT 2006 Gale Group. Benedict XVI met, May 22, 2006, with some 1,500 superiors of women and men's religious orders representing hundreds of thousands of priests, nuns, brothers and consecrated virgins around the world.

<sup>11</sup> Ideas taken from \_\_\_\_\_, *Pope calls for defence of family* (report), in *The Leader*, LV (43), Sunday, November 2, 2014, p. 9.

struggle to prove otherwise. Somewhere they are described as *strange beings in danger of extinction* – because they uphold and stick to antiquated ideologies. They're old and moribund. No new members are enticed to join them. Their big institutions or buildings are being sold off or transformed into secular ends. So, by the end of the day, there is no longer prospect for religion and for consecrated life in these contexts. Conscious of this, many institutes in the developed world have now thrown away signs of their consecration: their habits are now replaced by secular dresses, after much talk in the General Chapters and in spite of the insistence of the Hierarchy; they have opened their communities and convents to worldly tenets hitherto abhorred; they have left their charismatic ministries to lay people while themselves becoming directors.

The situation was worsened by the eruption and escalation of the sex scandals. The noise and the politics overwhelmingly submerged into the deep ocean of disgrace and scorn whatever religion and consecrated life stood for. Consequently, many now no longer identify publicly with the Church or with the consecrated life. To go about in clerical wears or religious habits easily attracts unwanted attention to oneself. In all, priests and consecrated no longer raise their heads high due to the counter witnesses at times blown out of proportion to the public knowledge by the media. These are hard truths and the situation of consecrated life today, an inflow of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **1.2.3 *Consecrated witnessing on the reverse order – dragged by the world***

#### **I) *The incursion and influence of secular Ideologies***

Some world events have posited new challenges to the consecrated. Izu noted, for instance, that the:

Political activism in the wake of radical feminism that has become evident among the more educated segment of religious has become a challenge. Soon enough, it is going to result in ideological muscle flexing with ecclesiastical and other authorities that might lead to a face-off. There is also the question of women ordination that unmercifully has refused to go away from daily discourse. If it were to happen today, how would the religious fare? Will it be limited to religious women willy-nilly or will it be extended to single women? If to all women, married and unmarried, will it come with or without the law of celibacy? Will celibacy then become optional? If it happens, will the female religious who so wish seek out priests of like minds or look elsewhere?

## II) *The incursion and influence of vices*

The world at large tends towards consumerism and uncontrolled materialism. This drives the business world to new inventions and technologies that continually drive the masses to go for the new or the modern that promises improved life. Sooner or later, the consecrated join the chorus and subtly set the pace for their colleagues in the developing countries even with their latent pride and discrimination. There are also the hedonistic tendencies spreading wide and fast throughout the world. Hedonism “paid more attention to the pursuit of bodily pleasure,” which poses a threat to one of the fundamental hinges of the consecrated life: chastity. The means of spread include the cables, videos and audios that

take unhealthy images and sounds into homes and societies (including those of the consecrated) and the consumers quickly emulate the contents. Modern music glorifies sex, nudity and indecent language. The society is dying through corrupt and seductive videos and audios.<sup>12</sup> Not only the laity fall victims; some clergy and consecrated are equally lured and, without firm resistance, cave in.

#### ***1.2.4 Steady decline of asceticism, especially among the active religious***

With a prevailing situation of materialism, consumerism, secularism, etc, there is an increased decline of asceticism, the very virtue that nurtures and sustains the consecrated life right from the origins. We recall that the monastic movement emerged as a way of incarnating the asceticism and martyrdom of the first three centuries of Christianity, which had turned into a spiritual way of life for all Christians. This was the inspirational factor, the nature and foundational characteristic leading the first monks to the famous *fuga mundi*. Today, the consecrated life we inherited and the life many of us live are by far alienated from these original features. What we see now is a direct opposite, much of externalism that more and more suffocates the interior life.

## **2) Consecrated life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: the African/Nigerian Situation**

This appendix calls us to examine as well the situation of the African continent with regard to the above noted features. In other words, is the situation of Africa the same or do we

---

<sup>12</sup> ANTHONY J.V. OBINNA, *Ndi Igbo: Time to think* (report), in *The Leader*, LV (44), Sunday, November 9, 2014, p 1 (i.e. Front page).

experience more or less some others more outstanding? The available materials make it more comfortable to talk about Nigeria rather than Africa. Prominent among them is the work of Izu M. Onyeocha already referred.

### **2.1 *The Positive or appreciable trends***

The positive trends seen earlier also apply to the African-Nigerian situation in various degrees. New or renewed forms of consecrated life show their faces just as new foundations spring up with renewed zeal. Yet there are negative sides which we shall highlight soon after. Equally, the African/Nigerian consecrated are prominent in the Church's mission, *ad gentes* or *ad intro*, be it at the universal or the local levels.

### **2.2 *The Negative or worrisome trends***

Izu Onyeocha offered a statistics, which I present here along with the resultant analysis. According to him, the statistics on Nigeria alone, quoted in 2004, shows that:

There are 3,627 Nigerian diocesan priests as against 498 missionary or religious priests, 210 Nigerian brothers and 2,936 Nigerian members of indigenous religious congregations. When put together [Nigerian/non-Nigerian, diocesan/consecrated], they total 4,148 priests, 270 brothers and 4,377 sisters. The proportion of priests to sisters is roughly 16:17. The ratio to brothers is 16:1 while sisters to brothers is 17:1. This shows how badly outnumbered the brothers are. These data bring to the fore a number of challenges as follows: number versus quality, modernity versus prudish-ness, motivation versus individualism, poverty versus personal dignity,

chastity versus the survival instinct, obedience versus self determination.<sup>13</sup>

While these statistics are useful to us in the development of our topic, others of different kinds (based on particular behavioural claims) would have been necessary to give credit to certain claims. Unfortunately I'm not now in the position to supply them. Yet the resultant anomalies and challenges listed by Onyeocha are useful to us for which I don't hesitate to cite them profusely.

### **2.2.1 Vocation boom: credits and pitfalls, joys and worries**

While the old churches experience lack of vocations to the priesthood and to the consecrated life, Africa (and Nigeria in particular) is "blessed with an abundance of new entries. Every advertisement receives overwhelming response. Candidates troop in from all backgrounds and all corners to seek their vocation as Disciples of Christ. They seek to meet with any possible requirement such that selection presents quite a challenge..."<sup>14</sup> To support this, Benedict XVI hinted, as he spoke also of Africa and Asia to the Aosta priests on issues of vocation, that: "In these past few weeks I have received *ad limina* visits from the Bishops of Sri Lanka and the Southern part of Africa; vocations there are increasing;... they are so numerous that it is proving impossible to build enough seminaries to accommodate all these young men who want to be priests."<sup>15</sup> These are credits, source of joy, an apparent zeal, for which we must give thanks to the "Lord of the harvest" because it implies a positive numerical future.

---

<sup>13</sup> IZU M. ONYEOCHA, *o.c.*, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> ID, *o.c.*, pp. x and 1.

<sup>15</sup> JIM SHEERIN, *o.c.*, p. 107.

The reasons for the decline of vocations in the west have not had strong effects in Africa/Nigeria because of the relative young age of the local churches and because of the pace of development. So, contrary to the situations of the older churches, "Our houses are full everywhere and seminaries and juniorates spring up like mushrooms everyday."<sup>16</sup> New foundations spring up and absorb so many that offer themselves.

On another note, the abundance of vocations in Africa/Nigeria is also a cause for worry because the underlying motivational forces don't always point at the right direction. So, Benedict XVI, offering a valuable social analysis of the situation, did not delay in making qualifications and identifying another culture as he remarked:

Of course, this joy also carries with it certain sadness since at least a part of them comes in the hope of social advancement. By becoming priests, they become like tribal chiefs, they are naturally privileged, they have a different lifestyle, etc. Therefore weeds and wheat grow together in this... crop of vocations and the Bishops must be very careful in their discernment; they must not merely be content with having many future priests but must see which really are the true vocations, discerning between the weeds and the good wheat. However, there is a certain enthusiasm of faith because they are in a special period of history... when it is clear that the traditional religion is no longer adequate. People

---

<sup>16</sup> IZU M. ONYEOCHA, *o.c.*, p. 17.

are realizing... that these traditional religions contain a promise within them but are waiting for something... their culture is reaching out... and two offerings – Islam and Christianity – are the possible historical response.... In a certain sense there is springtime of faith in these countries.<sup>17</sup>

The Pope has opened our eyes; the vocation boom is not for nothing. Like the decline in the western countries, some driving forces are behind it. The Pope has just noted some: “hope of social advancement, privileges and elevated lifestyle.” Similarly, in spite of the dazzling academic credentials paraded by candidates, Izu had course to admit that clearly, “the overall quality is less than flattering from what is seen and heard about some religious. It is clear that a lot more discernment is called for now.” It is better to have a smaller, smarter strike force than a horde and full house that merely float along.<sup>18</sup> If not well managed, the horde and full house could lead to compromise with quality and the ideals. What is seen and heard about some religious could mainly be in the areas of compromise with consecrated life ideals (normally in the worldly pursuits, etc). In many instances, the theory is, to a large extent, far from the practice, the ideal from the real. The following sub-headings show other factors causing worries in the apparently joyful gift of vocational abundance in Africa/Nigeria.

---

<sup>17</sup> JIM SHEERIN, *o.c.*, p. 107. cf. CICLSAL, *Directives on formation in Religious Institutes*, 1990, n. 14.

<sup>18</sup> IZU M. ONYEOCHA, *o.c.*, p. 3. This claim by Onyeocha is supported by his other analysis as contained in his work: *What is religious about religious?*, Owerri: Claretian Publications, 1993.

**I) *Individual autonomy and pursuit of worldly advantages***

Talking specifically about Nigerian and the diocesan clergy, Sheerin strikes a note of prime importance, which also points at what obtains among some consecrated persons, especially of the clerical organizations. Sheerin wrote:

If there is anything in the priest or seminarian that shocks God's People, it is world-liness and greed, and the ambition to have: the best car, the best amenities, the most comfortable facilities. It is not because parishioners are mean or begrudging – they easily recognize the needs of life which the priest has, and good parish councils and finance committees work hard to see that these needs are met – but they are quick to recognize the incipient greed which hurts the priest's spirituality and endangers his entire vision of himself as a man of God.<sup>19</sup>

This is in spite of the canonical recommendation that “Clerics are to follow a simple way of life and avoid anything which smacks of worldliness” (c. 282.1).

This trend finds its way into the consecrated state as many persons, especially among the clergy, now go their way in fending for themselves and determining their future in terms of career and means of livelihood. Those concerned often seek to evade the common life, where it is applicable, and its prevailing principles, which they consider hindrances on their way. So, a good number seek to withdraw or live on their own, outside the community, so as to have their way. Various factors are responsible for this: the influence of the external life, popular attitude towards wealth and the rich, greed and selfishness, official neglect and group politicking

---

<sup>19</sup> JIM SHEERIN, *o.c.*, p. 44.

that undermines the ideals of consecrated life. These factors show that the driving forces are at times self-made while, at other times, they are other-made. They are self-made when at the bottom are quests for comfort, high life, social impression and admiration. In these cases, one's quests usually blind one from the realities of one's state of life and one goes off in his effort to attain his goal. Uppermost in the minds of the concerned, are no longer the vowed life and the underlying expectations but the end and the means to it. At this point, they are ready for any means possible and are willing to defend it even against common sense, should the authorities intervene. Consecrated life is "a living tradition of life and of the message of our Saviour" (VC 22). Before the derailments we see today, one wonders how we actually fulfil this in the church and the world of our time.

The drive to individual autonomy is other-made and apparently justified when it arises from official neglect and/or politicking that undermines the rights and wellbeing of the consecrated, especially the coenobites. Many of those at the helm of affairs fall prey to sectionalism, with the accompanying favouritism, for which some members do not get the attention due to them as persons or in their areas of assignment. I met a religious who narrated his experience in this regard. He quoted an authority saying: "If anyone comes and disturbs, we listen to him, if not, we keep quiet and know that he can fend for himself." Izu has issues involving church employers worthy of mention: the consecrated, like all else, work to earn their living and they often do so in church-owned institutions. But, in spite of their enormous exertions,

they are underpaid. The employers seem to think that their food and wellbeing fall down from heaven.<sup>20</sup>

Some explicitly refer the religious back to the community as though [this] has a secret mint that pumps in cash. From within the religious communities themselves, the sharing of goods seems to leave them in want of even the most basic things, thus making them wonder whether it would not be better to exert less and get more or... something eventually. Why must a religious that works hard and conscientiously have to look to sympathizers for toiletries, pens and transport money? Many religious, especially those abroad, that found themselves in the state of perpetual want, despite the substantial financial and material contributions they make to the wellbeing of the entire community, have been tempted to make private provisions for their personal comfort or... even decided to leave the community altogether.<sup>21</sup> One who practices poverty and

---

<sup>20</sup> Cf. VV.AA, *Remuneration of ecclesiastical workers – Proceedings of the Annual Conference of the Canon Law Society of Nigeria, 2011* (ed. by P.E. Okpalaeke/J.B. Okoye), Awka: Fab Anieh Nig. Ltd, 2012. Thus, Nigerian Major Seminaries are now suffering as qualified lecturers (Professors, PhD, etc.) abandon them for secular higher institutions where they are more than well paid: ₦200,000 – ₦500,000 monthly as against ₦30,000 – ₦50,000 in seminaries or church-owned institutions. The religious are included in the rush for a greener pasture only that some overdo it by engaging even in canonically prohibited enterprises: businesses of all kinds, trading, public transport operation, contracting, etc.

<sup>21</sup> Priests seek incardination into various dioceses. Questions are raised about total submission of gifts, emoluments, inheritances, etc, as the vowed poverty requires. One goes extra mile to look for money.

detachment is also entitled to a certain level of personal dignity.<sup>22</sup>

## II) *Consequence of undeveloped economies, strong family ties*

The economies of the nations are still undeveloped and unbalanced in the face of teeming populations. Hence, people do everything possible, including the illegal and the immoral, to make ends meet. Corruption quickly takes over as money becomes the chief determinant of one's social worth and relevance. Everything is monetised; so the quest for money becomes rampant. Before you know it, Mary J. Obiora notes:

Our society strongly challenges our vocation in many aspects. One of these is the crazy rush to acquire and accumulate possessions. Any obstruction, real or imagined, on the way is forcefully levelled in order to be rich, to be famous and to have titles that perish with human transient life. It is a worm that eats deeply in our society and if the consecrated are not watchful, they can also become unfortunate victims [as indeed some have become]. This will be devastating and contradict our "status" as close friends of Jesus.... When we compete with our counterparts in the World, we suffer derailment from our vocation, which is deeply rooted in the life of Jesus.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> IZU M. ONYEOCHA, *o.c.*, pp. 4 – 5.

<sup>23</sup> MARY JEROME OBIORA, *Discipleship: its meaning and implications in the scripture and in our cultural set-up*, in VV.AA, *Discipleship and renewal* (already cited), p. 35.

Our country is rich (in mineral resources and human endowments) but paradoxically suffers adverse poverty that wears a lot of ugly faces. Consequently, the consecrated life quickly loses its feature as the best example of radicalism of Christian discipleship as many of her members imbibe the sick philosophy of “*If you can't bit them, you join them*”. In principle, once one is set to work, maximum concentration is needed, a total break with any other activity/engagement is an essential requisite. Some consecrated persons, especially among the religious, are no longer showing this in their response as they pursue wealth with the same vigour as the laity. In furtherance of this point, Izu raised questions that allude to concrete ills and compromised situations:

What is it that leads a religious to begin making private arrangements for studies, for biological family support, for future personal security? What would lead the religious to either under declare or otherwise completely hold back the gifts he or she receives? What leads the religious to seek to establish private friendship with the rich? What leads the religious to begin to keep personal secretes and avoid prying eyes in connection with his or her associations and interactions? The answers to such questions would reveal the nature of the challenge of the vow of poverty.<sup>24</sup>

Many do not hesitate to do whatever is possible to them – up to quitting rather than give up. Whoever does not follow suit is jeered at, mocked and made to fall in line.

### III) *The worries of the Church Hierarchy*

---

<sup>24</sup> IZU M. ONYEOCHA, *o.c.*, p. 14.

Not few ecclesiastical authorities are worried about the awesome development of priests and religious going their way to pursue riches. Just in recent times, some of the local church publications contain calls for caution. Francis Cardinal Arinze, during the ordination of the six candidates of the congregation of Christ the Emmanuel (the Emmanuelites), at St Jude Catholic Church, Ohuru in Obingwa LGA, Abia State, on 13/9/14, “cautioned the candidates against extreme materialism.”<sup>25</sup> Similarly:

The Catholic Archbishop of Abuja, John Cardinal Onaiyekan, has called on ordained men and women of God to live modest lives worthy of emulation. Onaiyekan made the call on... 13 July [2014] in Abuja in an interview at the Silver Jubilee celebration of Religious Vows of the Sisters of Saint Louis. During the celebration... Onaiyekan expressed concern that, instead of ensuring that souls were converted to God, some religious leaders were distracted by material wealth. He said modesty should be the standard for anyone who pledges to serve God. The Cardinal explained that though the body needs the material things to function, there should be limit on how they are applied.... He cautioned religious leaders who had access to wealth not [to] display them on worldly acquisition to the detriment of the poor in society./ ... He urged priests to strive to keep to their religious vows to enable lay people emulate them....<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, *Six Emmanuelites ordained priests in Aba* (report), in *The Leader*, LV (38), Sunday, September 28, 2014, p. 8.

<sup>26</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, *Onaiyekan, Men of God should not parade their wealth* (report), in *The Sage* 5 (18), July 27 – August 9, 2014, p. 5.

One of the consequences of materialism is loss of some socio-religious values like sacrifice. Nothing is done for charity and for generosity any longer but for money. The consecrated person's life, like that of the priest, is basically a sacrifice for others. This aspect is quickly eroded by the selfish-individualistic pursuits. The consecrated, like the priest, in many instances are no longer for others; others are for them. They no longer deprive themselves, like Christ, to enrich others (2Cor 8:9), especially the common masses. These rather deprive themselves to enrich the priest-consecrated due to the pressure the latter mount on them. In majority of the cases, our ministries (as priests or consecrated) are no longer a service rendered to the people of God. We are served contrary to Christ's injunction and example: I came "not to be served but to serve" (Mt 20:28; Mk 10:45) "and to give my life for my sheep" (Jn 10:11). Service implies lowering or humbling oneself, with some **ascetic** tone, so as to lift up the lowly, the little brothers and sisters of Christ, just like Christ did (Phil 2:8). In all, we are no longer so eager for the work for which we claim called and consecrated. But we hold on to the title because it's a sure means of attaining our ultimate goal: general material wellbeing. The vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life, therefore, end up being an "ecclesiastical career," accepted in an attempt to climb higher. A second-century author reminded us that "The faithful do not reap a quick harvest: they have to wait for it to ripen slowly because, if God rewarded them quickly, religion would be a career and not the worship of God. It would consist in the pursuit of self-interest, not piety."<sup>27</sup> This is exactly what happens in our time in most of the cases with

---

<sup>27</sup> A SECOND-CENTURY AUTHOR, *Homily*: Ch 18,1 – 20,5.

priests and the consecrated. Referring to the cases of Bishops, but which I think is applicable to priests and consecrated persons, Pope Francis I said: "It is sad when we see a man who seeks this office and does all he can to get it and when he gets it does not serve, instead goes around like peacock and lives only for his vanity."<sup>28</sup>

#### IV) *Management of the abundant vocations*

Another side of the worries that may go with the abundance of vocations in the developing countries is management on the part of the authorities. As Benedict XVI, Onyeocha, etc., have cautioned, there is need for proper and stricter discernment. I quickly remark here that this would not mean "family planning even in labour rooms." It will not mean rascal dismissal of the formandi under any reason or excuse. That will lead to victimization and eye-service as the formandi learn to avoid the formator's eye by all means only to raise their heads after the initial formation. Greatest prudence is needed at the time of admitting new candidates so as to avoid situations where large numbers are professed who are not well cared for due to limited resources. There are cases where facilities meant for a certain number were put at the service of double or triple the same number.<sup>29</sup> The overall human formation of the members suffers as half-baked religious are produced in the end. Izu Onyeocha offers us two examples:

---

<sup>28</sup> FRANCIS I, *You make the Church 'sick' if you don't support your bishop* (report), in *The Leader*, LV (44), Sunday, November 9, 2014, p. 16 (i.e. back page).

<sup>29</sup> cf. GERARD M. NWAGWU, *Religious life in Africa today*, in *AFER*, 35 (4), 1993, p. 226.

Religious seem to have become the most backward-looking segment of the population. For instance, few religious houses, especially among the females, make provision for their members to have access to newspapers and magazines in their budgeting. Few listen to radio/TV news, and fewer still seem to be aware of the prevailing or changing socio-political climate, both locally and internationally. The culprit for this is probably the fact that most religious women operate on very limited educational resources with no more than school certificate. Ill-equipped to grapple with complex issues, the most they can do is play audiocassette and watch home videos. Very few are aware of what goes on even in religious circles. Encyclicals, basic new teachings in the Church and the Church's position on certain issues of faith and morals are unknown to the religious. That limits their ability to participate meaningfully in topical discussions, aimed at propagating, clarifying or defending the faith.<sup>30</sup> The management style is characterized by idiosyncratic policies, often out of sync with current realities. The religious themselves assure themselves that all they require to be good religious would be to say their prayers, keep their vows, avoid getting into trouble by complying with what the authorities say....<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> And this is the crop from which formators are chosen thereby leading to compromise too in formation and production of more ill-equipped consecrated persons (not only in education but also in other areas).

<sup>31</sup> IZU M. ONYEOCHA, *o.c.*, pp. 3 – 4.

The present situation of vocation boom and large recruitments point towards mismanaged formation and hence the production of mediocre. However, it has been observed that it is not always the same between the international and the indigenous congregations. While the former are more prudent, the latter are not. The former often:

Go for smaller numbers and provide them with highly personalised formation. Local congregations go for large numbers and often can only provide generalised formation. The difference quickly becomes clear in favour of the international congregations when the time comes to test the formation received. Smaller numbers mean that budgets could be surgically applied where they are most required. Larger numbers managed with limited resources sometimes have to do without even some essentials. As scarcity is the creator of demand, there is the tendency to scramble for access to whatever one can for oneself and the spirit of sharing is jettisoned in favour of personal survival. If power is a sure way to access of scarce goods, then the scramble for power is acute. The incidence of bickering is more likely in a situation of scarcity since some will be perceived to grab a disproportionate portion of what should belong to all. Those who leave for whatever reason fare differently.<sup>32</sup>

## V) *Undermining personal dignity in the face of large numbers*

---

<sup>32</sup> ID, o.c., p. 13.

The other example from Izu hints exactly on mismanagement of facilities due to number thereby undermining human dignity and exposing members to danger:

It seems to have become a normal practice in Nigeria to literally sandwich religious in multi-occupancy rooms such that there is little privacy and little dignity. One could claim that it was as a result of poverty, but nothing suggests that material poverty must necessarily mean lack of personal dignity. Even children would appreciate some privacy even though they are put in dormitories where they could watch over to make sure they are all right. An adult could, if necessity demands, live in a dormitory for a short time during outings, etc, but not as a permanent arrangement. There are countless annoyances in adults cohabiting: Some throw things around, some drag their feet, some snore, some sleep-walk and sleep-talk, some put on lights when others want darkness and vice versa, some never stop talking or whispering to their friends while others need complete silence. Also more worrying is the possibility of violating or being violated when most vulnerable in such a compromised situation. It is also possible to scandalize or be scandalized, to mislead or be misled in such a situation. This is not a matter of poverty but that of common sense and judgment.<sup>33</sup>

### **2.2.2 *Proliferation of religious institutes***

While the western world suffers acute decline of vocation, developing countries witness rather a proliferation of

---

<sup>33</sup> ID, *o.c.*, p. 5.

institutes, with dubious purposes, similar, confused or undefined charismas, utter disregard of the laid down canonical and hierarchical rules such as: securing a clearly written Episcopal approval, a reliable and rightly-earned sustenance, laying a solid foundation by way of formation, orientation and openness to consecrated life tenets, etc. Here in Nigeria we've heard even of seminarians founding religious groups who operate underground. Much as the Spirit acts through anyone, there are some questionable implications such foundations bring to our imagination.

Among some prominent figures, the purpose of such foundations is seemingly for mere ostentation, on the part both of the founders and the members. The founders consciously or otherwise may simply be creating a domain for themselves, a people to parade in public with the concomitant homage and reverence by the boys/girls, with little or no show of interest in their spirituality, no visible interest to be on the side of the Church or defend her positions, all of which raise questions and doubts concerning the part of the Spirit in the project. On the part of the members, it may all be the quest for ordination or profession so as to validly parade oneself as a priest or consecrated – definitely for some ulterior motives other than spirituality or salvation. In some cases, it is to evade the hammer of the perceived enemy superior and his/her cohorts, or a solution to an endemic crises, dissension and division stemming from the political, social and economic inconveniences of the affected.

Proliferation of institutes and forms of religious life are not new. They've been there in the Church's history. It actually contributed to the rise of some regulations by the Hierarchy in the effort to guide both the foundations and their growth. But while it may be less fashionable in the west today, developing churches, like Africa/Nigeria, seem to cherish bringing new institutes into being even when their future is precarious.

In various forums, especially outside the shores of Africa, it has been argued that the vocation boom is a consequence of undeveloped economy and the resultant unemployment. The same argument goes for the proliferation of institutes. Young men and women are readily available for anyone who offers to take them. Their readiness for the spirituality, apostolate, lifestyle, etc, is another question: to be considered, they think, precisely after profession or ordination. Hence, one is tempted to think or ask whether the teeming young men and women seeking admission into seminaries and convents do not see the ever-springing new institutes as acceptable alternatives to the acute unemployment in their countries, given that priesthood and consecrated life offer better chances of elevated lifestyle, privileges, honour, prestige and power. These are concerns that call for attention and scrutiny rather than boasting in the face of the boom. John Paul II expressed his concerns in the cited document (VC nn 12, 62).

### **2.2.3 *Still far from the Promised Land***

Concluding his work, Izu says that consecrated life seems to still be a learning process for Nigerians/Africans who are still largely products of indigenous cultures.

Most religious come from pious but simple backgrounds. Most have left nothing materially to become religious and still have the tendency to seek rather than give. Thus, poverty presents a serious challenge as most religious are in no position to assist poor ageing and ailing parents or assist younger siblings to find their feet in the world. Neither can the congregation afford to pay all bills in all families when they have hardly found the resources to keep their members going.<sup>34</sup>

In other words, consecrated life in Nigeria is still largely marked by the burdens of poverty: the basic human needs are not yet assured for which the consecrated are not yet able to devote themselves wholeheartedly to living the commitments they took on themselves. Along this same line, family ties and support are high bumps on their race to the Promised Land and hence practical challenges waiting for official resolve.

It's not only poverty; chastity and obedience also present their difficulties. They are problematic to us as to other peoples of the world. Apart from being a natural daily struggle for every normal adult to live in chastity, factors like the quick changes going on in the world and in the society, aided by new technologies, etc, make the struggle harder for the consecrated. Occasions of temptation abound around us. Worse still, for the poorly managed congregations, already noted, dire economic needs push their members, especially the females, who have to look elsewhere for assistance, to the

---

<sup>34</sup> ID, *o.c.*, p. 14.

extreme and render them vulnerable. Izu Onyeocha has some more points.<sup>35</sup>

So also in the practice of obedience, the way things go, particularly among the female congregations, show that we're still far from the ideal. Practically, superiors are semi gods who wield power for its sake. Theirs is not service, as Christian authority is defined, but often a reign of intimidation and harshness that stifle human maturity.<sup>36</sup>

### **3. Administrative responses to (some of) the anomalies/challenges**

The renewal of the consecrated life implies a re-examination or re-evaluation or stock-taking of the life, in search of fresh vigour and meaning – a change for a new beginning. This workshop is an aspect of renewal process for the consecrated.

#### **3.1 *Apply the canonical disciplines but mind yourself!***

In the Church, superiors (like bishops) are custodians, directors, counsellors, umpires and caretakers of their various groups. By the same token, they are equally disciplinarians when this becomes necessary and unavoidable; i.e. when the brothers or sisters begin to flout or violate the principles, demands and ideals of their state and commitment, of course, following the canonical stipulations and showing pastoral care: love, tenderness and protection of the subject's vocation. It is not certain how many of the superiors know their canonically authorised powers in the area of discipline and the **nuances** inherent in the laws and procedures. I guess this

---

<sup>35</sup> ID, *o.c.*, pp. 5 – 7. Please see the attached excerpt.

<sup>36</sup> ID, *o.c.*, pp. 7 – 9. Please see the attached excerpt.

is an area you show particular interest in the choice of this years topic and exponent.

It is not obligatory for a superior to be a canonist, so that he/she may know the canonical stipulations on consecrated life. Yet it's necessary for one to be informed on these matters. He/she needs an expert in canon law who specializes on consecrated life to counsel him/her when, for example, carrying out the disciplinary actions so that he/she may do it properly. Many superiors are not well-informed; they lack knowledge of some facts, principles and procedures. So, they err in ways they would not like.

The laws and procedures are put for particular reasons. Infringement of even the least detail may, therefore, render the whole process null and void. Especially if the subject is well informed, the superior may make fool of him/herself in the process of applying the law. To clarify myself, let's consider some issues and examples: ....

And so, I'm saying in essence that some of the anomalies we see today exist or persist because the superiors (for various reasons) are found wanting in their duties as custodians. Either they are involved themselves (in the anomalies) or they don't know or have the political willpower to do things right. To wield the canonical hammer, I guess, they are conscious of the fact that "One who lives in a glass house does not throw stones." When a superior, for example, violates the vowed poverty by going to observable lengths to acquire, possess and live as a bourgeois, how would he/she expect his/her subjects to uphold the constitutions?

Definitely he/she has given them a free hand and in most cases will close his/her eyes to their worrisome tendencies. He/she will not trust in the power of secrecy because the subjects have their ways of exhuming the truth. Besides “everything secret comes to light at the appointed time.”

### ***3.2 Run a sincere, transparent and all-inclusive government***

As custodians and leaders of your various orders you must develop and sustain the willpower to do your jobs accordingly. You must be the faithful and wise steward who knows how to dispense the ration of food to the householders at the appropriate times (Mt ). When you have done so, then personal vices will show themselves as such and as such have to be dealt with. Undue neglect or favouritism sparks off chains of derailment. Make useful plans for the institutes not only for your tenure but also for years ahead. This should guide the recruitments, professions, ordinations, postings and the missionary expansions, etc. Assign duties to members according to the needs of the institute and according to personal capabilities and never as rewards for “delivering.” If one is or feels dumped for not “belonging” or playing along, surely, for the instinct of survival, one goes his or her way. For God’s sake, it’s not proper for religious to go finding jobs for themselves, especially due to official neglect. When that is the situation, religious also choose (to the detriment of the needs of the institutes) particular courses to study in view of opportunities to get. Such creates tension in the practice of authority/obedience and the overall wellbeing of the members.

### **3.3 African Version of Consecrated/Religious Life (Practical Inculturation)?**

With particular reference to the vowed poverty, some African/Nigerian religious, in what looks like a joke, have advocated for the evolvement of an African version of consecrated/religious life that would take cognisance of our cultural/peculiar situations and challenges. Nothing is wrong with it. The issue is: who does it, in what occasion, etc.? General or Provincial Chapters of the congregations and orders in Africa have the challenge to lead the way; so also the Conferences of Major Superiors of men and women. Hence, a forum like this is a golden opportunity to delve into the matter, may be to agree first whether we need such a thing or not. If we do, what modalities are to be followed? How do we make our voice heard after? Who does the study and the articulation of the facts, the yearnings and the opinions of Africans/Nigerians? Etc.

Actually some reflections and studies have been made in this regard by many Africans/Nigerians, including my humble self. But there is need for a body to assemble all the points and suggestions for a higher body like yours to present them officially on behalf of our people. Individuals cannot do it alone. Congregations can, but it must be well articulated and presented. While they waste precious time, their members take the steps/initiatives as it augurs well with them.

To say the last word, consecrated life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is still alive and active; yet it faces lots of challenges that make our hearts beat. At most, we wait to see the Spirit's response to these challenges in whichever form he may choose to do so.

## CHAPTER THREE

### *Perfectae Caritatis* and the Constant Demand for Renewal

By

Fr. Jude A. Ossai, OSA  
*Augustinian Novitiate, Jos*

#### **Introduction**

Renewal, adaptation, aggiornamento and re-evaluation are very healthy and necessary in every institution and life in general. It is even more imperative in Spiritual life because man's relationship with God is not static but dynamic. There is a constant call for conversion – from something or from one ethical behaviour to another. Religious Life is not an exception. Religious Institutes and individual religious are required to constantly go through the process of aggiornamento, depending on their Charism, their apostolate and social setting. There is need for re-interpretation of the vows and religious life in general so as to constantly give them freshness, meaning and prophetic value. Van Bavel supports this view when he noted with an example that the way St. Francis saw and lived poverty during his time was different from the way Pachomius, Basil and Augustine saw and lived it during their time. Yet, they all made impact on their milieu.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Van Bavel T.J, OSA. *The Basic Inspiration of Religious Life*, Edited by John E. Rotelle, translated by Henry Jackson. Villanova: Augustinian Press (1996). P. 154

One can say that the need for renewal is the major reason Pope Francis has declared the Year of Consecrated Life. This period of fourteen months (from 30<sup>th</sup> November 2014 to 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2016) is proposed for sincere re-evaluation of our lives as Consecrated persons. The Pope proposes three main aims for this year of Consecrated Life: To look to the past with gratitude, to live the present with Passion and to embrace the future with hope.<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis notes in his Apostolic Letter that “maintaining our history is essential for preserving our identity”. He calls on all religious to, therefore, look at their history and patrimony in order to revive the high ideals, the vision and the values that inspired them to join their respective Institutes.<sup>3</sup>

Urging the religious to live the present with passion Pope Francis does not only want the religious to look at the intentions and inspirations of their Founders, but more importantly, to re-appraise the Gospel as the absolute rule of religious life.<sup>4</sup> Sincere renewal demands that the religious ask “whether the gospel is truly the ‘manual’ for our daily living and the decisions we are called to make”.<sup>5</sup> With regard to the future the Pope urges hope. This hope, the Pope says, “is not based on statistics or accomplishments, but on the One in

---

<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis. *Apostolic Letter on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life*, I, 1-3

<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis. *Apostolic Letter on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life*, I, 1

<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis. *Apostolic Letter on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life*, I, 2. Cf. Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Up-to-Date Renewal of Religious Life, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 28 October 1965. No. 2

<sup>5</sup> Pope Francis. *Apostolic Letter on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life*, I, 2

whom we have put our trust (cf. *2Tim* 1:2), the one for whom nothing is impossible (*Lk* 1:37)."<sup>6</sup>

Each form of Consecrated life is expected to question what God and the people of today are asking of them.<sup>7</sup> For religious life to remain relevant, retrospection, projection and prophesy are indispensable. There has to be a sincere evaluation of how meaningful our mission and indeed, our "being", has been. Consecrated life has to ask if it is relevant to the people of today. The content of the answer to this question will determine the shift and adaptation that is required for the future.

In this year of Consecrated life the Pope urges all consecrated persons to live out their life with joy because "where there are religious, there is joy".<sup>8</sup> He expects the religious to display enthusiasm, zeal, contentment and satisfaction because "agloomy disciple is a disciple of gloom"<sup>9</sup> Consecrated persons should increase the church by their attractive way of life.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Pope Francis. *Apostolic Letter on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life*, I, 3

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Pope Francis. *Apostolic Letter on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life*, II, 5

<sup>8</sup> Pope Francis. *Apostolic Letter on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life*, II, 1

<sup>9</sup> Pope Francis. *Apostolic Letter on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life*, II, 1.

<sup>10</sup> Here Pope Francis applies the words of Pope Benedict XVI: "It is not by proselytizing that the Church grows, but by attraction". (See Pope Francis, *Evangelium Gaudium*, 14. The Pope wants to emphasize the need to attract people to the Church by the joyful and happy disposition of the religious as they live out their lives and fulfil their mission and apostolic endeavours.

The Year of Consecrated Life is meant to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, and of the Decree on the renewal of Religious Life, *Perfectae Caritatis*. While only the sixth Chapter of *Lumen Gentium* speaks of religious life, the entire document, *Perfectae Caritatis*, is centred on the renewal of religious life. The attention of this paper is focused on *Perfectae Caritatis*.

After a cursory look at the *Perfectae Caritatis* as a document, I will proceed to make some analysis of the document and seek to link the recommendations therein with the current situation of religious life, especially as we are living it in Nigeria today.

### **The Decree, *Perfectae Caritatis***

*Perfectae Caritatis* means “perfect Charity”. The document sees religious life as a call to perfection in charity. And this is very important for community living. *Perfectae Caritatis* is a Decree, ranking lower than the Constitutions and higher than the Declarations. It was approved and promulgated by Pope Paul VI on 28<sup>th</sup> October 1965 in the seventh public session of the Second Vatican Council. Of the 2,325 Council Fathers present, 2,321 Voted “yes” to the Document and only four voted “no”. So the document was almost unanimously adopted by the Council Fathers. Being a Decree, it carries much authority with it and requires that the entire Church takes it seriously.

It contains twenty-five paragraphs and many of these have sub-paragraphs. It contains guidelines and general norms for the renewal of religious life. Ernest Larkin describes *Perfectae*

*Caritatis* like this: “It is neither the *magna carta* hoped for by the *avant-garde* nor a throwback to pre-conciliar thinking. One could characterize the decree as basically conservative, balanced, almost dialectical in its effort to assert both sides of each question. But it is positive and practical and breathes the spirit of Vatican II”.<sup>11</sup> The document is original in thinking and content and stands out as the fruit of a thorough work done by the committees that handled the original draft documents.

*Perfectae Caritatis* was followed, less than a year later, by *Ecclesiae Sanctae* published on 6<sup>th</sup> August, 1966 by Pope Paul VI. *Ecclesiae Sanctae* contains norms and prescriptions for implementing *Perfectae Caritatis*.

It is important to note that any discussion on Religious Life without a mention of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*,<sup>12</sup> is not complete. The Vatican II Council Fathers had in November 1964 approved this Document on the nature of the Church and had dedicated the entire Chapter Six to the Religious as a form of life within the Church. Though our primary focus is on *Perfectae Caritatis*, reference must be made to *Lumen Gentium* as well.

### **The Outline of *Perfectae Caritatis***

*Perfectae Caritatis* in its treatment of the subject of renewal touches every aspect of the religious life. These different

---

<sup>11</sup> Ernest E. Larkin, “Religious Life in Light of Vatican II”, in [carmelnet.org/larkin/larkin068.pdf](http://carmelnet.org/larkin/larkin068.pdf), p. 303

<sup>12</sup> Second Vatican Council. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, 21 November 1964. Nos. 43-47.

aspects are given attention paragraph by paragraph. Here I present the breakdown made by Jeffery Pinyan<sup>13</sup>:

- A. *Introduction* (No. 1)
- B. *Principle of Renewal* (Nos. 2-6)
  - No. 2: Five general principles of renewal<sup>14</sup>
  - No. 3: Call to renewal
  - No. 4: Authority in carrying out the renewal
  - No. 5: Dedication to Evangelical Counsels and Contemplation
  - No. 6: Sources of Renewal.
- C. *Types of Religious Life* (Nos. 7-11)
  - No. 7: Contemplatives
  - No. 8: Apostolates (Active communities)
  - No. 9: Monastic
  - No. 10: Lay Religious
  - No. 11: Secular
- D. *The Evangelical Counsels* (Nos 12-14)
  - No. 12: Chastity
  - No. 13: Poverty
  - No. 14: Obedience
- E. *Religious Lifestyle* (Nos. 15-18)
  - No. 15: Communal Living
  - No. 16: Papal Cloister
  - No. 17 Habits
  - No. 18: Education and Formation
- F. *Lifecycle, Work and governance* (Nos. 19-24)

---

<sup>13</sup> Jeffrey Pinyan. <http://www.catholiccrossreference.com/blog/>.

- No. 19: Founding new communities
  - No. 20: Community Identity (Ministry and Mission)
  - No. 21: Discontinuing a community
  - No. 22: Combining similar Communities
  - No. 23: Conferences or Councils of Major Superiors
  - No. 24: Fostering Vocation.
- G. *Conclusion* (No. 25).

### **Previous Efforts towards Renewal**

It is important to note that “renewal” which is the focus of *Perfectae Caritatis*, has been carried out in different ways before Vatican II. Notable Popes in this effort were Leo XIII, Pius X and Pius XII. At different times there were different issues to deal with. In 1950, Pius XII proposed a reform with an Encyclical *Sponsa Christi*. Among other things the Pope made a general statement that:

... We find also in the Institute of Nuns some things that are neither necessary, nor complementary in themselves, but simply historical and external, that were born of circumstances of past times, that today have also changed much. When these other characters are no longer advantageous to or can impede another greater good, there is no special reason to be seen to conserve them.<sup>15</sup>

The context of this statement was the things that were not essential to contemplative canonical life. Unexpectedly,

---

<sup>15</sup> Cf. AAS 43 (1951), 37-44, as cited by Castellano J. Daniel in “Commentary on *Perfectae Caritatis*. Published on: [www.arcaneknowledge.org/catholic/councils/comment21-07.htm](http://www.arcaneknowledge.org/catholic/councils/comment21-07.htm)

however, certain strange recommendation came from different “reformers of the 1950s and early 1960s. The confusion that existed at this time and the obvious vitiation of focus by several institutes provided all the ingredients for radical reform before the opening of Vatican II Council. The Decree, *Perfectae Caritatis* was, therefore, inevitable.

*Perfectae Caritatis* sees renewal and adaptation of religious life to modern realities of life as a return to the beginnings, a going back to the Gospel and original Charism of the founders. The decree recommends therefore that all accretions of time in the observances and apostolates that do not correspond with the gospel and modern conditions must be cut off.<sup>16</sup> The two important considerations in the renewal of religious life, in the view of *Perfectae Caritatis*, are the Gospel and Modern times.

### **The Purpose and Aim of *Perfectae Caritatis***

In *Perfectae Caritatis* the Second Vatican Council did not intend to give a fundamental new orientation to religious communities. Rather, it sought to restore proper precedence and return to traditional norms. The call for return to traditional norms is not a recommendation to retain the *status quo* at all cost. “The up-to-date renewal of the religious life comprises both a constant return to the sources of the whole of the Christian life and to the primitive inspiration of the institutes, and their adaptation to the changed conditions of our time”.<sup>17</sup> The reason for the call to return to traditional norms is so that the religious institutes may recall the basic

---

<sup>16</sup> Ernest E. Larkin, “Religious Life in Light of Vatican II”, p. 305

<sup>17</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae Caritatis* 2

inspiration of their Founders and the gospel values that brought them into existence. This is very vital if the crisis of identity is to be avoided. The second paragraph of *Perfectae Caritatis* goes on to list five general principles of renewal<sup>18</sup>:

- a. Since religious life is *sequela Christi*, the Gospel which tells us about Him should be the supreme rule of all religious institutes.
- b. The spirit and aims of the founders of the religious institute and all their patrimony should be accepted, respected and retained. This is because it is for the benefit of the Church that institutes have their proper character and peculiarity.
- c. All institutes should share in the life of the Church. Religious are part of the Church and as such should, to the best of their ability and in consonance with their own natures, align with the Church in her undertakings in biblical, liturgical, dogmatic, pastoral ecumenical, missionary and social matters.
- d. Institutes should ensure that their members have a proper understanding of the people, of the conditions of the times and of the needs of the Church. This is aimed at arming the religious better as they serve humanity and participate in the evangelizing and missionary mandate of the Church.
- e. A spiritual renewal of the religious. This last point is believed to be the most important of the five. The reason is because “even the best-contrived adaptations to the needs of our time will be of no

---

<sup>18</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae Caritatis* 2

avail unless they are animated by a spiritual renewal...”

These five principles are the foundation stones on which the renewal of religious life, recommended by Vatican II should stand. The Decree is, therefore, a call for a deep reflection, a retreat and sincere evaluation of our respective religious institutes and ourselves as individual religious. This call which was put to the Church fifty years ago is still very relevant today. These five principles of renewal are condensed into three by Pope Francis in his Apostolic Letter on the Year of Consecrated Life. He has invited us, as we stated earlier, to look to the past with gratitude, to live the present with passion and to embrace the future with hope.

### **The Call to Renewal**

*Perfectae Caritatis* calls for renewal in the manner of prayer and work; in the government of the institute and so on. It was observed that the work of renewal is the responsibility of all members of the institute. In other words, the call to renewal is directed to all individual religious in collaboration and cooperation.<sup>19</sup> It is for the Chapters and competent authorities alone to establish norms of appropriate renewal and to legislate for it. However, the importance of the members of the institute is highlighted again when it states: “Superiors, however, in matters which concern the destiny of the entire institute, should find appropriate means of consulting their subjects and should listen to them”.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 4.

<sup>20</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 4.

I think that this insistence on “consulting” is very important today. There is the temptation among some Major Superiors to act as though they know everything. Some Major Superiors think that consulting the members of the Institute before taking critical decisions that affect the collective destiny of the Institute is a favour or show of magnanimity. No, it is not. It is the simple and right duty to perform. *Perfectae Caritatis* wants Major Superiors to consult and listen to their subjects. The reason is simple: The institute does not belong to you, the Superior, and so you are not allowed to clone it in your “image and likeness”. Needless to say that this has caused conflicts, cracks and at times, destruction of religious institutes.

The religious should renew themselves individually by recalling that they are consecrated to God and so have dedicated their whole life to the service of God and the Church. Each religious is reminded that the primary goal of religious profession is to leave everything and follow Jesus (cf. *Mk* 10:28; *Lk* 10:39; *1Cor* 7:32). The Decree states: “the members of each institute, therefore, ought to seek God before all else, and solely; they should join in contemplation, by which they cleave to God by mind and heart, to apostolic love, by which they endeavour to be associated with the work of redemption and to spread the kingdom of God”.<sup>21</sup>

The Council therefore reiterated the need for three practices that can foster closeness to Jesus Christ for whose sake we are religious: (a) Every religious should cultivate the spirit of prayer drawing on the authentic source of Christian

---

<sup>21</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 5.

spirituality; (b) The daily study of the sacred scripture; and (c) They should perform the sacred liturgy especially the holy Eucharist.<sup>22</sup>

*Sequela Christi* should be the motivation and evangelical pull of every religious. A religious is a religious because he or she willingly and personally elected to follow Christ more closely. It is sad to note that today many religious do not take these pivotal aspects of the life of a religious seriously. There appears to be lethargy and a lack of interest in prayers, including the Mass and the reading of sacred scriptures. There is no longer the fire and enthusiasm that used to characterize the religious. There seem to be more attention and interest in professionalism, academic excellence and different forms of activism. Many religious have become professional administrators and great intellectuals who have ceased to exude the joy of the Spirit.

In his address to the Conventual Minor Friars on 12<sup>th</sup> June 1995, Pope John Paul II stated that: "The efficacy of religious witness is found in being leaven of God and a reminder of the perennial values of the Gospel".<sup>23</sup> I believe that a major preoccupation for a Major Superior is how he or she can inspire a greater appreciation of the fundamental principles of religious life in the members of his or her institute. The Major superior ought to be concerned about the place of God, of Sacred Scripture and of Gospel values in the life of his or her members. If by the time a Major Superior finishes his or

---

<sup>22</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 6.

<sup>23</sup> John Paul II, *Consecrated Life: The Holy See speaks to Religious and Members of Secular Institutes*. Vol 21, No 2. Pp. 68-69.

her tenure members of his or her institute have grown to know and love God more and are more committed to the life of God and Gospel values, then such a Major Superior has succeeded in the renewal of the institute after the mind of Vatican II Council Fathers. Such a renewal leads to love of other members of the institute as brothers / sisters, reverence and love of their leaders and to better dedication to the Church and her mission.<sup>24</sup>

### **Sense of Identity**

A proper understanding of oneself breeds confidence and positive approach to life and the self. Where there is a crisis of identity, there is confusion and wrong choices. Numbers 7 to 11 of *Perfectae Caritatis* focus on the different types of religious life. This part of the document was very necessary because of the confusion and lack of proper understanding of the religious at the time of the Vatican II Council. One can say that there was a sort of crisis of identity: the difference between a religious and the Clergy, and the difference between the different religious institutes was not very clear.<sup>25</sup>

Vatican II Council Fathers endeavoured to situate Religious Life in its proper place within the Church by showing that it

---

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae Caritatis* 6

<sup>25</sup> The confusion regarding the nature, expectation and place of the religious within the Church was both from within and from outside. On the one hand some religious either forgot who they were by deviating from the original calling and ideals of their institutes or they carried out their mission and apostolates without the spirit of their institutes and their status as religious. On the other hand, there was a miss-understanding and misinterpretation of who a religious was by the clergy and the laity. But the question is, has the understanding changed today? Have the Laity and the clergy truly understood the place of the Religious in the Church? And if they have yet to understand, how should they be made to know?

is not an intermediary between clergy and laity. The Council rather returns the religious 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>26</sup>

A religious 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 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>27</sup>. This assertion is very vital as it reminds the religious 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 religious need to always remember that what makes him a religious is not really what he or she does, but how he does it.

---

<sup>26</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, 43. Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, Can. 487 and 488

<sup>27</sup> Ernest E. Larkin, “Religious Life in Light of Vatican II”, p. 304

In *Perfectae Caritatis* Numbers 7-11, the Council Fathers recognized five different types of religious life: The Contemplative, the Apostolate / Active Communities, the Monastic, the Lay Religious and the Secular Institutions.<sup>28</sup> The council believes that each form of religious life has its beauty and positive contribution to the Church. While asking these different forms of consecrated life to reform and adapt themselves to the current realities of the life and society, they are, nonetheless, urged to retain their peculiar natures.

Contemplatives remain “an ornament to the Church a fount of heavenly graces”.<sup>29</sup> The Active Communities perform, on behalf of the Church, the apostolic and charitable ministry entrusted to them.<sup>30</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>31</sup> Lay religious life is complete in itself and the Council holds it in high esteem

---

<sup>28</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>29</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 7.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae Caritatis* 8.

<sup>31</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 9.

because of its contribution in the education of the young, caring for the sick and in its other ministries.<sup>32</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>33</sup>

The Council Fathers have sought to recognize the different forms of religious / consecrated life, pointing out their peculiarities and contributions to the church's missionary mandate. The question is: after fifty years, can we say that the issue of identity crisis is over? I think that to a large extent, there is a greater awareness of who the religious are and there are principles and parameters drawn for the religious. Religious institutions are obviously aware of their charisms, their apostolates and duties towards the Church.

The problem I see, however, is the identity crisis that is noticeable among the Religious and Consecrated Persons themselves. There appears to be a big gulf between "what we know we are" and "who we are". All the religious know that they are religious and so different from "non-religious". However, "being" religious is becoming increasingly difficult. Put clearly, the religious hardly live like religious these days. This observation obviously goes for the major superiors as well.

Most clerical religious seem to value the clerical more than the religious state. This is a mistaken appreciation of who we

---

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 10.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 11.

are as religious and it is already a worrying issue, a crisis of identity. The diocesan priest is a priest, full stop. The religious priest has assumed another identity which *Lumen Gentium* believes to be authentic.<sup>34</sup> It must be seen that a religious is a religious by the way he strives for holiness and “perfect charity”, imbued by the evangelical Counsels.

Let us take some examples. There is what one can call an “over-clericalization” of the Religious institutes and the members themselves. Being a religious is no longer the main drive but being a priest. This already starts from the formation houses where the postulants and Novices are looking forward to “becoming *priests*”, not *religious*. There is no much interest and emphasis on Profession of Vows. Profession has become so transitory and unimportant that certain institutes do not even emphasize its celebration. Solemn Vows are now understood by the students in formation as “a bridge”, a “means” to the main thing - diaconate and priestly ordinations. The same applies to those already ordained who give exaggerated time and energy to celebrating their ordination anniversaries and only “mark” their profession anniversaries.

Some Religious priests cannot be distinguished from the diocesan priests and at times, from the lay people. Religious priests compete with lay people and diocesan priests in acquiring and possessing material property, in making career out their ministry and in pastoral approach. At times it is difficult to distinguish between a religious parish priest and a diocesan parish priest in the way the brothers who

---

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* 43.

collaborate in the parish ministry are treated. Very often, we are identified by what we wear and not by who we are. Those days, habit did not make a monk, but today, habit makes a monk. To make matters worse, some religious do not even like wearing their habits.

Female religious are not spared in this identity crisis. Some Sisters are just hanging on because it is difficult to remove the habit and the veil. Otherwise, the attitude of some sisters already suggest to you that either they do not know who they are or they do not like who they are. When a Sister already involves herself in secular business to the detriment of her apostolate and the health of her community, then there is trouble. Some sisters have adopted all kinds of pet projects and held tenaciously to them like business women. Some sisters flaunt the rules of their community and gallivant up and down looking for money and making name for themselves.

What about some Major Superiors who do not seem to understand their roles as leaders of religious institutes? Some male Major Superiors act like bishops but they are not; they actually belong to a different level and “wave length” within the Church. Some Major Superior, including some of their female counterparts, refuse to consult their brothers /sisters and instead, adopt unhealthy political gimmicks and uncharitable behaviours towards their subjects. Some Major Superiors have forgotten that they are fathers and mothers and that they are *primus inter paris*, vis-a-vis their subjects.

Instead, they abuse their power and create bad-blood within their institutes.<sup>35</sup>

In this year of Consecrated life, the Pope is asking us to re-evaluate our lives as religious, always bearing in mind that we are consecrated persons. We are also called to be prophets. We are different and we must show this difference by simply being faithful to our vows and charisms.

### **The Evangelical Counsels**

Numbers 12, 13 and 14 of *Perfectae Caritatis* concentrate on the three Evangelical Counsels of Chastity, Poverty and Obedience. Each number treats each of the three Counsels in the order it is written. Both *Lumen Gentium* and *Perfectae Caritatis* have made it clear that at the very root of religious life are the evangelical counsels. It is through the profession of vows that one becomes a Consecrated person to God. It is therefore, very important to include the evangelical counsels in the discussion of the renewal of religious life. The Christological value of Religious life is in the consecration of the religious to Christ and this consecration takes place through the evangelical counsels. The vows are worth revisiting and re-interpreted given the psychology and

---

<sup>35</sup> We understand how difficult it is to lead a religious Institute in these days that a lot has changed. Considering the attitudes of some religious as mentioned above, one can only say that it takes the grace of God to be a Major Superior. And that is the fact. Some religious are bent on doing their own thing and only remember the rules of the community when they are in trouble or when they are in need. Some create so much trouble that the Superior feels punished by being elected to lead. However, the Superior who has accepted to lead should be ready to also do the right thing as a leader. The superior should seek to establish or re-establish the ideal by being an example.

sociological ideologies of our modern society. The vows may face challenges but they still retain their relevance. *Perfectae Caritatis* believes this very strongly hence it re-proposes them to the religious as their basic foundation.

**Chastity:** Celibacy is a gift of grace from God and “it uniquely frees the heart of man (cf. *1Cor* 7:32-35) so that he becomes more fervent in love for God and for all men”. Chastity is for the religious, a most effective means of dedicating themselves wholeheartedly to the divine service and the works of the apostolate. In the mind of the Council Fathers Chastity has a functional role in the missionary mandate and service of the religious. Chastity is possible if the religious relies on God’s help in living it out.

The document makes an important observation when it says that chastity is better preserved when there is a true common life: “Further, let all, and especially superiors, remember that chastity is preserved more securely when members live a common life in true brotherly love”. This assertion is very true. Brothers or sisters who truly love one another in a community stand a better chance of living out the life of chastity very happily and convincingly. A healthy community protects and nurtures chastity.

*Perfectae Caritatis* makes one more important point regarding chastity. It argues that since chastity and its demand of continence touches “intimately the deeper inclinations of human nature”, candidates should not be admitted to take the vow of chastity if they are not adjudged to be “psychologically and affectively” mature. To lead them to

this maturity, they should be warned of the dangers to chastity and also taught that chastity that is dedicated to God is beneficial to the whole personality.<sup>36</sup> In other words, formation should be integral, positive and truthful.

The teachings of the Council Fathers fifty years ago are still very relevant today. As part of our renewal, we need to be much more thorough with our formation process and make sure that only mature people and those who are willing to live out the life are admitted to the vows.

**Poverty:** The document makes the following points regarding the vow of poverty:

1. Religious should choose poverty *voluntarily* as a way of imitating Christ who though was rich, chose to be poor so that we could become rich through his poverty. The underlined point here is voluntariness and willingness, not coercion or force. A religious should *voluntarily* choose to practice the evangelical counsel of poverty.
2. Religious should be poor in fact and in spirit. Put the other way round, the religious should be seen to be poor, having their treasures in heaven and not seeking worldly things.
3. In the practice of poverty, religious should put their trust in the providence of God. In other words, there should be no unhealthy preoccupation about tomorrow. It has been observed that there are some religious who within few years of their life under vows already begin to worry and to save for the future, just like business men and married men do. It is understandable when religious Institutes

---

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 12.

save for their future, as they should, but not when individual members out of a feeling of insecurity, begin to amass wealth and property for themselves.

4. Religious congregations may permit their members to renounce their inheritances, either the ones already acquired or the ones to be acquired later. The choice of the word *permit* is a bit curious here. By not using “commit” or “made to” or “forced” I think the council wants to reiterate the *voluntariness* of the vow of poverty. I believe it is very important that we pay attention to it. The reason is because we often fail to allow for voluntariness in our giving up of material things. Members of our institutes should be trained and spiritually guided to see giving-up of possessions as a spiritual thing, a value, and not as punishment. At times, certain structures of injustice within an institute make religious poverty and renouncing of inheritances both odious and impracticable. This happens in some cases where there is no transparency on the side of the custodians of the material properties of the institute or where there is the practice of double standard by the superiors, major or local.
5. The institute should endeavour to bear “a quasi-collective” witness to poverty, taking the local conditions into account. This they have to do by giving up part of their resources for the other needs of the church and the poor. In this regard the document makes reference to sharing of resources among provinces and houses. Communities with more resources should share with those who have little or nothing. This point is again very essential because much inequality and injustice are often

created in religious institutes where some persons keep moving from one rich community / apostolate to the other and some others keep moving from one poor one to the other.

6. Even though institutes have the right to possess temporary good for their sustenance and work, they should avoid any semblance of luxury, excessive wealth and accumulation of property.<sup>37</sup> *Presbyterorum Ordinis* of the Second Vatican Council has a similar admonition for priests.<sup>38</sup> I think the religious has a lot to do in this area because very often it is difficult to distinguish between the religious and others. In re-thinking and re-interpreting the vows, we still need to be conscious of the prophetic motif of the evangelical counsels.

**Obedience:** Regarding the vow of obedience *Perfectae Caritatis* stresses the following points:

1. By the vow of obedience a religious offers his will as a sacrifice of himself to God. He does this in imitation of Jesus Christ who came to do his Father's will (cf. *Jn* 4:34; 5:30; *Heb* 10:7; *Ps* 39:9), and actually did his Father's will. The religious, moved by the Holy Spirit subject themselves in faith to their superiors who hold God's place. Through this act of free submission of the will the religious are able to serve the brothers and the church as well. In the mind of the Council, Obedience is an act of faith in the God who relates to the religious through the superior. This theologico-anthropological

---

<sup>37</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 13.

<sup>38</sup> The Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, (7<sup>th</sup> December 1965). No. 17

dimension of this evangelical counsel elevates obedience from mere acquiescence, to an adoption of a Christological imitation. Through the impulse of the Holy Spirit, the religious places his faith in his superior who represents God as he seeks to do what Christ did. The vow of obedience is a special grace and should be treated as such.

2. Because the superiors represent God, the religious are expected to be humbly submissive to them. However, this submission should be done in the spirit of faith and of love for God's will and in accordance with their rules and constitutions. Furthermore, religious are expected to make use of their power of intellect and will, their gift of nature and grace in carrying out the command of their superior. It is in this way that the human dignity is maintained and respected and true maturity and freedom as children of God achieved.<sup>39</sup>

The points here are very apt in today's religious life experience. Suffice to say that the Council Fathers did not advocate a sheepish and zombie-like obedience. Like the Vow of poverty that has to be voluntary, the vow of obedience should be from one's free-will. The superior has to propose the will of God to his subject, and whatever he proposes has to correspond with the rules and constitutions of the institute. To some superiors, a religious who asks questions or complains that he is not consulted is a bad or disobedient religious. Some superiors prefer a robotic or zombie-

---

<sup>39</sup> See Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae Caritatis* 14.

like subject. For them these are “good religious” and the ones who seek to have a say in what concerns them are rebels and “bad religious”. This is contrary to the teachings of *Perfectae Caritatis* and it is tantamount to going back to the pre-Vatican II era. Furthermore, the superior is presented as God’s representative; and so the religious by his obedience obeys God. When a superior is uncharitable, or sectional or vindictive toward his subjects, he or she hardly qualifies to be an analogy for God talk less of taking the place of God. Such a superior obviously makes obedience very cumbersome and unattractive. In other words, a Superior has to be charitable, equitable and just since obeying him / her is obeying God.

3. To show the seriousness attached to the role of the superior on the issue of obedience, the Decree goes on to state that “superiors will have to render an account of the souls committed to their care (Heb 13:17)”. For this to be easy for them, superiors are advised to be docile to the will of God as they perform their duty and should exercise their authority in a spirit of service of the brethren.
4. The next paragraph continues with the theme of the superiors. Superiors are asked to govern their subjects, realizing always that they are sons of God and that they should respect them as human persons. They are also expected to foster the spirit of voluntary subjection instead of coercion or show of force. It means that superiors have to listen to their subjects

and foster cooperation among them. "Superiors therefore ought to listen to their subjects willingly and ought to promote cooperation between them for the good of the institute and of the Church." This they must do, while retaining their authority to decide and to prescribe what is to be done.

Pope John Paul II, in *Vita Consecrata*, stresses this authority of the superior when he states: "While authority must be above all fraternal and spiritual, and while those entrusted with it must know how to involve their brothers and sisters in the decision-making process, it should still be remembered that the final word belongs to authority and, consequently, that authority has the right to see that decisions taken are respected".<sup>40</sup>

Let us note one other crucial point on in this paragraph. Preserving the unity of the members of the institute is very important because it happens at times that superiors covertly or overtly cause dissension and division among members of their institute. Some Major superiors promote and maintain cliques either because they came to power through the support of a clique or they practice divide and rule system. The Major Superior should serve as the principle of unity of his / her religious institute.

5. Lastly, the Council Fathers ask that Chapters and Councils should discharge the roles committed to

---

<sup>40</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, 43.

them faithfully. The reason this point is important is because the decisions of Chapters are the ultimate in the governance of a religious institute, followed by the decisions of the council of which the Major Superior is the Chairman. The personal decisions of the Superior come last in this administrative arrangement.

Even though the Superior takes some decisions on his / her own, it should not be forgotten that the mind of the members of the institute which are expressed in a Chapter must be respected and implemented by the Superior. The counsel of the Council should be taken seriously too, as the members of the institute trust the Councillors to take decisions on their behalf, outside the Chapter. The power and authority of the Superior in the religious life is a shared power, a collective power, a mandated power. It is not a raw “personal power”.

*Perfectae Caritatis* actually has more to say to the superiors than the subjects. And this is very interesting. It shows the understanding of the Council Fathers. They believe that once the superiors get it right, by truly aligning with the will of God and allowing “voluntary submission” of the will on the side of the subjects, then the vow of obedience is made easier. Obedience is a service on the part of the superior and the subject; obedience is a holocaust of one’s will, for both of them.<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> Cf. *Perfectae Caritatis*, 14.

There is need for the re-interpretation, re-appraisal and appreciation of the evangelical councils in the modern world. The vows of poverty, chastity and obedience have to do with the three powers that control society today, namely the power of money and wealth, the power of sex and the power of authority. If we are to affect the world today as religious, we need to handle these three powers in such a way as to influence people to use them appropriately. It is only in this way that the vows can be useful today and retain their evangelical and prophetic values.

### **Religious Life Style**

Number 15 to 18 of *Perfectae Caritatis* discusses the lifestyle of the religious and it focuses on four main areas: Community living, Papal Cloister, Habits and Education and formation of Religious. Since the Decree is a call to renewal, these topics are very important because it is through them that the character, the charism and the essence of religious life is lived out.

“Common life, in prayer and the sharing of the same spirit (*Acts 2:42*), should be constant, after the example of the early Church, in which the company of believer were of one heart and soul. It should be nourished by the teaching of the gospel and by the sacred liturgy, especially by the Eucharist”.<sup>42</sup> The Religious are expected to truly be united, not just be “in uniform” hence the use of the expression “one heart and soul”. Living together as brothers or sisters in a geographical location is not enough because people can share the same

---

<sup>42</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 15.

roof but very far apart from each other in spirit. This is why the Decree asks the religious to share “the same spirit”. It is important to reflect on this point because not only does it bring harmony in the community and the institute, but it also creates an identity. It is when a community lives like a true family that it can enjoy the presence of God in it (cf. *Matt* 18:20). The Decree recommends that members who live community life should be placed on the same footing, with equal rights and obligations, apart from those arising out of sacred orders.<sup>43</sup>

At times there are crisis of living together in community because of the unwillingness of some religious to truly live as religious. Personal interests and personal ego are destroying and defacing the beauty of community life today. For a religious to truly be religious, he or she has to succeed in marrying his or her “personal ideal” with the “institutional ideal”. Where one’s personal ideal clashes with the institutional ideal, he or she has a decision to make: to stay or to leave. Should he decide to stay in the institution (Religious Institute, in this case), he has to let his self / personal idea go. Van Bavel buttresses this point:

It must be clear that anyone who joins a religious community is not seeking any false security, that he or she is not striving for any personal advantage or individual amassing of possessions, but is desirous of having his or her own interests coincide as much as possible with the interests of the group. A minimum of

---

<sup>43</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 15.

agreement and involvement is required in so far as common goals are concerned.<sup>44</sup>

Many religious do not go through this process successfully and it is a cause of great concern because communities cannot work where multiple different personal ideals are simply cut-and-nailed together without a conscious and joyful assimilation of the institutional ideal.

*Papal Cloister:* Even when the Decree advocates for the sustenance of papal cloister, it however, recommends that “it should be adjusted to suit the conditions of time and place, abolishing obsolete practices after consultation with the monasteries themselves”<sup>45</sup>. Since the Church still believes in the positive impact of contemplative life in the Church and the need for stability in monasteries, she only requires that the practices which are obsolete should be abolished. Things are obsolete if they are not necessary and not meaningful to modern day practice and the charism and spirituality of the institute.

*The Religious Habit:* The next paragraph<sup>46</sup> deals with the external appearance of the religious – the habit. The Decree describes the religious habit as “a symbol of consecration”. It is the external sign of what one already is – a consecrated person. It is important, therefore, to let the habit truly be what it is when a religious wears it. The decree recommends that the religious habit be simple, modest, poor and

---

<sup>44</sup> Van Bavel T.J. *The Basic Inspiration of Religious Life*, p. 161.

<sup>45</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 16.

<sup>46</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 17.

becoming, in keeping with the requirements of health and suited to the times and place and to the needs of the apostolate.

*On-going Formation:* The attention of the Decree then turns to the on-going formation of the religious in number 18. The proper training of members of an institute is very central to the up-to-date renewal of religious life. Members of a religious institute should be well trained in apostolic, doctrinal and technical fields so that they can qualify to adequately carry out their mission and witnessing. It is recommended that Superior should, as far as they are able, provide opportunities for proper cultural and doctrinal training. To achieve this care must be taken in appointing and training formation personnel. When the religious are not adequately trained they may become sources of problems in an Institute.

### **Lifecycle, Work and Governance**

Even today, there exist all kinds of people claiming to be “Father Founders” and “Mother Founders”. Most of these people are either dismissed from Religious Institutes or they are not in good terms with them. As Vicar for Religious, I have been faced with all kinds of cases which the Bishop often refers to me; cases of people who wish to found new congregations. It is very difficult to convince these people of the basic principles for founding new congregations and Religious Institutes. This is the basic interest of Number 19 of the Decree, *Perfectae Caritatis*.

It states that “When it is proposed to found new religious institutes the question must be seriously pondered, whether

they are necessary, or even very useful, and whether it will be possible for them to increase”.<sup>47</sup> While it is important to promote the presence of different forms of religious life in the Church, especially in places where the church has recently been established, care should be taken not to “imprudently” bring into being religious institutes which may be “useless or lacking in sufficient resources”. I strongly believe that it is very necessary for religious institutes to be very vigilant and take this matter seriously. Major Superiors should raise alarm when any member of their institute is involved in such activities. We should be courageous enough to stop people who are not qualified from founding new institutes and congregations.

The Decree recommends that already existing institutes which are no longer able to develop or fulfil its ministry and mission should be closed, following a due process. And where possible, several institutes whose aims and spirit differ little from each other should be amalgamated.<sup>48</sup> The basic concern of the Council Fathers is that no institute should exist for the sake of existing. It must be meaningful and useful to the Church and the society which it should serve as a prophet.

The Decree recommends that each institute should focus on its missionary mandate and apostolate and make effort to adapt their ministry to the needs of the Church in every given time. The means of achieving their mission which “are less

---

<sup>47</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 19

<sup>48</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 21

suited to the spirit and native genius of their institute” should be rejected.<sup>49</sup>

The Decree confirms the existence, and points to the importance, of Conferences or Councils of major superiors. It recognizes the need of such conferences to establish and maintain a suitable coordination and cooperation with Episcopal conferences.<sup>50</sup>

Number 24 of the Decree calls for the promotion of healthy religious vocations. It is important to properly screen prospective candidates as to give the right focus to the future of the institute and its apostolate.

### **Conclusion**

*Perfectae Caritatis* is all about a call to renewal, reinterpretation and search for meaning. Renewal, like conversion is a constant demand; there is always need for the re-interpretation of religious life practices. Since religious life is about *sequela Christi*, we need to constantly ask whether our way of interpreting Jesus, in and through the evangelical counsels, is meaningful, attractive and of value in our society. If things are not interpreted in time they die off. Rigidity and tenacious hold on *status quo* “... would be un-evangelical, for if anyone ever heeded the heartbeat of his time, it was Jesus”.<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 20

<sup>50</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 23.

<sup>51</sup> Van Bavel T.J. *The Basic Inspiration of Religious Life*, p. 155.

*Perfectae Caritatis* is not calling for change for the sake of change or copying every new thing that happens in society. Rather, it is asking for an objective interpretation of the signs of the times and adapting the practice of the gospel values in a way that they remain prophet. The guiding principles for the renewal and adaptation of religious life as we mentioned earlier, are return to the Sacred Scripture as the basic source of inspiration, the spirit and aims of the founders and involvement in the life of the Church. This renewal is to be carried out through a proper understanding of the people and the conditions of the times and through individual renewal of the religious.

The question we need to ask is: How much has changed, fifty years after the promulgation of this Decree? If any milieu needs re-interpretation and adaptation, it is ours. So much has changed in the society and many changes are still taking place that the religious need to constantly seek to be and remain meaningful and prophetic to the society. This is a difficult task but we must begin, first, with ourselves and then with our institute.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Consecration and the Evangelical Counsels

By  
*Mary-Sylvia Nwachukwu, DDL*  
*Spiritana International School of Theology*  
*Attakwu, Enugu State*

#### **Introduction**

The concrete way by which the religious bind themselves to God is through the evangelical vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. The three vows of chastity, poverty and obedience spell out the manner in which consecrated persons express their closeness to God the Father, to Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit and serve the economy of salvation. They further highlight the four dimensions of religious life: the theological dimension, which describes the primary goal of consecration as intimate relationship with God and sharing in his life; the Christological and Pneumatological dimensions, which defines this sharing in the life of God as a conformation to Christ through the Holy Spirit; and the ecclesial dimensions, which describes how consecration disposes the religious for the service of God in the world, that is, in the missionary work of the Church. The different dimensions of consecrated life would constitute the burden of this chapter.

#### **Theological Dimension**

God is the primary source of consecration. Only God is holy, and for his purpose in the economy of salvation, he communicates his holiness to his creatures through an act of consecration. Consecration is the foundation of religious life.

The first implication of this is that the consecrated person is chosen to belong totally to God and to make a total gift of itself for God's service. These ideas are implied in the terms 'consecration' and 'religious'.

Consecration relates to ideas like 'total dedication' to God, 'separation for God's service', 'election chosenness'.

Similarly, the word 'Religious', taken from two Latin verbs 'religare (to bind together) and re-eligare (to choose again or to select again) implies the same sense of selection for total belonging to God. In the words of St Augustine, the consecrated person is *homo Dei nomine consecratus et Deo votus*<sup>1</sup>, that is, a person consecrated in the name of God and dedicated to God. What is holy is what is set apart from others and preserved or dedicated totally for God. When something is consecrated, it shares in God's own holiness so that it has the power to communicate the same holiness to others. Religious life finds its unity and focus in this theological dimension. From this center, the evangelical counsels derive their meaning and orientation.

The concrete way by which the religious bind themselves to God is through the evangelical vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. "By such a bond, a person is totally dedicated to God, loved beyond all things. In this way, that person is ordained to the honor and service of God under new and special title"<sup>2</sup>. The profession of the evangelical counsels constitutes a way of total dedication of life to God and to his

---

<sup>1</sup> Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 10. 6.

<sup>2</sup> LG 44

service, and this implies a special consecration, which is deeply rooted in that of baptism and expresses it more fully. The sense of total belonging to God facilitates the freeing of the heart so that it may be more inflamed with love for God and for all people<sup>3</sup>. It also facilitates the practice of obedience and poverty<sup>4</sup>. Obedience and poverty would be difficult with this primary sense of total gift of self to God. Since it implies that the religious is separated, set aside and dedicated totally to God, unreservedly and free from the anxieties associated with marital and worldly concerns, consecration gives the religious a different kind of concern. The only worry of the consecrated person is how to please the Lord. This is the sense in which religious life involves a renunciation. The religious renounces the freedom to have a life project that is defined in relation to self. The project of life of the religious is God's project. According to Leonardo Boff, "...[the] religious take the God to whom they have been consecrated as the starting point and from it derive their self understanding and their involvement in the world"<sup>5</sup>.

It is mistake if the religious submits to the temptation of translating the special consecration as denial of the world or opposition to it or even assuming a superior or exalted position over others and over the world.

Consecration to God does not place the religious against world or against others. Rather, it places the religious in a position to be concerned deeply with God's mission in the

---

<sup>3</sup>*Perfectae Caritatis*, 12.

<sup>4</sup>*Perfectae Caritatis*, 5

<sup>5</sup> Boff Leonardo, *God's witness in the heart of the world*. Chicago: Claret Centre for Resources in Spirituality, 1981, p. 156.

world. The role the religious play as sacrament of God's holiness is the goal of consecration.

Our world today defines the human person in terms of the person's relation to the world: economic, political and social. In order to explain the value of the individual, the contemporary society considers the person's specialization or capacity in productivity. The vows, as an expression of consecration, first of all define the religious in relation to God and to God's mission in the world. Secondly, it makes the religious available for the service of God's work in the world. These vows describe what we might call the sphere of existence of the religious. The sphere in which the religious live and operate is God. God also determines the nature of the role the religious play in the world. The religious exist and function in the world but they perform a sacred, cultic and sacramental role.

This theological dimension of religious life specifies the primary goal of consecration as close intimacy with God or sharing in the life of God. The vows are sign, symbol and sacrament of God's own holiness. As a sign, the religious show, through the vows, that their lives are oriented towards God, and they demonstrate through a joyful living of the same vows that what is earthly cannot be the goal of human existence and of history. As symbols of the transcendent, consecrated persons have the primary duty to make God present to and in the world. This is possible through their life of holiness as spelt out in the vows. Holiness is the defining characteristic of one who God has consecrated and brought close to himself, and this would imply that the consecrated

person has acquired the properties of God's life. According to the definition of Vatican II, this sharing in the life of God has a specifically Christological/ Pneumatological character.

### **Christological Dimension**

The call to holiness of life is a call to live the life of God as revealed in the life of Jesus Christ, who is Son of God and perfect image of the Father. PC 1, & 3 underscores this when it says:

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

In Jesus Christ, God gave the fullest revelation of who he is and what he does for the world. The life of Jesus spells out how God redeemed humankind by bringing them out of death into life. The call to holiness is the call to become children of God by becoming bearers of life like Jesus through dying in order to give life to others. The Gospel, each in its own structural and thematic features, depicted Jesus as the sacrament of God's righteousness, love and compassion for people, Jesus manifested the advent of the Kingdom of God. His words and actions manifested God's decisive action against evil, by which He freed his children from all that held them captive, giving them the opportunity to enjoy the freedom of the children of God. In the language of Paul, Christ, through his obedience to the Father, reversed the

process of disobedience and selfish living that began with Adam and which led all to death. Therefore, through his death and resurrection, Jesus offers a pattern of life-for-others that gained eternal life for all (cf. Rom 5:12:21)

In relation to institutes of consecrated life in the Church, the spirituality of every institute is the call to imitate an aspect of the life of Jesus, which falls within the general pattern of Jesus' life-for-others way of living. For some institutes, the spirituality could be Divine Love in action; for others it could be selfless service to the poor. Every spirituality is an invitation to live like Jesus in a way specified by the Charism some moral virtues in practice, for instance, love, compassion for-others pattern of life. It is a call to become Jesus to the world. In Rom 8, Paul says that this is possible only if we are conformed to Christ.

According to Rom 8:29, we are called "to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family." The verb 'to be conformed' (*sunskamatizesthai* – to form oneself) has the sense of forming oneself after another<sup>6</sup> or changing one's form to assume the form of another. What Paul says here could be explained by reference to water, which takes any kind of shape, depending on the container into which it is poured. It could also be explained with a building block, which, when it was still a mixture of cement and sand, was formless until it is poured into the block mould that gives it the block shape or form. Similarly, every human being has a 'form'. The 'form' of a

---

<sup>6</sup> Dunn J. D. G., *Romans* 916. Word Biblical Commentary, 38 B., Texas: Word Book Publishers. p.712

person that is meant here is not the physical form of the human being; it is the essential structure that defines the person's way of being. The form of Jesus Christ, in this sense, is the pattern of life that he lived. What is meant here follows the message of Rom 5:17-19, which says

If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely with those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one's act leads to justification and life for all. For just as by the one's man disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one's obedience the many will be made righteous.

The way a person lives is the manner in which he/she exercises dominion over others, leading them to life or to death. The apex of this way of living is Jesus' love for us, which led him to die on the cross. 'God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us' (Rom 5:8). Through his life of total obedience to God, which led him to die for us, Jesus offered an example of life that earned life for all and he invites his followers to live according to his pattern of life. 'We know love by this, that he laid his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for one another' (1 John 3:16). The impact of Jesus' life on creation becomes very incomprehensible within the context of the death and life struggle that characterize existence in the world. This way of

living is proposed to every Christian as the way that leads to salvation.

In view of the message of Rom 8, the Christian should do away with the form of life according to the flesh or according to worldly standards and assume the form of Christ. To live according to the 'flesh' is to make the human person and his interests the center, the point of departure and arrival of life. As in Rom 8:29, Paul uses the verb 'to conform' in Rom 12:2 in order to warn Christians against conforming to the structures and character of this world. Therefore, the injunction to conform to Christ describes the entire vocation and program of the life of the Christian. The ultimate purpose of this programme is the redemption of creation (cf Rom 8:19-23). This Christological dimension of religious life stresses further how religious life serves the economy of salvation. One must consider, at this point, the Pauline assertion that this conformation to Christ cannot be obtained through human effort. It is possible only through the Holy Spirit.

### **Pneumatological Dimension**

The Holy Spirit is presented in the Acts of the Apostles as the presence of the risen Christ in the Christian community. Among the early Christians, the most important cohesive factor was their sense of living in the presence of the risen Lord through the Holy Spirit<sup>7</sup>. Through the Holy Spirit, the early Christians were able to withstand the distinction of race, gender and religion and they preached a good news which was a logical extension of the openness and the universality

---

<sup>7</sup> Acts 10:44-48; Rom 6:3; 8:16; 1 Cor 12:12-13; Gal 3:27-28.

that characterized Jesus' ministry<sup>8</sup>. The apostles conquered fear, and got the courage to take the good news beyond boundaries of Jerusalem only through the power of the Holy Spirit. Christ's presence was also experienced in the gifts of the Spirit for edification of the members and for the building up of the Church (I Cor 12:1-11). In sum, the presence of the Holy Spirit is that God's power is at work in the Christian community. These instances in the life of the early Christians show that Christian life is not possible without the Holy Spirit.

The apostle Paul defines the work of the Holy Spirit in relation to the individual and the Holy Spirit is the divine power that operates the miraculous transformation of the individual, integrating him/her into the saving event of the cross and the resurrection and helping hi/her to live in the sphere of the work of Christ. In Rom 8:15-17 and 1 Cor 12:12-13 this work of the spirit leads to our adoption as children of God and incorporation into the body of Christ, the Church. Therefore, adoption or conformity with Christ is synonymous with 'to be in Christ' or 'to be in the Spirit'. Paul uses this language to emphasize that the Spirit is totally gift of God<sup>9</sup>. The foregoing highlight the importance of the Holy Spirit in the life of consecrated persons. If the goal of conformity is Christ, it means that the Holy Spirit a power on which the religious must always rely and not on his/her own possibilities. In the language of Paul, to live by the Spirit is not to live according to the desires of the flesh or to have

---

<sup>8</sup> Matt 28:19-20; Acts 13:4; 15:22-35; Rom 1:16

<sup>9</sup> E. Schweizer, *Pneuma*, in G. Friedrich (Ed.). *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament VI*, Grand Rapids: Erdmans, p. 427-428.

confidence in the flesh (Gal 3:3, Phil 3:3). The Pauline injunction to Christians to rely totally on the power of God and to renounce the flesh (or the world or all those qualities or deeds of which someone might boast) makes clearer meaning of the vows which the religious profess. Since the close imitation of Christ required of the religious is achieved through the evangelical counsels, total reliance on the Spirit is necessary for the ability to renounce the power of God. When one is able to live according to the pattern of Christ's life, the person could then say with Paul "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20).

These Christological and Pneumatological dimension of religious life open up to another dimension, the ecclesial. The holiness, which the religious are called to bear witness, is then, they (the religious) are joined to Christ by this total lifelong gift of themselves, the richer the life of the Church becomes and the more lively and successful its apostolate"<sup>10</sup>.

### **Ecclesial Dimension**

Consecrated life has an ecclesial dimension, which is underlined in its definition as "a special calling that belong to the life and holiness of the Church"<sup>11</sup>. This definition affirms that religious life is a life lived in the Church and for the Church and her mission. Consecrated persons do not live a private life but they live for the Church. God's call to holiness is addressed primarily to the Church. The vocation of individual to the consecrated life serves this ecclesial

---

<sup>10</sup> PC 1&3

<sup>11</sup> LG 44

dimension in the plan of salvation. Just as Israel was chosen and called to a life of holiness, the same call is renewed to the Church redeemed by Jesus Christ. This ecclesial dimension underscores the importance of religious life in the Church. It means that the success of the Church's vocation to holiness depends to a large extent on those who have been called to live it out in an extensive manner.

The primary assignment of religious communities, therefore, is to bear practical witness to the Church's vocation to holiness. The practice of the vows must become a sacramental witness against the threats and challenges of secularization, disunity, hatred and oppression among peoples. Through the vows, the religious give sacramental witness to God holiness when religious communities become places where God's holiness (liberation, reconciliation, justice, compassion, etc) are lived, experienced and proclaimed to all good people of good will. They undertake this task by being, first and foremost reconciled and liberating community. God's holiness must become a reality in their personal lives, in their communities and in the world at large. Their identities as consecrated persons invites them to become ministers and of reconciliation. (2 Cor 5:20-21)

The ecclesial dimension of life specifies the second goal of consecration, which is mission or apostolic activity that springs from intimate union with God. The Latin expression *Sanctum diffusivum sui* means that holiness diffuses itself; it is not static; it is a dynamic reality. The Church is missionary both by virtue of life which flows from Christ into her members means that holiness diffuses itself; it is not static; it is a dynamic reality. The Church is missionary both by virtue

of the life which flows from Christ to its members (cf. Eph 4:16) and by virtue of her being founded by Christ as the sacrament of salvation to the world<sup>12</sup>. Religious communities engage in apostolic mission in the name of the Church whose mission is an extension of the mission of Christ.

Christ was sent by the Father “to bring good news to the poor, to heal the contrite of heart” (LK 4:18), “to seek and to save what was lost” (LK 19:10). Similarly, the Church encompass with love all who are afflicted with human suffering and in the poor and afflicted sees the image of its poor and suffering Founder. It does all it can to relieve their need and in them it strives to serve Christ<sup>13</sup>.

In imitation of Christ, every Christian is called to become a missionary<sup>14</sup>, but only some are called to dedicate their entire lives to mission work.

(Religious life) not only offer precious and absolutely necessary assistance to missionary activity, but by a inward consecration made to God in the Church, it also clearly manifests and signifies the inner nature of the Christian calling<sup>15</sup>.

---

<sup>12</sup> AG 5

<sup>13</sup> LG 8, &3

<sup>14</sup> AG, 15 &6

<sup>15</sup> AG 18 &1:

The total dedication of consecrated persons to God makes them available for the service of God. In other words, through the sharing in the life of God, the religious begins to see and love the world with God's own vision and compassion. Vatican II affirms further that except for religious communities which are entirely dedicated to contemplation, "apostolic and charitable activity belongs to the very nature of the religious life, seeing that it is a holy service and a work characteristic of love, entrusted to them by the Church to be carried out in its name" (PC 7; 8, & 2). Therefore, fidelity to the demands of consecration implies that every religious community "should join contemplation, by which they fix their minds and hearts on him, with apostolic love, by which they strive to be associated with the work of redemption and to spread the kingdom of God"<sup>16</sup>.

---

<sup>16</sup> PC 5, & 5



## CHAPTER FIVE Consecrated Persons and the Profession of Obedience

By  
Kolawole Chabi, OSA  
*Augustinian Institute- Augustinianum*  
*Rome, Italy*

### Introduction

Tertullian of Carthage, one of the earliest Christian theologians, made a humble avowal at the beginning of his treatise *On Patience* as follows:

I fully confess to the Lord my God that I certainly have courage, not to say presumption, to have dared to write on patience, a virtue which I am utterly unfit to practice, being, as I am, a man of no account. For, those who undertake to set forth and recommend any virtue should first give some evidence of practicing this virtue, and they should give proper direction to their constant admonition by the example of their own conduct, lest they be put to the blush at the discrepancy between their words and deeds.<sup>1</sup>

By quoting this statement, I am analogically expressing the same feeling as the African ecclesiastic writer, pointing to the fact that, writing on obedience is a daring task for me as I make effort to live it out in my religious Order. I do not wish to be a “utopian writer” who gives interesting information about something that never impacts on his life. So let the

---

<sup>1</sup> Tert., *De Patientia* 1, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers* Vol. 3. Edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885). We purposely re-adapted the translation for the convenience of a more modern English.

reader of this write-up offer prayers to God on my behalf so that my life may rhyme with whatever I dare to say.

Having said that, I would begin by pointing to the fact that it is always important to constantly take into consideration that which marks us out as special witnesses to the Gospel of Christ. Moreover, it is most timely in this year of Consecrated life, to reflect on one of the marks of our identity: the Evangelical Counsels which clearly manifest the choice we have freely made to do more than the minimum<sup>2</sup> and to aim at Christian perfection, so far as that can be obtained here upon earth.<sup>3</sup> This is an urgent need “because of the changes that have taken place in the internal lives of Institutes and communities in recent years, and also in light of what more recent Magisterial documents on the renewal of consecrated life have proposed.”<sup>4</sup>

Obedience in the life of Consecrated Persons which is tightly connected to the concept of Authority, is the specific aspect of the Counsels that will occupy us in this reflection. Important documents from the Magisterium have addressed the

---

<sup>2</sup> Christ in the Gospels laid down certain rules of life and conduct which must be practiced by every one of His followers as the necessary condition for attaining to everlasting life. It is enough to follow the double-precept of love of God and love neighbour to satisfy the condition to salvation. But that is the minimum required of every Christian. However, the Lord says that there are choices which demonstrate a desire to be perfect and require some renunciations (Cf. *Mt.* 19:12;21)

<sup>3</sup> Cf. A. Barnes, *Evangelical Counsels*, in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* Vol. 4., Robert Appleton Company, New York 1908. 24 Apr. 2015 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04435a.htm>>.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *The Service of Authority and Obedience. Faciem Tuam* 3.

question of Obedience in the context of pronouncements and instructions on the Consecrated Life.<sup>5</sup> What we are going to do here is first to offer an account of this particular evangelical counsel on the basis of its biblical-theological as well as historical foundations, then we shall make reference to what the Church teaches about it from official documents in recent years. The last part will be on Obedience as a mark of true witness of unity to the world of today.

### **Preliminary Considerations**

The English word “obedience” derives from the Latin “*oboedire*” - *ob* = towards; *oedire* = “to hear”; thus, it means: “to hear or listen towards”. In popular English usage, it means to follow, heed, comply with commands or injunctions within a sphere of jurisdiction. From this point of view, Obedience developed a Law-based interpretation, meaning rule-keeping, commandment compliance, performance according to precepts, etc. When we speak of Obedience in the context of consecrated life, we do not exclude the idea of law and authority. However, it falls within the scope of the Evangelical Counsels which religious men and women profess as a free response to the call of God.

---

<sup>5</sup> From Conciliar Constitutions to Apostolic Exhortations through Encyclical Letters, official documents of the Church abundantly speak of Obedience (see *Faciem Tuam* ; *Ecclesiam Suam* ; *Lumen Gentium* ; *Gaudium et Spes* ; *Perfectae Caritatis* ; *Evangelica Testificatio* ; *Marialis Cultus* ; *Evangelii Nuntiandi* ; *Mutuae Relationes* ; *Religious and Human Promotion* ; *Code of Canon Law* ; *Redemptoris Mater* ; *Fraternal Life in Community* ; *Vita Consecrata* ; *Fides et Ratio* ; *Novo Millennio Ineunte* ; *Starting Afresh from Christ*). Of course for restraint of space we cannot make reference to all these documents in write-up.

The vows of our consecrated life<sup>6</sup> derive from the teachings, examples and commands of Jesus in the Gospel. Poverty and Chastity are sufficiently demonstrated in various passages of the New Testament. Obedience, however, is the most difficult vow to locate in the gospels as a precise command. There are no words of Jesus highlighting submission to another human being as a distinguishing trait of being a follower of Jesus. Yet with the emerging of apostolic communities, Obedience came to be part of the evangelical counsels because it was seen as the pervasive value of Jesus' life-Jesus' total obedience to God even unto death. Thus, obedience as a vow identified the religious with Jesus and his life.<sup>7</sup> We shall return to this aspect subsequently as we discuss the biblical foundation of Obedience.

As viewed in the life of those who profess this Evangelical Counsel, Religious Obedience is that general submission which religious vow to God, and voluntarily promise to their superiors, in order to be directed by them in the ways of perfection according to the purpose and constitutions of their Order or Congregation.<sup>8</sup> It consists, according to Lessius, in a man's allowing himself to be governed throughout his life by another for the sake of God. It is composed of three elements<sup>9</sup>:

---

<sup>6</sup> As clearly affirmed by the Vatican II Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life *Perfectae Caritatis* 5, these are the common element to the consecrated life.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. D. J. Ward, OSB, *Monastics : Life and Law. Reflections of Benedictine Canonist*, edited by Renée Branigan, OSB, The American Benedictine Academy, 1998.

<sup>8</sup> A. Vermeersch, *Religious Obedience*, in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 11. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911. 27 Apr. 2015 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11182a.htm>>.

<sup>9</sup> Lessius, *De Justitia*, II, 46, 37.

- The sacrifice offered to God of his/her own independence in the generality of his/her actions, at least of such as are exterior;
- The motive, namely, personal perfection, and, as a rule, also the performance of spiritual or corporal works of mercy and charity;
- The express or implied contract with an order, which accepts the obligation to lead him/her to the end for which he/she accepts its laws and direction.

Religious Obedience, therefore, does not involve that extinction of all individuality, so often alleged against convents and the Church; nor is it unlimited, for it is not possible either physically or morally that a man should give himself up absolutely to the guidance of another. The choice of a superior, the object of obedience, the authority of the hierarchical Church, all exclude the idea of arbitrary rule. That is why maturity, autonomy, and responsibility are indispensable for a meaningful life of Obedience in consecrated life. No one believes that childlike, blind, and non-responsible obedience is healthy and spiritually rewarding.

### **Biblical-Theological and Historical Foundations of Religious Obedience**

A cursory glance in the Scriptures reveals how vital is the question of obedience to the people of God in the history of salvation. The idea is expressed through the Hebrew word "*shema*", which means "*to hear, listen, obey*" and is abundantly recurrent in the Old Testament. Just to make a few references, we could mention the instances in which Yahweh enjoined

Israel to obey in order to live as his people, or cases in which He speaks of the insubordination the same people. Thus, the Lord made obedience the *sine qua non* condition for belonging : *"If you obey My voice ..., you shall be My possession."* ( Exod. 19:5). And after Moses received and transmitted the Decalogue to Israel, the people eagerly promised: *"All that the Lord has spoken we will do; we will be obedient."* (Exod. 24:7). The Lord still insisted on obedience as listening in the book of Deuteronomy: *"Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one..."* (Deut. 6:4). Still through the Prophets, Yahweh told the rulers that he prefers obedience to any sacrifice they may offer : *"to obey is better than sacrifice"* (1 Sam. 15:22). But God also expressed how Israel disappointed him by not obeying : *"My people did not listen to My voice; Israel did not obey Me"* (Ps. 81:11). So right from the Old Testament, Obedience has been at the heart of the relationship that God wishes to have with his people, and the Obedience of religious undoubtedly is rooted in this aspect of the History of salvation.

The evangelical foundation of religious obedience is first of all found in the perfect accord of that obedience with the spirit of the Gospel. Freedom from ambition which leads a person to choose a position of inferiority, implies a spirit of humility which esteems others as superior, and willingly yields them the first place; the sacrifice of his own independence and his own will presupposes in a high degree that spirit of self-denial and mortification which keeps the passions under proper restraint; the readiness to accept a common rule and direction manifests a spirit of union and concord which generously adapts itself to the desires and tastes of others. However, this is possible only through the

obedience of Christ as Saint Paul recommends that believers should live by *“taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ”* (2 Cor. 10:5).

Christ’s first and last words in the Gospel of Luke clearly express the whole content and meaning of Obedience: *“Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”* (Lk. 2:49) and *“Father, into your hands I commend my spirit”* (cf. Ps. 30:6; Lk. 23:46), an echo in history of the words of the psalmist (Ps. 39:7-9) which the author of the Letter to the Hebrews puts on the lips of Christ from the very beginning: *“When Christ came into the world, he said ... ‘See, God, I have come to do your will, O God’”* (Heb. 10:5-7).<sup>10</sup>

Such is the goal of the third request of the Our Father: *“Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”* (Mt. 6:10), a request repeated in anguish at Gethsemane: *“Not what I want, but what you want”* (Mt. 26:39,42). This is an obedience exercised in the midst of trials: *“He learned obedience through what he suffered”* (Heb. 5:8), an obedience *“to the point of death— even death on a cross”* (Ph. 2:69), ever real like daily *“food”* (Jn. 4:34). As a result, on the cross Christ could say: *“It is accomplished”* (Jn. 19:30). He was the Father’s *“yes”* to humanity (God’s fidelity to humanity) as well as humanity’s *“yes”* to the Father (total obedience) (cf. 2 Cor 1:20; Acts 1:4-5; 3:14). Such obedience is *“not servile but filial ... a reflection in history of the loving harmony between the three Divine Persons.”*<sup>11</sup> So, eagerness to do the will of God in all things is a mark of the obedience

---

<sup>10</sup> Cf. J. Rovira, CMF, *Authority and Obedience in Religious Life. On the Instruction “Faciem Tuam,”* in UISG n° 138 (2008), 6-7.

<sup>11</sup> St. John-Paul II, *Vita Consacrata* 21d.

to God which led Christ to say “*I do always the things which please my Father*” (Jn. 7:29).

Historically speaking, in the life of early hermits who were not subject to the vow of Obedience, it was already manifested in the docility with which their imitators placed themselves under the guidance of some older man. St. Cyprian, in his letter “*De habitu virginum*” (*On the Garment of the Virgins*), shows us that at Rome the virgins followed the direction of the older women. Obedience was then looked upon as sort of education, from which those were dispensed who were considered perfect and ripe for a solitary life. This idea is found also in the first chapter of the Rule of St. Benedict. St. Pachomius (A.D. 292-346) understanding the importance of obedience in community life made it the foundation of the religious life of the cenobites, preaching by his own example, and inculcating upon all superiors the necessity of a scrupulous observance of the rules of which they were the guardians. The monks (cf. Cassian, “*Institutions*”) thus saw in perfect obedience an excellent application of their universal spirit of self-renunciation. Later, St. Bernard insisted on the complete suppression of self-will, i.e., of that will which sets itself in opposition to the designs of God and to all that is commanded or desired for the good of the community.<sup>12</sup>

The obedience of the Eastern monks was imperfect and defective by reason of the facility with which they changed from one superior or monastery to another. St. Benedict, in

---

<sup>12</sup> Cf. A. Vermeersch, *Religious Obedience*, in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 11.

consequence, advancing a step farther, introduced a new rule binding his monks by a vow of stability. A certain choice of rules still existed, which seemed likely to be hurtful to the common life, for some monasteries had various sets of rules, each set having its own observants. The reforms in the Order of St. Benedict brought into existence monastic congregations known by the identity of their observances, and these were the forerunners of the Mendicant Orders with their rules which have become canonical laws. St. Thomas, thus, had before him all the material necessary to enable him to treat fully of the subject of religious obedience in his *Summa Theologica*, in which he makes it clear that the vow of obedience is the chief of the vows of religion.<sup>13</sup>

### **Instructions from Church Teachings**

The Church anchors her teaching on Obedience in the words of Christ who says : “*Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother*” (Mk. 3:35). As he did, the disciples also listened, welcomed and carried out the wishes of the Father and so became part of his new family, the new Israel. The new family is in fact made up of “*those who hear the word of God and do it*” (Lk. 8:21) : listening and doing are the two essential characteristics of “the family” of Christ<sup>14</sup> . In professing obedience, religious offer the full surrender of their own will as a sacrifice of themselves to God and so are united permanently and securely to God’s salvific will.<sup>15</sup> And they definitely make Obedience to God:

---

<sup>13</sup> Cf. St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, QQ, 104 et 186;

<sup>14</sup> CICLSAL, *The Service of Authority and Obedience. Faciem Tuam* 8.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Perfectae Caritatis* 14.

The path of growth and, therefore, of freedom for the person because this obedience allows for the acceptance of a plan or a will different from one's own that not only does not deaden or lessen human dignity but is its basis. At the same time, freedom is also in itself a path of obedience, because it is in obeying the plan of the Father, in a childlike way, that the believer fulfils his or her freedom. It is clear that such obedience requires that persons recognize themselves as sons and daughters and enjoy being such, because only a son or a daughter can freely place him or herself in the hands of his or her Father, exactly like the Son, Jesus, who abandoned himself to the Father. Even if in his passion he gave himself up to Judas, to the high priests, to his torturers, to the hostile crowd, and to his crucifiers, he did so only because he was absolutely certain that everything found its meaning in complete fidelity to the plan of salvation willed by the Father, to whom, as St. Bernard reminds us, "it is not the death which was pleasing, but the will of the One who died of his own accord".<sup>16</sup>

This is the way to understand obedience within the Church, an understanding intended for all Christians, and this is the obedience required of all down through the centuries. Such obedience precedes and is the foundation and explanation not only for the obedience of a religious to a superior but also for that of each believer to the internal demands of the ecclesial community, including obedience to the hierarchy who exercises the ministry of guiding the faithful.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> CICALSAL, *Faciem Tuam*, 5

<sup>17</sup> Cf. J. Rovira, CMF, *Authority and Obedience*, 9.

This also explains why the Church does not distinguish between those who command and those who obey since all actually obey and the whole Church follows the example of her spouse, Jesus Christ, in listening to and doing the will of the Father with the help of the Spirit. Not that we should not recognise and give due reverence to those who take up the responsibility of leading as a service to others. Authority in the logic of the Gospel is service and remains always under the Absolute Authority of God. Saint Augustine of Hippo understood this very well and expressed most accurately when he referred to his flock, the Christians of Hippo as his fellow disciples on the way<sup>18</sup>. He constantly regarded himself as a labourer in the vineyard working with his flock with the strength provided by the Lord.<sup>19</sup> Each Christian then lives out this obedience within the particularities of his or her vocation, and religious obey within the parameters of their own way of life (in multiple ways, in fact). So the way one chooses to follow Christ is not an unimportant matter. Each person must, however, seek out his or her vocation, that is, the will of the Father for him or her, and accept it with joy, love and fidelity. This is not an oppressive obedience but rather a liberating one<sup>20</sup> because God is love (cf *1Jn.* 4:8.16) and therefore cannot help but desire the greatest good for each and every one of us when gifting us with a specific vocation (cf. *Jn* 3:17; 12:47; *Rom.* 8:28 ; *1Tm.* 2:4 ; *2Pet.* 3:9). When all is said and done, the vocation of a particular Christian cannot be considered better or superior to all others because it is God's will for him or her.

---

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Saint Augustine, *Sermon* 134, 1.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 49, 2.

<sup>20</sup> CICLESAL, *Faciem Tuam* 5-6 ; J.-P. II, *Vita Consacrata* 91.

The obedience of each person is carried out within the ecclesial community and so involves not only the fundamental personal connection between God and one's conscience but also the relationship with other brothers and sisters in the Church who are journeying together toward God. In other words, our obedience to an invisible God is carried out within God's visible community of the Church in the same way that love for the God whom we do not see is proven by love for the neighbour whom we do see (cf. *1Jn:4:20-21*).

True obedience is not that of sycophants, of those who avoid any obstacle or hurt, who value their own comfort above all : obedience is truthfulness, an obedience animated by the enthusiastic energy of love, that is the true obedience which has made the Church fruitful over the centuries, freeing her from Babylonian temptation and bringing her back to the side of her crucified Lord.

Loyalty and obedience are demonstrated:

- in the humble and opportune presentation of one's personal point of view (as a "no" to fear, inhibition and passivity, to the lack of a sense of ecclesial co-responsibility in the search for God's will);
- in the sincere desire to seek the truth (as a "no" to the lack of uprightness or the playing of both sides, to putting one's own interests first);
- in continual respect for everyone, including therefore those who exercise the service of authority (as a "no" to offending or denigrating a neighbour);

- in the untiring effort to reconcile the demands of obedience to legitimate authority with the demands which cannot be abandoned in conscience (as a “yes” to respecting everyone’s clear conscience, even when they make a mistake – let us recall the words of Saint Paul (*Rom.* 14-15; *1Cor.* 8-10);
- and all this is done in a spirit of faith and so of prayer that must characterize Christian life. People in such a situation who act with this attitude certainly serve the Church, are the Church even when they provoke times of crisis and tension, and they help us know and accomplish the will of God.<sup>21</sup>

In the light of the aforementioned ways in which Obedience manifests itself, we may bring this part of our reflection home with a concise summary of what we could draw from the Church’s teaching, especially from the document *Faciem Tuam*. By and large Religious Obedience must be:

- human, adult, mature and sustained by faith, not individualistic, egocentric, “childish”<sup>22</sup>, passive or secularised, any more than authority must not be a sign of “paternalism or maternalism”<sup>23</sup>
- its reference point is Christ, the will of the Father;
- it is expressed in congregational fraternity;
- obedient religious look upon the superior as a brother or sister, are grateful for his or her service, pray for the superior and help him or her in discerning and

---

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *Lumen Gentium* 37a ; *Code of Canon Law* 212; *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 907 and 911.

<sup>22</sup> *Faciem Tuam* 25a.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* 14b.

accomplishing of God's will through dialogue and a sense of co-responsibility and collaboration.<sup>24</sup>

### **Witnessing Unity Through Obedience**

The witness of consecrated persons regarding obedience and authority must not be underestimated. The consecrated person demonstrates that God is the goal of his/her life. The freedom modeled by Christ Himself is the liberty for which the consecrated person pines. And so by living the evangelical counsel, he/she reveals the deepest conviction of his/her heart that the Lord is leading his/her personal story which he/she entrusted unto Him. And this is an invaluable witness to the world in which we live.

Moreover, the intrapersonal relationship of the Blessed Trinity as revealed in the economy of salvation shows how the obedience of Christ becomes a paradigm for our witnessing. We cannot ignore what is revealed to us in the life of the Son of God. Jesus-Christ the Son, in whom we are all sons and daughters of God, is the model and the life of all children of God. If we do not make His life our own life, then we are not children of the Father. If we do make his life our own, if we receive it, we become truly obedient like him. Our obedience will become witness, a martyrdom: for whom? for the Son of God. Our obedience as religious keeps and joins us together: and unity in the name of Jesus is nothing but the revelation of his presence. In fact, he said: "Where two or more are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (*Mt.* 8:20). This is why we should strive to keep an open heart to obedience, love and attentiveness: to live in

---

<sup>24</sup> Cf. CICLESAL, *Faciem Tuam* 19b.

unity, so that Jesus, the Saviour of all, may be present wherever He places us in our ministry today.

Finally, all of us will be required to make an act of obedience with which we will conclude our earthly journeys. This obedience will be “an expression of abandonment to the good Father who will call us definitively to himself, into his reign of infinite light, where our seeking will have found its conclusion and our eyes will see him in a Sunday without end. Then we will be fully obedient and fulfilled, because we will be saying ‘yes’ forever to that Love that has made us happy with him and in him”.<sup>25</sup>

### **Conclusion**

In this brief *excursus*, we have examined Obedience as an evangelical counsel. We have seen that Religious Obedience involves listening and paying heed to the Word of God in the Scriptures. This is what Consecrated Persons are called to do when they began by saying their first “yes” to God’s design in their life. As the document *Faciem Tuam* rightly indicated, “God manifests his will through the interior motion of the Spirit, who “guides to all truth” (Jn 16:13), through multiple external mediations. In effect, the history of salvation is a story of mediation, which makes the mystery of grace which God completes in the intimacy of the heart visible in some way. Even in Jesus’ life, it is possible to recognize not a few human means through which He became aware of, interpreted, and accepted the will of the Father, as the *raison d’être* and as the constant food for his life and his mission”.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, *Faciem Tuam* 29.

<sup>26</sup> CICLSAL, *Faciem Tuam*, 9.

Thus our Obedience involves human mediation. But the mediation of an authority does not amount to the negation the individual freedom and responsibility. In this sense, if Obedience is and is understood as an imitation of Christ the obedient Son of the Father, and authority as a service to the community in the Love of Christ, the practising of this counsel becomes a witness of unity to the people of our time.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Community Life among Consecrated Persons

By  
*Fr. Jude A. Ossai, OSA.*  
*Augustinian Novitiate, Jos*

#### **Introduction**

As we continue to celebrate our vocation as consecrated persons in this year of Consecrated Life it is important to reflect on a common practice by consecrated persons: community life.<sup>1</sup> We live our lives in community and carry out all our apostolates and different services to humanity through the community. Common living can be a very beautiful form of life if those who live it truly work together and make personal sacrifices to let go of personal interests and depend on one another and work for common good.

Vatican Council II Fathers, in *Gaudium et Spes* recognised that man is by his intimate nature a social being who cannot live

---

<sup>1</sup> Even though community life is essential to consecrated and apostolic religious life we have to state as well that it was not always so. Since western Monasticism which we inherited developed along the line of Cenobitism, community life was and still remains very essential to religious and consecrated life. The same cannot be said, however, of the Eastern Monastic Tradition which developed along the line of Anhoritism and solitary Hermitage. Even in the West we still have the tradition of Hermits living alone, in solitude. To these Hermits and Anchorites, Community Life – that is, life of living together, sharing material and spiritual things and life as well, is not essential. See Van Bavel T.J. OSA. *The Basic Inspiration of Religious Life*, translated by Henry Jackson, edited by John Rotelle, OSA. Villanova: Augustinian Press, 1996. P. 134

and develop with qualities without his fellows.<sup>2</sup> Interdependence and communion are not just means of achieving productivity and making progress, but rather, a human necessity and a form of living that derives from man's "intimate nature". St. Augustine anticipated this when he said that "we need our fellow in order to be ourselves".<sup>3</sup> All the teachings of the Church regarding the life of consecrated persons insist on the importance of communion.

This article intends to explore the concept of community life among consecrated persons. It takes cognizance of the fact that there are different forms of common life and point to the difference between different forms of social community life and religious community life which is the kind consecrated persons practise. This article explores the theological and ecclesiological perspectives of community life, its prophetic values and the causes of some difficulties and challenges that arise in the course of living community life.

Even though this article deals with religious community and consecrated life as it cuts across all religious institutes, there is more reference to the spirituality of St. Augustine and the Augustinian Order, my religious Order.

### **The Concept of Community Life**

Community living is a chosen social contract between persons which can as well be religious in nature. Community life or common living demands the coming together of

---

<sup>2</sup> Second Vatican Council. *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Gaudium et Spes*, 7 December, 1965. No. 12

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine. *Expositions of the Psalms*, 125, 13

different persons to carry out a common project or willingly agree to share life together as well. Human persons naturally tend to feel more fulfilled and productive when many hands are put together to achieve a common objective.

Among Africans, community living is very natural; things are done in common, as a family. The extended family system basically says that no single person or single nuclear family is self sufficient. It is very customary to see multiple families come together to work toward the same objective, ranging from farming to training of children, eating and economic activities. It is believed that relationship and cooperation go beyond immediate blood relation to include extended families, clan and even a whole village.

Outside typical African systems, there are different forms of social community in which different persons come together and share a common project jointly for the purpose of achieving greater, and at times, quicker results. This social community is clearly brought out by the Ibo expression, *igwebike*. This simply means “the strength of the many is greater” or “the power of the multitude”.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> It is important to note here that there has been a shift in African culture to the effect that even the very concept of *igwebike* is no longer very visible among our people. There are at least, two reasons that are responsible for this: One is as a result of the indiscriminate adoption and lack of proper adaptation of foreign cultures. The second is the “survival of the fittest mentality” and the attendant wickedness that has become rampant among our traditional Africans. As a consequence of this the concepts of *Nwanne* and *Umunna* (brotherhood) are disappearing fast among our people in Africa. These trends have led to crass individualism among our people. However, the fact that Africans recognize the current trends as anomalies raises the hope that the traditional African community spirit is still valued and appreciated.

There is also an anthropologico-theological dimension to community life. God created man and woman in his own image and likeness and communion. God who revealed himself as love, as Trinity and as Communion called man and woman to enter into intimate relationship with him and to interpersonal communion. Our highest vocation is to enter into communion with God and with our brothers and sisters. Man is naturally a social animal, a relational being and a being in constant dependence on other persons.

In social communities, common interest binds the stakeholders together and they do not necessarily need to live together. What matters in such communities is how the shared goal and objective can be effectively achieved and maximized. There is another form of community, however, which lays emphasis on the persons involved in social contract. In this form of community the main focus is I-You relationship. The stress is on “being together” and “living together”. This form of community involves participating in each other’s value as a person and mutual love is vital.<sup>5</sup>

### **Religious Community Life**

Religious Community life which is the main focus of this article goes beyond mere social contract or collective pursuance of a set goal or objective. Religious Community is the I-You relationship described above and it necessarily includes God and faith. The core centre and inspiration of a Religious Community life is God, whom the members primarily come together to seek. Different Religious Institutes

---

<sup>5</sup> Van Bavel T.J. OSA. *The Basic Inspiration of Religious Life*, p. 134

search for God differently, under different inspirations. A religious Community is therefore built on faith in God and in the Charism and Spirituality of one's particular religious institute.

Electing to live in a religious community presupposes that one participates in each other's personality, and in the value of the other persons that make up the community. The community is not merely to be used for achieving personal gain and self advancement, to the detriment of the community. Religious community requires that those who live it be involved with other people, in sharing their lives. This is why a religious community, of consecrated persons, cannot truly stand if there is no genuine love of Christ among the members. In this kind of community attention should not be focused on the common work or project without concern for the community itself. Work is not the paramount thing in the community but the particular life style that is lived with others.<sup>6</sup> My life as an Augustinian, for instance, is far more important than the work I do. My work should proceed from my community life and the community should affect the way I carry out my work.

Community life has witnessed its own form of evolution and development, with different emphases as well<sup>7</sup>. At the beginning, community life was in its simple charismatic and enthusiastic form. At this stage, people enthusiastically sold

---

<sup>6</sup> Van Bavel T.J. OSA. *The Basic Inspiration of Religious Life*, p. 139

<sup>7</sup> Domingo Natal Alvarez, OSA. "The Augustinian Community in Practice", in *Elements of an Augustinian Formation*, Rome: Pubblicazioni Agostiniane, 2001. Pp. 321-322. The following stages of development and their characteristics that follow are taken from these cited pages.

their properties and submitted the proceeds for common distribution (*Acts* 2:44-47; 4:32-37). We can imagine that some difficulties would have existed within this community but very little of that is highlighted in the scriptures. An example is the case of Ananias and Sapphira (cf. *Acts* 5:1-11).<sup>8</sup>

In the Middle Ages community life became more systematic than charismatic. In this period community routines were created and the emphasis was on doing the same thing in the same way, at the same time, like prayers, meals, celebrations, etc. Community Life in the Modern Age was characterized by action. Emphasis was laid on work, mission and apostolate. What counted at this stage was “not so much the individual or the community as their activity”. Such communities were unhealthy and harmful to the individuals who made them up as there was lack of “interior life and love”.

Contemporary Community is more integrated, with prayers, work, mission and friendship all incorporated. Community is no longer mechanized “under the yoke of authority, a hive of work or a commercial company, nor must it be a hearth rug community, full of joy, happiness and self satisfaction with

---

<sup>8</sup> There were further indications, however, that the early community was not as closely knit, glorious and rancour free as the Acts of the Apostles tend to suggest. One can imagine, and correctly so, that the Jerusalem community had problems of personal relationships and sundry difficulties. The complaint of the Hellenists that their widows were sidelined in the daily distribution of food is a sign that all was not very well with the community (*Acts* 6:1-7). What stands out in that Jerusalem community, however, is the wisdom and sense of maturity that attended the handling of their difficulties. Luke’s intention was to present an ideal situation that characterizes and summarizes the teachings of the Apostles which was in line with the wish of Jesus for those who would believe in him (cf. John 17), namely, to be united and live as one.

no exterior projection. It must not be a political community with balanced contending forces, nor a corporate community that appears to be a living entity but, in fact, does not go beyond this”<sup>9</sup>. An integrated community is the one that gradually becomes a gathering of friends at the service of the Church; the community that carries out its apostolates and mission and at the same time promotes the persons that makes it up and enhance their journey towards God.

### **Characteristics of Religious Community Life**

The basic scriptural root and inspiration of Community Life is Luke’s presentation of the daily living of the early Church in Acts of the Apostle. Luke describes the common life of the early church thus:

The whole community of believers were one in heart and mind. No one considered as his own what belonged to him; but rather they shared all things in common. ... There was no needy persons among them, for those who owned land or houses, sold them and brought the proceeds of the sale. And they laid it at the feet of the apostles who distributed it according to each one’s need. (*Acts 4:32, 34-35*).

This exemplary community shows forth the initial direction of the faith community of the early believer. With time community life developed along different lines and with different emphases. We can point out different characteristics of Community life.

---

<sup>9</sup> Domingo Natal Alvarez, OSA. “The Augustinian Community in Practice”, in *Elements of an Augustinian Formation*, p. 322.

Jordan of Saxony identifies four main characters of religious community life from this text of Acts of the Apostles: (a) Living together. (b) Oneness of Spirit - living in one mind and one heart (c) Sharing of temporary goods (d) Proportional distribution.<sup>10</sup> In a true community there has to be a deep and true human contact with one another<sup>11</sup>, and the persons who make up this community have to be united in mind and heart. To be in one mind and one heart does not mean uniformity in all things but rather, unity of purpose and faith in God who brings members together. Again, true communion is expressed when things are owned and shared in common. The modalities for owning and sharing may differ from community to community, but at the foundation of every form of community life should be the willingness to share what one possesses. If things are owned in common the just distribution of these goods among the members are very vital to the survival and smooth running of the community. It does not make sense, therefore, for someone to claim he does not believe in common good and still lives in a religious community.

Van Bavel states that a true community presupposes “spontaneous grouping, a sense of belonging together, mutual solidarity, willingness to make sacrifices, deeper knowledge of each other, trust in one another (an absolute pre-condition for true communication), collective reflection

---

<sup>10</sup> Jordan of Saxony, OSA. *The Life of the Brethren ( Liber Vitasfratrum)*, translated by Gerard Deighan, edited by John E. Rotelle, OSA. Villanova: Augustinian Press, 1993. Pp. 63-64.

<sup>11</sup> Van Bavel T.J. OSA. *The Basic Inspiration of Religious Life*, p. 140.

and criticism and psychological unity of values, thoughts and actions”<sup>12</sup>. A community exists and survives by the presence of the people who make it up. The availability of persons enhances meetings, dialogue, communication and even a true sharing of goods in common. It is when people live together that a true sharing of each other’s life and faith is possible. This is why a religious community is negatively affected when some members are either always on the road or they are only physically present and not ready to share the life of the community. Living together in a religious community is more than merely geographically sharing the same space. Living together is primarily talking to one another and listening to one another and being interested in the “other person”. It also involves “a psychological unity of values, thoughts and actions”.

A major distinctive characteristic of a religious community life is that it is a community of faith. A religious community stands on the same vision of faith and on the same option with regard to the message of Christ. In other words, a religious community is banded together by the same spirituality and charism. Members of a religious community come together for the purpose of sharing and living their faith with one another. They come together so that they provide support for one another as they grow together in the same faith<sup>13</sup>.

Van Bavel further notes that the community should not crush a person and the individual aspects of the personality should

---

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Van Bavel T.J. OSA. *The Basic Inspiration of Religious Life*, p. 141.

not destroy the community. A community is richer and healthier when the community is respected and promoted and the persons who form the community also respected and promoted. It is important to promote personality, freedom, privacy and responsibility, but not to the detriment of the community. A proper equilibrium and balance is required for a true community to exist and have value<sup>14</sup>.

In this vein we have to add that the quality of persons forges the quality of the community they form. In other words, the community reflects the quality of persons that make it up. It means, therefore, that a good community can create good and mature persons, and good persons can create a good community.

Community life occurs when the persons that make it up are prepared to sacrifice their own personal interests for the benefit of the common good. Community starts when one “passes from the enjoyment of being together to wanting to be together, laying on one side other activities in which he is interested in order to spend more time with other members of the community”<sup>15</sup>.

---

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, p. 145-148. Not all is really “common” in Community life, in the sense that the individual persons have to be protected so that they are not “swallowed up” by the common life. See the thoughts of Cilleruelo Lope. *Caratteri del Monacato Agostiniano in Sanctus Augustinus Vitae Spiritualis Magister I*, Roma, 1959, pp. 44-45. Carlos Moran Fernandez, OSA gave a summary of Cilleruelo’s point of view in his article, “The Community in St. Augustine, Philosophical and Theological Perspectives” in *Elements of an Augustinian Formation*, p. 286.

<sup>15</sup> Varied Authors, “Communion of Life” in *Our Journey Back to God: Reflections on Augustinian spirituality*. Rome: Pubblicazioni Agostiniane, 2006, p. 317.

Community life requires a graduation from the “me” to the “us”. This graduation entails sacrifice, selflessness and personal conviction on the part of the members. A community is not formed by decree but by the collective free, open and mature persons who personally delight in interdependence, interrelationship and intercommunication. Community starts to exist when the “us” becomes paramount in the mind and action of the persons that make it up<sup>16</sup>.

Religious Community Life is a *scholar amoris*, that is, “a school of love”. Community life helps one to grow in love for God and for one’s brothers and sisters. Because the community is a place where one learns to love it is therefore a place of human growth as well. In the community one gives love and receives love; in the community one learns to love and teaches others to love. A consecrated person who is a truly integrated community person is a spiritually and humanly mature person.

### **The theological and Ecclesiastical Perspectives of Community Life**

Community life is called into being by God in the sense that religious community life originates from a common experience of God. The mystical experience of faith in God quietly, steadily and in an inexplicable manner, pulls different persons to form a community of faith. This is the mystical religious experience of every consecrated person who lives a common life. It is not enough for a community to

---

<sup>16</sup> See *Formation Plan of the Order of St. Augustine: Ratio Institutionis*, Rome, 1993, no. 28.

come together for the sole reason of sharing common interests or apostolate. Such a community will be too fragile and can only survive as a social community. A true religious community has to originate from, and be sustained by, common experience and love of God. The essential constituent of religious community is the presence of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the community is established on the values and message of Jesus Christ.

There is therefore, a Trinitarian dimension to the community. A religious community should be inspired by the unity and diversity of the intra-Trinitarian life. In the Trinity distinctiveness and unity perfectly cohere. In like manner, a religious community is the concurrence of multiplicity and unity. Commenting on the Gospel of St. John St. Augustine describes life in common in this sense when he states:

The charity of God, poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us, makes of many souls one single soul and of many hearts one single heart, in so far as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are one single God, one single Light and one single origin".<sup>17</sup>

*Vita Consecrata* equally points to the Trinity as an inspiration and model for Religious community life when it states: "By constantly promoting fraternal love, also in the form of common life, the consecrated life has shown that sharing in the Trinitarian communion can change human relationships

---

<sup>17</sup> St. Augustine. *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 39, 5.

and create a new type of solidarity".<sup>18</sup> Here Pope John Paul II wants to stress that the biting edge and value of communion of life derive from the Trinity.

In the spirituality and theology of St. Augustine, the community is a theological place. For him the human person is a theological place, that is, a place where God and man meet.<sup>19</sup> The community which is the collection of many such persons (who are places of encounter between God and man) is without doubt, a theological place. The community is therefore where its members meet God in each other and where those outside the community encounter God as well. St. Augustine says in his Rule: "Let all of you then live together in oneness of mind and heart, mutually honouring God in yourselves, whose temples you have become".<sup>20</sup> God is (should be) present and made visible in each religious community.

I think that at times we who live religious community life do not bring out this anthropologico-theological dimension of it. We tend to focus so much on the social dimensions that we

---

<sup>18</sup> John Paul II. *Consecrated Life and its Mission in the Church and in the World: Vita Consecrata*, no. 41

<sup>19</sup> See the analysis of this Augustinian theme in Varied Authors, "Communion of Life" in *Our Journey Back to God: Reflections on Augustinian spirituality*, pp. 319-325.

<sup>20</sup> *The Rule of St. Augustine*, no. 9. In another of his works St. Augustine re-presents the theme of God dwelling in us through Christ and we dwelling in him. He writes: "We dwell in Him (Jesus Christ) when we are his members, and he dwells in us when we are his temple. Unity joins us so that we may be members, and this unity is achieved through charity. And what is the source of charity? asks the apostle. The charity of God, he says, is spread in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (*Commentary on the Psalms*, 27, 6).

often forget the great mystery that we are and live, in the community. It is important we wake up to this fact so that we can better appreciate the theological value of our brother/sister in the community and of ourselves.

Religious Communal living has also an ecclesiological dimension in the sense that it is a participation in the mystery of the Church which is a communion of baptized people – the mystical body of Christ. Religious community is a microcosm of the entire Church and a special witness to the communion of life, made possible by the Holy Spirit who unites the Church. “Community life makes publicly visible and continually perceptible the gift of fraternity given by Christ to the whole Church”.

Moreover, community life is basically inspired by the life of the early Church (cf. *Acts* 2:42).<sup>21</sup> Every given religious community tries to replicate the beginnings of the Church and seeks to maintain the apostolic practice of sharing the word of God, prayers and material or spiritual goods. Religious communities constantly remind the church of her root and foundation, namely, community of God’s people who are brought together by the same faith in the Risen Christ. The common life of consecrated persons is a reliable witness of communion for the whole Church, in the style of this first community of Jerusalem.<sup>22</sup> Each community is a

---

<sup>21</sup> Second Vatican Council. Decree on the Up-to-Date Renewal of Religious Life, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 28 October, 1965. No. 15

<sup>22</sup> Varied Authors, “Communion of Life” in *Our Journey Back to God: Reflections on Augustinian spirituality*. Rome: Publicazioni Agostiniane, 2006, p. 324.

mini-church, - the body of Christ, the place of the Holy Spirit and a practical living of the universality of the Church. Like the larger Church, the community is a place where the sacraments, the word of God and faith are shared. Religious communities are and should be readable signs of the intimate communion which animates and constitutes the Church.

### **The Prophetic Character of Community Life**

Religious Community Life has a prophetic value in the sense that it speaks about the mind of God and a unique way of living the gospel. Pope John Paul II stressed in his encyclical, *Vita Consecrata* that "She (the Church) wishes to hold up before the world the example of communities in which solitude is overcome through concern for one another, in which communication inspires in everyone a sense of shared responsibility, and in which wounds are healed through forgiveness, and each person's commitment to communion is strengthened".<sup>23</sup> In other words, the values of community life go beyond the religious institutes that practice it to include the Church and the society at large. Community life enhances the advancement of the gospel to the whole world.

Community life is prophetic in the sense of calling the entire Church to reflect on where she is coming from. The Church of the post-Pentecost era was anchored on unity, fraternity, sharing of faith and material things in common. In the early Christian community, despite the obvious human difficulties they encountered, one's neighbour was important and personal life burdens and the evangelizing tasks were borne

---

<sup>23</sup> John Paul II. *Consecrated Life and its Mission in the Church and in the World: Vita Consecrata*, no. 45

collectively. This is what community life seeks to recall and re-live.

Community Life, in various ways, sounds prophetic notes by teaching the world to do things differently in different circumstances:

- a. *In our world that is grossly divided:* The world is divided along political lines, ethnic and tribal lines, economic and social lines, and the lines are almost endless. Very often, human persons are valued and considered along the line of where they come from or how much power or wealth one has. Community living, especially as it should be practised by consecrated persons, gives a very eloquent message to the effect that these considerations are inconsequential. Happiness and fulfilment can still be achieved when life is lived and shared in common. Consecrated persons who gather from different ethnic, social and economic backgrounds can and do live harmoniously together and this is a powerful message for the world today. All human persons are equal before God and harmoniously living together in unity and love, despite our diversity, resembles God more, he who in his image we were all made.
- b. *In this age of Capitalism and Selfishness:* Even here in Africa where community life was natural to our people, self-centeredness and capitalist tendencies have not only crept in, but have penetrated deep into us. Religious community life is a witness to the joy that

comes from giving and sharing. The craze for wealth and material possession has led to lots of evil and corruption in our society. St. James points out that inordinate desire and greed lead to murder and all kinds of evil (*James 4:1-10*). Fulton J. Sheen repeatedly taught that the main course of unhappiness and dissatisfaction in life is inordinate desire. Consecrated persons who truly live community life and willingly share and depend on one another have very little to worry about. St. Augustine believed that he is happier who has less needs. This is why it is shameful and a tragedy of loss of focus to see religious and consecrated persons hustle and fight for material possessions. This important witness and prophetic value should not be lost sight off.

- c. *In the face of Hunger and Poverty*: There is poverty and hunger everywhere and no country is spared of it. The rich keep getting richer and the poor keep getting poorer, and there seem to be no end in sight. Religious community life brings hope and succour and a sense of solidarity to the have-nots. But it goes beyond mere theoretical solidarity with the poor. The consecrated persons who deprive themselves of material things are also expected to share with the poor. This is why charity and option for the poor should be adopted by religious institutes. The hungry and poor persons truly understand the pains of the poor and hungry hence the concrete solidarity and identification with the poor. Jesus was like that and we are called to follow him more closely.

- d. *In the face of Loneliness*: Two of the greatest illnesses and problems of modern society is loneliness and mass manipulation. These are two threats to modern men and women of our time.<sup>24</sup> Many persons feel less and less loved, and so they feel alone in the midst of crowds. One can say that the cause of this loneliness is the fact that many people are lost in the crowd. There are so many forms of social media, so much talk about social contact and solidarity but people remain hollow, empty, lonely and sad. The reason is because real love of Jesus is still lacking in all these forms of social contact; community life “actively responds to this danger” of loneliness and mass manipulation. True Religious community is cantered on love, appreciation of the persons and genuine concern. Within a religious community, the persons who make it up demonstrate to the world that genuine selfless love and giving are possible and liveable. It is a great evangelical witness because those who truly live community life inspire persons to come out of themselves and truly communicate, to truly live for others and to truly love.

### **Difficulties in Community Life**

Reading through all that has been said so far regarding community life, one may begin to think that common living is all glorious all the time, romantic and easy. There is no doubt that community life is a wonderful form of life and that there can be bliss and happiness and joy in it. These positives

---

<sup>24</sup> Domingo Natal Alvarez, OSA. “The Augustinian Community in Practice”, in *Elements of an Augustinian Formation*, p. 318.

should be expected because as we have seen from the discussion so far, a genuine religious community life is a place of meeting with God, a place of sincere expression of love and care, a place of solidarity, progress and mutuality.

While all these are true and can be real, we want to be very realistic about the practice of community life and equally state that there are difficulties and challenges in common life, including and especially, in religious communities. As noted above, a true religious community starts to exist when the members begin to make sacrifices of their independence, their freedom, their will and their material possession. These are challenges on their own and they are difficult choices. Van Bavel gave credence to this assertion when he said that “the most difficult task in human existence is the creation of a true community with others”.<sup>25</sup>

Religious communities are composed of people from different cultural and historical backgrounds and people with different worldviews and ideals. Not every person successfully adapts to the new life and reality of the community, and this can cause difficulties. The other truth is that certain persons join the community for the wrong reason. Most of the problems and difficulties that occur in communities are caused by the members of those communities; it is very rare for problems affecting communities to come from without. In what follows, I wish to briefly explore some possible causes of difficulties in Religious Communities.

---

<sup>25</sup>

Van Bavel T.J. OSA. *The Basic Inspiration of Religious Life*, p. 149

- a. *Selfishness*: Certain persons who live in communities only think of themselves and what will benefit them. They can put in over one hundred percent of their time, energy and attention to something if they know they will personally gain from it. Such persons do not work hard for the good of the community. For instance, a community member may prefer to do some “chores” for a rich layperson / non-community member for a whole day, rather than spend two hours on a project that will benefit the community. Certain persons carry out actions that affect other members of the community negatively and they do not care about the feelings or wellbeing of the others. Not only are these attitudes unbecoming of such persons, it is also an injustice against the rest members of the community.
- b. *Inordinate Ambition and Desires*: Consecrated Life is a life of simplicity and holiness where each member witnesses to the beauty of humility and simplicity. However, there are persons who desire too many things at the same time and would do everything to attain such goals. It could be in the form of inordinate desire for power and control, or for money and wealth or for academic certificate and promotion. Money is good, academic excellence is good and authority is also good if these are properly managed. In a community where some of the members are over ambitious for material things, there is bound to be problems and difficulties, not only for the persons in question, but for the entire community. Over ambitious religious are bound to be very sad and

- gloomy religious because they are looking for things in the wrong places. The result of such a search is failure or disappointment.
- c. *Crisis of Identity*: At times certain consecrated persons begin to drift away from their original identity. When this occurs such a person becomes a problem for the community. Since he / she lives in a manner that is opposed to the nature and demands of the community, the community will suffer. A consecrated person who drifts towards partisan politics or to the status of a business man/woman or that of a married man / woman creates huge problems for the community. Apart from the fact that the prophetic role of the community will be adumbrated, the members of the community will be put into awkward situations. Such a member will hardly spend quality time with the community and may not even have time for the apostolate or projects of the community.
- d. *Petty Jealousy and Frustration*: Certain Consecrated persons do not appreciate the qualities and achievements of their members and confreres; instead, they become jealous, unnecessarily judgmental and critical. Jealousy which is the child of dissatisfaction and emptiness gives birth to frustration. Jealous people become unnecessarily competitive and continually strive to outwit others. Since they do all these with bad intentions, they usually witness consistent failure, and so get more frustrated. Frustration can also be as a result of other negative reactions towards authority or perceived opponents.

Living with frustrated persons in a community is hellish, and in fact, very frustrating.

- e. *Pride*: Without humility one can hardly speak of a true religious community. Proud people destroy the community by their inability to sincerely accept who they are in a community, namely, dependent people and people who are equal with the rest. As long as all the brothers or sisters in a community do not have mutual respect and consider one another as valuable and important persons, there is bound to be problems and difficulties. A proud religious is a shame to the system and a danger to it as well.

All these difficulties are products of human behaviours and we dare say that they are avoidable. They spoil the community which otherwise is a very beautiful way of living. It has to be said also that these difficulties and challenges help those who experience them to achieve personal growth. The remedy to the situation is life of interiority and spiritual growth. If those who live in religious communities attain spiritual maturity, all the bickering and what can be described as infantile and puerile squabbles will greatly reduce. When one is focused on God and continually seek God in one's neighbour, one will consider these described causes of difficulties in community life as drifts and loss of track. Above all, spiritual growth brings the kind of joy that no one can take from you.

## **Conclusion**

The Year of Consecrated Life is a wonderful opportunity to re-think and re-evaluate our contributions to the health and

promotion of community life. Living together, sharing life, faith and material goods in common, is a beautiful way of life, especially as consecrated persons who truly need the support of others in living out their vocation. A healthy community life makes the burden of the evangelical counsels much lighter and more interesting. From experience it is evident that celibacy, poverty and obedience can be charming if there is genuine love, friendship and mutual support in the community.

When we make sacrifices and put in efforts to live community life in an inspiring way, we equally evangelize and educate the other members of the Church and the society at large on the gospel value of love, unity and friendship.



## CHAPTER SEVEN Consecrated Persons and Charism

By  
Oseni Ogunu, OMV<sup>1</sup>  
Lanteri Oblate Seminary  
Bodija-Ibadan

### Introduction

The concept of *charism* is central to the life of all Christ's faithful. It is particularly vital to and pervades the life and mission of the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.<sup>2</sup> The Magisterium of the Church frequently calls consecrated persons to a fidelity to their charism.<sup>3</sup> Evidently, within the Consecrated Life in Nigeria, the *Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria* (men and women) have on various occasions drawn attention to the importance of charism of the Institutes in their official Communiqués.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Oseni J.O. Ogunu, OMV, a member of the Congregation of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary, is a member of the Formation Team at the *Lanteri Oblate Seminary*, Bodija-Ibadan (Nigeria). He teaches theology at the *Dominican Institute*, Ibadan; he is the Editor of *The African Enchiridion: Documents and Texts of the Catholic Church in the African world*; and the current Editor of *The Catholic Voyage*.

<sup>2</sup> These Institutes and Societies include: Orders and religious Congregations, Catholics who embraced Eremitical life, the Consecrated virgins and their related associations, and new forms of consecrated life.

<sup>3</sup> For example, John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Vita Consecrata*, nn. 36-37

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. *Echoes of Hope: The Stand of the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria on Issues of Faith and Life*. Edited by Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony OSA), 2013.

There exists many good scholarly studies on almost all aspects of Consecrated life, researches presented by experts from different disciplines and perspectives.<sup>5</sup> The occasion of the celebration of the Year of Consecrated, however, seems an appropriate time to relook at some essential themes in our Consecrated Life. One of these is *charism*. What is it? What does charism signify as it relates to Founders and our Institutes of Consecrated life and the Societies of apostolic life?<sup>6</sup> How can we participate in and interpret the charism? Who is a Founder? This article offers brief reflection on the significance of charism/founder. Without laying claim to any groundbreaking discovery, it wants to present to the average reader, a non-specialist, a *general* overview of the concepts of *Charism* and *Founder*. Thus, the article presents three main points: 1) the Biblical and Historical perspectives on "Charism"; 2) Charism: A Divine Gift to Founders, Participated And Interpreted; 3) Charism in the Consecrated Life; then, there follow some Final Remarks.

## 1. **Biblical and Historical Perspectives**

What is charism? With a Greek root, *charisma*, means a free gift, a spiritual capacity resulting from God's grace (*charis*).

---

<sup>5</sup> E.g. Edward Malatesta, SJ, "Charism", in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, Edited by Michael Downey. TPI, India (1995), pp140-143; "Fondatore", in: *Dizionario Teologico della Vita Consecrata*; W.F.Dicharry - R.J. Tapia - J.F. Gallagher, "Charism", in *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, vol.III, Pp.460-463: Catholic University of America, Washington, 1967; "Carisma", in: *Dizionario Teologico della Vita Consecrata*;

<sup>6</sup> Rather than a long nomenclature, for sake of brevity I shall here use, in inclusive sense, mostly the expressions: "Consecrated life", "Institutes", and "Consecrated persons", according to contexts. Certainly, the members of the CMSN include all approved Institutes of Consecrated life and Society of Apostolic life present in Nigeria.

The term “*charisma*” or charism, given a religious meaning by Paul and used mostly by him in the New Testament, indicates the object and the result of the divine grace (*charis*), something that produces well-being, a gift given by God to believers of every order and degree.

### 1.1. In the Bible

The word *charism* does not appear in the Old Testament text (except for two variants in the Greek version of Sir 7:33; 38:30 and in the Theodotion’s translation of Ps 30(31):22), but the phenomenon of charismatic gifts, the action of the Spirit is evident in the OT. Many personalities, heroes, judges, Moses and prophets were often invested with the effusion of the Spirit and accomplished actions thanks to the power of the Spirit effused in them by God (Judges 11:29;13:25; I Sam. 1:26). “Charism” only in the New Testament (NT) biblical Greek. In the NT the term is present 17 times, 16 times in St. Paul (Rom.1:11; 5:15.16; 6:23; 11:29; 12:6; 1 Cor.1:7;7:7;12:4; 12:9.28.30.31; 2Cor. 1:11; 1 Tim 1:6) and once in St. Peter (1 Pt 4:10). However, the usage is not uniform, varying from the general meaning equivalent to grace to the technical meaning.

The full outpouring of the Spirit was reserved for the messianic times (Ps 67(68). 19; Eph. 4:7-13). This was particularly true of the early Church when it needed special helps for its consolidation, survival and expansion. Human pride, however, tended to overemphasize the spectacular gifts, for example tongues and healing. And it became necessary for the Church’s leaders, e.g., in I Cor. Chapters 12-14, to remind Christians of:

- ❖ The common source of all gifts – the Holy Spirit;

- ❖ The comparative value of the charisms, e.g. prophecy far surpassing tongues;
- ❖ The superiority of love over all charisms; and
- ❖ What should be the orderly interaction of hierarchical and charismatic functions in the Church.

In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus promises the special assistance of the Spirit to enable a courageous proclamation and defense of the Gospel (Mk 13:11; Mt.10:19-20; Lk 21:14-15; see Acts 2:4; 4:23-31; 6:8-10). The Spirit is the primal blessing who dwells in us, but is not owned by us. Indeed, the Spirit is “the chief external Witness to the presence of Christ’s reign.”<sup>7</sup> The Acts of the Apostle, describes the charismatic effects of the coming of the Spirit on the Pentecost (Acts 2:1ff) and the special power of the Spirit in Stephen (6: 5.8), Philip (8:5-8), the Ephesians (19:5-6). Although it does not mention the word, Charismata, the entire book gives many evidences of the gifts that Paul mentions.

God in sovereign wisdom bestow gifts in variety of ways through the sacrament of baptism, through response to the spoken word, in a moment of trial, in answer to humble prayer or loving action. We are urged to desire and seek charism in order to better serve God and God’s people, but it is not for us to determine whether, how, or when any particular gift will be given to us.

According to Paul, *charisma* indicates the total gift of salvation received by all believers (Rom 5:15-16; 6:23). He uses the

---

<sup>7</sup> J. Koenig, *Charismata: God’s gift for God’s People* (Philadelphia: West Minister, 1978), p. 73, 76.

word, “charism”, to indicate all those particular phenomena and manifestations expressed in the faith of persons who are members of the Christian communities he founded, especially Corinth.

Paul distinguishes various *kinds* of charisms. Sometimes, he uses it in a general meaning to indicate a free gift of God; but at other times he signifies more specific gifts that enables a person to evangelize, teach, govern, prophesy, heal or even to speak in tongues and to work miracles and wonders. In addition, Paul considers the following to be charismatic gifts: celibacy (1 Cor. 7:7), mutual encouragement through witness to faith (Rom.1:11), the endurance of suffering (2 Cor. 4:7-12; Phil.1:29; Col.1:24; Jn. 18:11), the sharing in Jesus’ passion and death. “A charisma always involves suffering.”<sup>8</sup> Paul gives four lists of charisms: 1 Cor. 12:8-10; 1 Cor.12:28-30; Rm.12:6-8; and Eph.4:11. These lists presents altogether 29 charisms but, granted the repetitions, we can distinguish 20 different charisms. Paul does not intend to give a list that is complete, exhaustive and concordant, because the abundance and the richness of these gifts do not permit reductions to a system or to rules. Furthermore, the Pastoral Epistles consider the office conferred by the laying on of hand to be a charism (I Tm 4:14; 2 Tm 1: 6-7). All these gifts are given individually to persons, but their orientation or direction is for the collective benefit of the Body, the Christian Community (1 Cor.12:7). In sum, with W.F. Dicharry and others, we can say that the various kinds of charisms can be divided into three main

---

<sup>8</sup> Karl Rahner, *The Spirit of the Church*, p.68

groups: the teaching charisms; the service charisms; and the extraordinary or miraculous charisms.<sup>9</sup>

Paul, especially in Rom 12 and 1 Cor.12, presents the *significance* of this service for the life and the growth of the Christian community. Using four expressions, he indicates the gifts offered by God to His Family, the Church, namely: a) Gifts of the spirit (1 Cor.12:1;14:1); b) Charisms (1 Cor. 12:4); c) Ministries (1 Cor.12:5; 2 Cor.9:12ff); and (d) Workings (1 Cor. 12:6).

Noteworthy also is that Paul uses the term, charism, in a circumstantial and thematic sense. In a situation where he notices a facile and equivocal non Christian enthusiasm or finds extravagant spontaneities that do not aim at unity and at the harmonious building of the community, Paul decisively intervenes with the weight of his authority and refuses categorically every exuberant and individualist appropriation of these gifts (Cfr. 1 Cor.13:1-13). He wants to stop undue overestimation of charisms. However, but his worry is also intended to not mortify or degrade absolutely the reality of these gifts which he sees concretely realized and stimulated by the Spirit for the good of the community. In fact, Paul intervenes decisively in the community of Thessalonica, so that it stays attentively vigilant to identify, affirm and welcome divine gifts: "Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test everything. Retain what is good."(1 Thessalonians 5:19-21).

---

<sup>9</sup> W.F.Dicharry - R.J. Tapia - J.F. Gallagher, "Charism", in: *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, vol.III, Pp.460-463. Catholic University of America, Washington, 1967.

Paul does not give a systematization of the charisms, because he knows well their provenience: these gifts of the Spirit belong ineluctably to the economy of gifts and of edifying gifts. For this reason, he presents only indications and basic criteria that enables one to grasp their genuine authenticity. For him, "love" is the unique criterion to make the body of the church to grow consistently towards the full stature and maturity of Christ (1 Cor. 12:31; 13:13); and the "Spirit" is the most excellent gift, which permits the love of God to be revealed in the hearts of persons and a charism to be as such (Rm 5:15; 8:15-16). The gifts of the Spirit may be temporary or permanent, ordinary or extraordinary, according to the mission and service for which it was given and offered to all the faithful. Unlike "talents", "charisms" are supernatural gifts given by loving benevolence of God.

In Greek the words *charisma* ("gift"), *charis* ("grace"), and *chara* ("joy") all have the same root. The attitudes of joy and of thanksgiving and praise because of God's gracious gifts -- which characterizes the communities depicted in the New Testament -- should be marks of the community of any age and impel it to proclaim the Good News far and wide. In accordance with the technical meaning of the word *charism* as found in the NT and particularly in St. Paul, theology defines charism as "a gratuitous gift from God, supernatural, transitory, given to the individual for the good of others, for the benefit of the Church."<sup>10</sup> From this standpoint,

---

<sup>10</sup> W.F.Dicharry - R.J. Tapia - J.F. Gallagher, "Charism", in: *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, vol.III, Catholic University of America, Washington, (1967), pp. 461-462.

throughout history, efforts have been made to deepen the understanding of the nature of this gift, --namely, what it consists of and what it implies in the individual receiving it --, and the different types of charisms.

## 1.2 In the History of the Church

The saving work of God is accomplished through the people whom he has gifted. So, the presence of the Spirit and of the Spirit's gifts has a history. In the Old Testament, as we saw earlier, emphasis is placed on the gifts given to the leaders of the people. However, there is a promise that one day the gifts will be given to everyone (Is. 42:1; 44:1-3; Joel 2:28-29; Ezek 36:26-27; Jer.31:31-33). Paul recognizes that "the gifts and the call [to Israel] are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:28-29; see 9:4-5). When the fullness of time arrived (Gal 4:4) the fullness of the gifts was especially concentrated in the charismatic *par excellence*, "Jesus of Nazarene .... a man commended to you by God with mighty deeds, wonders, and signs, which God worked through him in your midst" (Acts 2:22); "...God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the holy Spirit and power. He went about doing good and healing all those oppressed by the devil, for God was with him" (Acts 10:38).

God chose to continue the work of Jesus through his disciples, the Church, which has the duty to preserve and witness to the faith. Every member of the Church is called to share actively in this mission and, therefore, each has been empowered by the Spirit with a particular gift.

a) **The Patristic Period**

b) In the first three centuries of the history of the Church's life, the charism indicated in the New Testament continued to be present and recognized, even if - understandably - not exactly in the same degree as in the initial communities. The use of the term "charism" soon became rare. The prevalent tendency was to assume the characteristic of extraordinariness. "Charism" was used in the generic sense of grace or gift. Origen had soon noticed the decrease of the use of charisms and made a theory of it. Indeed, around the first heresies of the post-apostolic era and the Montanist crisis of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century there began a clear eclipse of the charism factor: this eclipse runs through the history of the Church till Vatican Council II, with the exception of some sporadic interest for the phenomenon of its reawakening intertwined in the variegated ecclesial life. Among the factors responsible for this eclipse of *charism* were: first, the effects of the Montanist crisis -- which sharply contrasted the hierarchical Church with the "true" Church of the charismatics, and the effect of progressive institutionalization of the Church; then, in addition, there were the heretical movements, the Protestant Reformation, followed by the Counter-Reformation, a growing centralization and defensiveness and an increasing influence of the clergy and hierarchy in every aspect of the Church life did not favour the flourishing of the charisms in the ecclesial body. Nevertheless, at every moment of the Church's history various charisms -- for example, in the founders and some members of religious communities and in heroic attention to social and spiritual ills of the times and places, etc. -- have continued to be a sign of God's presence and activity.

In the period from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> centuries of the Fathers of the Church, a fundamental question was posed: Are the “extraordinary” charisms reserved to the primitive church or do they belong to the Church of all times?. For the Fathers of the Church in this period, wherever the Holy Spirit is, there we find His charisms. Therefore, starting from the consideration of the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in the Church, the response is that the charisms are perennials because perennial is the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church. The Fathers added other lists to those of Paul: the charisms of interpretation of the scriptures, of exorcism, of martyrdom, of fasting, of perpetual virginity, of mercy. Testimonies about this came from Cyril of Jerusalem (313-387), Basil of Cesarea (323-379), St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430); St. Gregory the Great (540-604), and so on.

### c) The Medieval Era

From the 6<sup>th</sup> century to medieval times there was no great novelty of positions. St. Bernard (1091 -1159), referring to Gregory the Great, offers a spiritual interpretation of miracles; St. Anthony of Padua, commenting that the Church has grown in her maturity, opines that charismatic signs might even be absent (St. Anthony of Padua, “Le Prediche”, in *Opera Omnia*, Siena, 1963, vol.V.236).

On his part, St. Thomas Aquinas explains that charisms are signs of credibility of the Church (*Summa Theologica* Ia - IIae, Q.68, 70, III, 1; IIa-IIae, Q.171-178). In his view, charism is a grace given by God not for the personal justification or sanctification of the individual, but for the spiritual welfare of

others. It differs essentially from the type of grace that renders the individual pleasing to God or holy in His sight (*gratia gratum faciens*). Charism retains for its name the merely generic term of gratuitously given grace (*gratia gratis data*; see *Summa Theologiae 1a IIae, Q.111.1 ad 3*). Charisms, may be given to the individual in a purely instrumental manner to accomplish some salutary effect in others. Thus, a charismatic person might not necessarily be a holy person, although ordinarily God will use as his instrument a person who is close to Him. The individual is instrumentally empowered with extraordinary ability to communicate to others that which he had received permanently through a gift. The superiority and permanency of those graces that render the individual holy do not detract from the ontological and supernatural perfection of charisms. Charisms are product of special intervention of God in man's faculties and operation. Aquinas argues, therefore, that charisms can accompany the Church throughout her history; in other words, charism belongs to the Church of all times.

#### **d) Theological Reflections after the Council of Trent, before Vatican Council II**

During the period following the Council of Trent Theological reflections widen the concept of charisms beyond the limits of the primitive Church and define them as "*gratiae gratis datae*" (grace freely given), that is, exceptional gifts that God grants to some Christians, not for his personal and exclusive good, but rather for the good, the specific utility of the building of the entire Church. There are different theological positions in this regard, though that definition remains substantially the understanding of charisms for a long time.

During the years preceding Vatican Council II, there continues the uncertainty and variety of opinions concerning the permanence, or non permanence of charisms in the church. Some Popes refer in a general way to the action of the Spirit, when they directly treat the theme of the foundation of religious institutes. For example, Pius VI in *Quod aliquantum* (10 March 1791), Pius VII in the Apostolic Constitution *Ad Cathedram Apostolorum Principes* (24/5/1807). Just before Vatican Council I the conception of charisms was represented, more than anything else, by the opinion that they are extraordinary, conspicuous and transitory gifts offered principally to the Church of the origins - the early Church -- and communicated through the imposition of the hands of the apostles. In fact, during Vatican Council 1, it was considered as charism - especially the "charism of truth and of faith" - the prerogative of the infallibility of the Pope, in the Constitution "*Pastor Aeternus*" of 1870: a gift conferred by God on Peter and his successors, which can never be lacking precisely due to his function of service for the benefit of the whole ecclesial community (DS 3071).

However, the theology of the Magisterium has some signs of sensibility toward a theological discourse that is wider immediately after Vatican Council 1. For instance, Leo XIII, in the Encyclical Letter dedicated to the Holy Spirit, *Divinum Illud* (9 March 1897), speaks of charisms as a demonstration of the divine origin of the Church and considered them as extraordinary gifts given by the benevolence of God for particular needs, especially in relation to saints and to the

action of the Holy Spirit that brings them forth continually in the Church (DS 3328). Then, Pius XI discusses the Holy Spirit in his Apostolic Letter, *Unigenitus Dei Filius* (19 March 1924). Pius XII in his Encyclical Letter, *Mystici Corporis Christi* (29/6/1943), while continuing to consider charisms solely as extraordinary and prodigious gifts, overcomes a reductionist conception of the Church and promotes an ecclesiology in which charisms are now considered within the communal structure of the Church, in the mystery of the mystical Body of Christ, with great balance between the hierarchical and charismatic dimensions. Pius XII emphasized the organic structure of the Church, which is not limited to solely the hierarchical order nor is it constituted only by charismatic persons with bond with the same hierarchy (DS 3801).

Within the theological arena, towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was the beginning of a controversy between Carl Gustav Adolf von Harnack (7 May 1851 – 10 June 1930) and Gotthold Julius Rudolph Sohm (29 October 1841 in Rostock – 16 May 1917) regarding the structure of the early Church. This structure was seen on the one hand in the prospective of a double organization – social and religious organization – while, on the other hand, in an exclusively charismatic viewpoint, alien to whatsoever institution or juridical ordinances. For Harnack, the essence of the Church coincides with the juridical ordering, while Sohm eliminates the presence of the Spirit from every juridic-social activity. K. Holl, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century tries to unify both positions and opens the way for a new probing,

developed subsequently by Rudolf Bultmann, E. Kaseman, H. Conzelman and H.V. Campenhausen.

In sum, the eclipse of the charism factor is often explained as being a result of the confrontation and of the dialectics between authority/institution and charismatic excitements or agitation. However, this explanation cannot be superficially reduced to rigid schematism, because the process is much richer, articulated and complex. Surely, it is not possible to accept the thesis according to which, on the one hand there is a charismatic Church, and on the other side, an hierarchic-institutional Church, as if both were opposing enemies. Perhaps, the response could be sought along the lines of an “and” rather than an *aut-aut* (“either/or”).

**(c) After Vatican Council II**

One of the merits of Vatican Council II is to have restored to the term “charism” its fullest significance, not limited to include solely extraordinary facts but also the more common and simple facts (LG, nn. 4, 12; AA, 3; AG 28). With Vatican II, the Magisterium gave an exhaustive treatment to the presence of the charismatic gifts, understood as a normal or ordinary aspect of the life and mission of the Church that concerns each and all of the faithful. From the lexical viewpoint, the term “charism” is cited 14 times in the documents of Vatican II; in about 100 times reference is made in some way to it. The announcement of Vatican II by John XXIII is a symbol opening to the new flourishing of charisms in order to renew our times, as a new Pentecost, its wonders (AAS 54 (1962), 13).

Soon after Vatican II, a new extraordinary development began: the delineating of a more mature doctrine about the Church and Holy Spirit. We see the emergence of a recomposition of a dynamic and balanced parable of re-evaluation of charisms and of all that they imply. This is not so much because the term, charism, is explicitly cited in official documents as, rather, for the new and true appreciation of the Church. It was near the time of Vatican Council II, in the USA, we see the birth of one of the many signs of this new Pentecost: the foundation of the “Charismatic Renewal” or “Renewal in the Spirit”. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century Karl Rahner was one of the theologians that had the greatest influence on the rehabilitation of charisms, favouring a more fruitful attention to charisms in theology and in the vision of the Church as a mystery and sacrament. At the strictly Magisterial level, a fundamental reference must be made to Pius XII; he, with his doctrine, not only accepts the variety and multiplicity of charisms, but also inserts them positively within a renewed ecclesial and christologico-pneumatological perspectives of the Body of Christ, the Church. In this regard, the thesis of K. Rahner is explicit: the charismatic element is not at the margin of the Church, but belongs necessarily to its essence, as are the ministries and the sacraments. The only difference, he explains, lies in the fact that charisms, belonging to the free and unforeseeable action of the Spirit, appears in history in forms always new and, therefore, the whole Church must make herself welcoming in a manner that is always new. On the hierarchical ministry, in particular, lies the delicate duty to examine and cultivate these gifts of the Spirit according to

the original identity for which they were given within the people of God (Cfr. 1 Thess.5:19).

In brief, in the light of the teachings of the Scriptures and Vatican Council II, and of the experience of the Church, we can conclude concerning charism that:

- ❖ Charisms are not a thing of the past but are eminently contemporary and actual; they do not hover in the periphery of the Church, but are eminently central and essential to it.<sup>11</sup>
- ❖ We can, therefore, expect a continued outpouring of the Spirit with ever new forms of life, witness, and service, and hence even new forms of consecrated life in the Church in Africa, although it is not for us to say to what extent God will offer the gifts and to what degree individuals and communities will gratefully and responsibly receive them. The more Christians assume their vocation to contribute to building a just and peaceful world, offering witness that will offend the selfish and the powerful, the more they will need to be attentive to their personal and collective experiences. Christians must, on the one hand, read the signs of the times in the events of contemporary history, and, on the other hand, discern the prompting of the Spirit within their own hearts. For example, the young Churches in Africa, as they grow and mature, will need to evaluate the voices that proclaim new forms of thinking, formulating, celebrating and living and expressing

---

<sup>11</sup> H. Kung, "The Charismatic Structure of the Church", in: *Concilium*, 4: *The Church and Ecumenism*, ed. H. Kung, New York, Paulist, 1965, p.58.

the faith in ways that reflect their own cultures and traditions.

- ❖ Important, efficacious and even necessary as more extraordinary charisms (e.g., healing, speaking in tongues, prophecy, etc.) are for the development of the life of the Church and her mission, the more ordinary gifts are the substance of the life that most truly characterizes the pilgrim Church: “faith, hope and love, in the longing for eternity, the patience of the cross, heartfelt joy.”<sup>12</sup>
- ❖ To distinguish authentic gifts from illusory ones and to use charisms well, individuals and communities in the Church, together with the hierarchy must exercise discernment. Negative factors to be avoided in the discernment are well expressed by one author: “a penchant for the striking and sensational, and a possible neglect of gifts which are less showy but more useful; a certain emotionalism which attaches excessive importance to feelings and personal experience when judging the fruits of the Spirit; elitism, which exaggerates the importance of belonging to the Renewal, and may even tend to despise those who do not belong to it; a certain fundamentalism in the interpretation of scripture passages, neglecting the result of scientific exegesis; false ecumenism which tend to downplay doctrinal differences that are still keeping the Christian Churches apart; and a certain self-centredness which

---

<sup>12</sup> Karl Rahner, *The Spirit of the Church*, p. 57.

seems to neglect the social dimension in the Church's life."<sup>13</sup>

At the same time, we can be confident that the same Spirit who generously bestows the charisms will at the same time grant the wisdom and charity necessary for the building of the Church-Family of God and for the effectiveness of her mission to the world.

## **2. Charism: A Divine Gift to Founders, Participated and Interpreted**

In the Magisterium of the Church since the XIII century till the post-Vatican II Popes (e.g. Paul III Julius III, then Pius VI, Pius IX, Pius XI, Pius XII and John XXIII) have, to varying degrees, referred to this or that founder of religious institutes, seeing in him or her the action of God in their lives. The Vatican Council II speaks of the eminent role of these "illustrious men and women" (LG 45) and of their contribution to the enrichment of the Church (PC, 1). The Paul VI and John Paul VII frequently speak of the charism of the founders. In this way, the Pope laid the foundations for the rethinking of the theology of the Founder. The present section proposes a brief outline of the following points: the non-necessary and the essential elements in a founder, spiritual fecundity, the charism of the Founder, non-transferable characteristic aspects as well as some issues of interpretation of the charism of the Founder.

---

<sup>13</sup> L. Bermejo, *The Spirit of Life: The Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian*, pp.386-387.

### 1. **Who is Founder?**

There are elements that not necessary in the identification and description of a founder. Put negatively, a founder is not the person who wrote the rules, the constitutions or the statutes; in fact, many founders and foundresses did not write them. A founder is not the person who first had the idea of the Institute, because there are cases in which the illumination was received by another person: Sr. Maria Celeste first understood that God wanted Alphonsus Maria de Liguori to found a Congregation. M. Anthonia Paris saw, contemporaneously with Anthony Maria Claret, that the later should establish his Congregation of Missionaries.

So, what is the essential element in a founder? The radical element in a founder is this set of facts, namely, that s/he: (a) feels *called to follow* a determine kind of evangelical life and to consecrate oneself to a certain service of the Church and to have received an adequate charism; (b) begun to *exercise a certain influence*, attracting people to the same kind of life and service, that is, to have helped others to be aware that God has given the same charism to them; (c) has, thus, gradually establish a *new evangelical family*; and (d) has expressed one's own vocation almost always through writing and in some cases, only orally, creating in this way the nucleus of the rules.

Almost all persons recognised as founders or foundresses by the Church are included in this fact.

## 2. Spiritual Fecundity

Certainly, founders and foundresses are shining models of holiness, often magnificent (St. Benedict, St. Clara, St. Ignatius of Loyola, Venerable Pius Bruno Lanteri, etc.); however, what precisely characterizes a founder or foundress as such is the gift of *spiritual fecundity*. This spiritual fecundity shows the special presence of the Holy Spirit, the giver of life, in the founders: a presence that characterizes them as men and women of the Spirit, who uses them to give new life to the Church, enriching the Church with a variety of gifts (PC,1).

## 3. Charism

Charism is a life-giving *gift* given by the Holy Spirit to those whom He *calls to found* a religious family, and this involves the participation of other members. We consider, firstly, the vocational Gift. The spiritual fecundity of founders is concentrated on the charism, or gift of the Spirit, which render them capable of fulfilling a mission for the good of the Church. The charism in the theology of Founder (or in general in the theology of consecrated life) is a vocational gift. Secondly, charism is Vital Gift. In the light of St. Paul's teachings, charism is understood as a life communicated by the Spirit. Charism is a life-giving gift for the individual to whom it is given and for the community to which it is destined. Since it is a vital gift, charism can be more described than defined. In addition to the gifts that they may receive individually, as the human origin of the institute, the founder has a double gift: (a) a gift that renders him or her capable of creating an evangelical family in the Church; this gift is given to him or her as a person; (b) a gift that is

oriented towards a kind of life and a service in the community. This gift will be shared with members of the group and will be, for this reason, the charism of the Institute. Thirdly, there is the gift to found. The charism that enables a person to found has various aspects, namely: persuasion and inspiration, comprehension and expression, and holiness.

#### **4. Participated Charism**

Furthermore, the Founder receives a gift, which the divine Spirit then grants to his sons or daughters. The form or expression of participation, a sharing, in this charism can be can be succinctly indicated as follows:

##### **a) Author of Charism**

The founder will describe the received gift in one way or another, thus, formulating the fundamental rule. And the Institute will try to interpret it in the course of its history. It must be noted, however, that it is improperly that we speak of participated charism as something communicated by the founder. Pauline theology reminds us that only the Holy Spirit is author of charisms in the Church. It is, therefore, the Spirit that communicates the charisms to members of the Institute. The founder only transmits it inasmuch as, upon his death, he/she leaves his or her own life as a model with which one confronts himself or herself, as manifestation of the use made of his charism. The group is born precisely because a certain number of men and women become aware of their vocational charism, since they see the founder and associate themselves with him/her in order to fulfill the vocation. Therefore, one could speak of the mediation of the

founder, in the sense that he is the first to live this charism in an eminent way and his children feel in tune with his original experience. The mediation of the founder continues after his death through the Institute that makes him known.

### **b) Central Nucleus**

The central nucleus of participated charism is constituted by this contribution, founded in the response given to this question: What is the first and fundamental intention of the founder? The response offers, in any case, a type of existence oriented towards the divine service in a certain way. However, there are cases in which the emphasis is placed on life: such was, for example, the case of St. Bernard, who seeks to create a framework for the development of an existence directed solely to God; or, the case of Francis-Chiara, Basilia-Macrina, who try to return to the Gospel, thus renewing the Church. The activities in this case are those commonly carried out among Christians and these or other activities can be adopted.

There are other institutes, more numerous, which were born above all for a specific activity:

- the contemplation that intercedes and enriches (e.g., the monks like Trappist; or the Discalced Order of Mount Carmel (Carmelites);
- A clearly apostolic activity (e.g., catechesis, evangelization, spiritual renewal, formation of the laity and of the clergy, social communication);
- Or, a service of charity (e.g. the poor, to the sick, the elderly, the orphans, prisoners, refugees).

These last two types of ministries are distinguished because, although the institutes dedicated to them have many things in common, there are essential differences between the two types and from them emerge spiritualities that are clearly differentiated (e.g. John of God or Ignatius of Loyola) .

In the genesis of all Institutes we find, above all, that the founder sees a need of the local church with a universal projection. This is evident in Benedict (the Crisis of Latin monasticism) and more also in Basilio, Francis of Assisi, and Pius Bruno Lanteri. All Institutes are born for the Church. But the phenomenon is more evident in the institutes of apostolic life and of charity. For instance, Dominic of Guzman and the spread of heresy; Vincent de Paul and the abandoned peasants; John the Baptist de la Salle and the poor children without instruction; Anthony Maria Claret and the lack of evangelization that followed the suppression of religious orders; Pius Bruno Lanteri (1759-1839) and the proclamation of truth even as he combats against current errors, and the announcement of the mercy of God and reconciliation, having seen the impact of the past Revolution on the life of the faithful in a time of great moral confusion and spiritual discouragement. The central nucleus of the charism responds to the vocation to satisfy a given need, for which the group is born, and sometimes it converts to religious institute and therefore its members become religious.

Therefore, it is not surprising that many founders return to the apostolic aim, to define the kind or style of life, the spirituality, the formation and the government of their

Institutes. Around this central nucleus we also find developed all other elements of participated charism, including the religious life. Religious life is profoundly conformed, in spirit and in the style of life, by the orientation to ministry.

**c) Kind of life**

The first element of charism, which derives from this central nucleus, is the kind of life embraced by the founder and by his first companions. First of all, the choice of celibacy, of poverty, of contemplative or apostolic solitude, of community, obedience, of apostolic commitment. Here, the reference is to the various types of life totally oriented towards divine service. However, there are founders of apostolic institutions which along with persons committed to celibacy, include also members who are not committed to it, although they live alone, or persons who are bound by the bond of marriage, which is sacramental consecration.

**d) Rule of Life**

Deriving from the central nucleus of charism, as a constitutive element, is the concrete rule of life followed by the Institute. Included in this is a certain way of understanding fraternal life in common (or Community life), the forms and the numbers of practices of piety or religious acts), etc. Obviously, other causes may intervene: for instance, the influence of environment or milieu; but this refer to the problem of posterior interpretation.

**e) Spirituality**

By the word “spirituality” is meant here the concrete way of living a life in the Spirit, the way in which the infinite richness of Christ is restricted and as diversified, informing the spiritual experience of the believer. As far as religious institute is concerned, this translates principally into two subjects: (a) Predominant orientation towards certain aspect of the mystery (e.g., the Trinity, Incarnation, prophetic ministry, passion and resurrection of Christ, intercession of Mary, the Church); (b) or predominant orientation towards certain characteristics of Christian life (e.g., apostolic fervour, contemplative love, the compassion with the Redeemer).

Holiness is expressed in the Founder not only with particular intensity but also with diverse characteristics. Certainly, the Christocentrism of Francis is part of the Franciscan heritage; the strong apostolic orientation of Ignatius of Loyola informs the Jesuit spirituality, as the Trinitarian and Christological aspects of the experience of the founder are a source of inspiration for his followers; the strong sense of Church is the heritage of the Antonia Paris to her Claretian daughters; A keen sense of the Mercy of God made manifest in Jesus Christ, a filial love for Mary and a genuine sense of fidelity to the Church lived by Ven. Pius Lanteri, are a part of the characteristic features of Lanterian charism and an heritage to his spiritual sons and daughters.

Through the grace of God, the consecrated persons undergoes a radical re-orientation to Jesus Christ in the spirit of the Founder. As prayer forms his heart in the likeness of Christ, the candidates to consecrated life participate in the

community life, apostolic works in a variety of settings, careful spiritual direction, rigorous studies in philosophy, theology and spirituality/charism of the institute.

**f) The Form of Government?**

Is the government part of the charism? There are cases in which a certain structure of government -- clearly defined by the founder and conformed to the aim of the Institute -- is a part of the gift that distinguishes the Institute in the Church. However, the government of institutes generally reproduces more or less the system of government existing in the society of the time in which the Institute was founded; on the other hand, there are founders, whom the Roman Curia changed the system of government without this thereby being in their eyes an essential modification. In this regard every Institute has its own story to tell.

**5. Non Transferable Characteristics**

Not everything that is exemplary in the founder passes on as his heritage to the Institute. Because there are exemplary facts, which show the ardent humanity, but also limited elements or facts with which grace had to combat. They are facts which have strictly personal value. The founders and foundresses have right to their own limitations. Institutes have sinned frequently by converting their founders into a somewhat abstract icon, and therefore refuse to see their human limitations. Part of the work of grace was, thus, forgotten. Today experts engage in studies that are more respectful of the total reality – the entirety of both the strengths and human limitations of founders and foundresses.

### **5.1. Psychological characteristics**

Evidently, the personality traits of the founder does not become heritage of the Institute. In addition, the following elements do not become heritage of the Institute: the ways of doing things, the manner of relating with other persons, which derive from his specific psychology.

### **5.2. Ideas**

The theological or philosophical ideas in the broad sense, fruits of education, do not pass on as heritage of the Institute. Nor do even the ideas of the founder on spiritual or ascetic theology in general pass on as heritage of the Institute. Rather, the heritage that the founder passes on to the Institute include the concrete spiritual teachings that derive from his experience and are in relation with his vocation: such are, for example, the insistence on certain aspects of the mystery of Christ, or of virtue, but not the theoretical doctrine that he may expose while speaking of certain virtues.

### **5.3. Environmental Characteristics**

These are transmitted at the beginning but the traits of time and place -- that is, the environment impressed on the founder and his first companions -- tend to disappear. Time ensures the disappearance, insensibly, of the traits that come from him. There are Institutes that were born international due to the different provenience of their first members (e.g. Dominicans and Jesuits); others Institutes became international soon after their foundation (e.g., Franciscans). But there are others that, in spite of the universal vocation, toiled or were hardly able to become international, even when they were established in other nations. This made

some members to consider as inalienable certain ways of living and of interpreting religious life, which are common in the natural milieu or environment of origins, but which have no universal value. One of the consequences is that unnecessary tensions and conflicts arise, when national minorities begin to grow -- in number and in reflection. Nigeria had its own examples of such institutes. Even decades after Vatican II, some institutes, in fact, were forced to rethink their policy of non admission of indigenous candidates by fact of lack of vocations from home countries and the inevitable choice made to ensure the needed continuity, not extinction, of the institute, though some "theological" or "missionary" motives were suddenly discovered and sprinkled upon the decisions made.

## **6. Interpretation**

The charism of founder, his mission and his spirit are continually subject to interpretation, in various ways. They are interpreted originally by the founder, in life of the Institute, in an expressed manner. Through discernment, fundamental norms derive from the encounter with the divine gift of the Spirit, basic criteria of interpretation need to be identified and respected.

### **6.1. Original**

The Founder himself already gave a progressive interpretation of his charism, as he undergoes through spiritual experiences which lead him to become more conscious of the charism. In fact, every experience is both an encounter with a reality that comes from outside -- in this case, divine grace -- and the interpretation of this reality by

the individual. The founder or foundress begin to interpret him/herself, since s/he have been stimulated by different vocational experiences. For instance, the encounter with: a poor sick person in the case of John of God; a poor child lacking education, for the Castanyer brothers; the divine grace in an interior form in visions or initial locutions of Francis of Assis, Anthony Maria Claret, Anthonia Paris; or persons affected by current errors and suffering moral confusion or spiritual discouragement in the case of Ven. Pius Lanteri.

This interpretation of oneself and of his/her charism continues in the Founder, throughout his/her whole life. At the beginning, in fact, it is not necessarily clear what his/her Institute must be. He/she discovers it, gradually, through other experiences or in the process of discernment.

Subsequently, the founders, in one way or the another, carry out a second interpretation of the charism describing them orally -- by means of conferences and conversations, and more frequently through writings in form of autobiographies, rules, constitutions..... Therefore, the texts of founders have a normative value for the further development of tradition.

## **6.2. In Life**

However, the process of the interpretation does not end there. This is because although the founder may die, the living tradition continues: God continues to call believers to the same vocation and to give them the same fundamental charism. Times and situations change and the Institute

continue to interpret. It does this through the decisions of government, that are taken as the need arise. For instance, the decision to open education centres in an institute that had not got such centres; or to assume the administration of parish which was never done before; or decision to multiply the types of apostolate which presupposes a re-interpretation.

### **6.3. Express Interpretation**

Finally, there are privileged moments of reflective interpretation. They are General Chapters, especially those in which the institute finds itself obliged to confront itself with certain fundamental questions, or new and grave matters. Such, for example, were the special general chapters of renewal and the adaptation that followed Vatican Council II. Each Institute had to review its life, measuring itself with the original inspiration of the Founder or Foundress.

Hermeneutics is not easy, it is dangerous but necessary and inevitable. It is not easy to distinguish, in some cases, between the essential and the superfluous, the permanent and the changing or temporary elements. There is sometimes a risk, because the religious institute do not enjoy infallibility. Their rectors or superiors can make mistakes and others must later on correct the errors; the history of religious life has many examples of such cases.

### **6.4. Fundamental Norm**

Fundamental norm derives, ultimately, from the necessity to enter into encounter with the gift of the Spirit. Therefore, it is necessary to commit oneself to a process of discernment,

that is in an attitude of faith that listens and reflects. This process involves the study of the sources but animated by prayers. Thus, one needs to act, as happens in every process of discernment, by way of the initial indifference, listening or attentive reading, offering our ideas and sentiments to the Lord.

### **6.5. Basic Criteria**

The basic criteria that guide the interpretation of charism seem to be the following points:

#### **a) Essentiality**

Identify which are the primary elements and which are the secondary elements in the experience of the founder.

#### **b) Proportionality**

Put oneself before the world and the church of our own time (and place), just as the founder placed himself or herself before the world and the Church of his/her own time and place.

#### **c) Intentionality**

It is necessary to discover the intention of the founder and judge his/her action on the basis of that. The concrete action may be the fruit of his time, that is, they constitute the way in which he responded to charism, rather than the charism itself.

#### **d) Profound reality and Historical forms**

One must reflect on the significance assumed by some decisions, distinguishing them as much as possible from historical aspect. In this way, it is convenient to distinguish

between the ministry of an Institute and the historical forms that this ministry had adopted at the beginning: for example, between renewal of preaching of the Christian Life and the parish missions, it is necessary to distinguish between significance that the Founder attributed to community and the disciplinary forms of living fraternal life in common that he took from his environment.

### **3. Charism in the Consecrated Life**

#### **3.1. *Charism* in the Magisterium of the Church**

The pre-Conciliar Magisterium, as earlier indicated, gave germinal premises for a new mentality which equilibrates the perception of charisms in the Church and in the theology of Consecrated Life. Some popes - e.g., Pius VI, Pius IX, Pius XI and Pius XII - have made references in a general way to the action of the Holy Spirit when they speak more directly about the theme of foundation of religious institutes. During Vatican II the interventions became more specific. Some Conciliar Fathers (e.g. A. Sol, V. Sartre) highlighted the importance of Charismatic elements inherent in every institute; other Conciliar Fathers (e.g. Jean Zoa, Philippe, Janssens) enriched the conciliar debate concerning the image of the Church in its charismatic dimension, in addition to its hierarchic-institutional aspect. This new ecclesiological vision shows that there is a recovery of a gradual but deepened perception of the charismatic reality of consecrated life.

In fact, starting from the Vatican II, the various institutes - drawing from a renewed and more profound ecclesiological

and pneumatological vision - embarked on the important journey of revision and reform of their Constitutions and rules of life: in this way, they try to unite harmoniously the principal juridical elements required by the document *Ecclesiae Sanctae* (II,I/12-13) with the biblico-theological data of consecrated life and the charismatic thought of each Institute.

The Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* specifies that, while not belonging to the hierarchical structure of the Church, Consecrated Life is a special divine gift, a sign of the Christian mystery and belong to its life and holiness, and therefore to its most profound sacramental nature, to its essence originated from the free initiative of the spirit (Cf. LG nn.4, 12, 43-45; PC 1-5, 15; AG 23, 29, 40; and EN 69). LG 8 speaks about a charismatic institutional structure of the Church, that is, about a composition of hierarchical gifts both charismatic and ministerial. Subsequently, the apostolic Constitution *Evangelica Testificatio* (ET) (29/6/1971) of Paul VI and the document *Mutuae Relationes* (14/5/1978) more adequately qualify the charismatic dimension of Consecrated Life and expressed better the theological terminology applied to it. Consecrated Life is a particular gift which the entire Church - in its profound configuration of her organic and hierarchical communion - must welcome, make blossom, examine, authenticate, guard, defend and make mature with gratitude and acknowledgment.

### **3.2. Charism of the Founders**

Within the fecund environment of reflection was born, after Vatican II, the expression “charism of the founders”. Paul VI was the first to use this terminology (when he addressed the Special General Chapter of the Monfortan Fathers, 31 march 1969: See AAS 61 (1969), 266) and then also the first to inaugurate it in an official document in the apostolic Constitution *Evangelica Testificatio*, n.11 (ET; 1971). In this document we find, for the first time, the use of the expression “charism of the religious life”, described as “the fruit of the Holy Spirit, who is always at work within the Church” (ET, 11). It is a sign given more for the service of the entire community of Christ’s faithful, than for the sanctification of the person that receives it (LG 44, 46); it is also a way of special participation in the sacramental nature of the People of God, the Church (MR 2). This teaching was amply taken up by John Paul II. Among the most important documents that treats this topic, we have the:

- *L’Ecole Catholique* (19/3/1977) coined the expression “dynamic fidelity to the charism of their founders”;
- The document “*Mutuae Relationes*” (14/3/1978) which, more than preceding documents, expresses well and in an articulated way, the content of this charism;
- *Religious and human promotion and contemplative dimension of Religious Life* (12/5/1980);
- *Essential Elements of the teachings of the Church on Religious Life* (31/5/1983);
- CIC, canons 573-746, which, while not using direct expression, diligently highlights not only the so-called general norms but also the gift of the Spirit inherent to the persons of the “founders/foundresses”;
- *Redemptionis donum* (25/3/1984).

- John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata* (1996).

### 3.2.1. Meaning of the term

The term “charism of the Founders” signifies, in its general sense, that gift of the Spirit offered benevolently by God to some founders - men or women - to produce in them determine capacities able to bring forth or generate new community of consecrated life in the Church. A more complete definition is given by *Mutuae Relationes*, n.11: “‘Charism of the Founders’ (ET, 11) appears as an “experience of the Spirit,” transmitted to their disciples to be lived, safeguarded, deepened and constantly developed by them, in harmony with the Body of Christ continually in the process of growth. “It is for this reason that the distinctive character of various religious institutes is preserved and fostered by the Church” (LG 44; cf. CD 33; 35, 1; 35, 2; etc.)” (MR,11).

#### (a) Typical Features

This gift, “charism of the Founders”, exhibits several characteristic elements. It is personal, collective-communitarian and ecclesial. It is, firstly, a *personal* gift inasmuch as it transforms the person of the founder or foundress: it prepares him or her for a particular vocation and mission of the Church. It is a *collective-communitarian* gift, since it involves or engages more persons to perform in the course of history the same divine project. Also, the gift is *ecclesial*, because through the founder or foundress and his/her community the gifts are offered to the entire Church for her dynamic edification. The whole church, an organic communion, is called upon to welcome the fruit of this

peculiar charism. Besides, this gift has a permanent or provisory character, depending on its belonging, or not, to the power of the Spirit which cannot be confined to a place or to an era, but is inscribed into an existence that permanently recalls a life in-with-for Christ.

### **(b) Connotative Distinction**

When speaking of the “Charism of the Founders” a distinction is sometimes made, at least in some regions, between “charism of founder” and “charism of the founders.” The expression “charism of founder” signifies the gift in a general sense which capacitates or enables a person to begin a new foundation, independently of the historical modalities of realization and of its specific spiritual contents. The expression “charism of the Founders” indicates the more specific content of the gift inherent in a unique way to teach founder or foundress in order to perceive, live and show in history a peculiar experience of the mystery of Christ according to original characteristic marks.

### **3.2.2. Transmissibility**

The “charism of Founder” is not transmissible, because it belongs to only the founder or foundress to start this initiative in history: to him or her alone belongs the fact of bringing forth disciples to a new and particular style of spiritual life, with reference to all those unique and non-repeatable characteristics, which belongs strictly to the person of the founder as founder, and it cannot be ideologized nor imitated. However, the “charism of the Founder” is transmissible to the community of disciples solely as it concerns the assimilation and internalization of

the spirit of the Founder; the spirit of the Founder permits this community to live, develop and lead to continuous fulfilment of the project and the content of the original fundamental experience that brought about the emergence of the ecclesial fabric.

There is an irreformable nucleus of the charism, which transmits in time the potentialities of the primordial experience. This process of transmission does not happen through automatic or intellectual mechanisms; rather, it takes place only through the harmony and the radical contact between the spirit of the disciples and the spirit of the founder. The transmissibility of the charism to disciples in their essential and characteristic spiritual marks implies, *de facto*, a profound interaction between the charism “of” and “of the” disciple, a gift given to some persons in order to relate fruitfully with the experience of the Spirit of the Founder and to give, therefore, a historical body to a new and peculiar form of Christian life within the Church.

### 3.2.3. Fundamental Experience

In practice, the fundamental experience is the basic spiritual experience which is created in the impact between the life of the Founder and the life of each disciple which integrates and forms itself according to the orientations of the peculiar movements of the charism of the Founder. Such experience is configured specially in the period of the birth of the new community in the course of the entire life of the Founder; it thus creates the fundamental spiritual contours, the “*proprium*”, of the life and mission of the same community. This *proprium* must always remain in

dynamic continuity with the origins, notwithstanding and through the entire discontinuity of the contingent forms, the psychological, environmental and theological conditioning or changes.

#### **3.2.4. Charism and Spirit**

An essential distinction is often made between “charism” and “spirit”. The word “charism” places itself exclusively on the theological level: it emphasizes the gratuitous action of God which cannot be acquired nor transmitted. The term “spirit” puts itself on the anthropological level, to emphasize the action of the response of the person to the divine initiative of the Holy Spirit: therefore, it is a reality that can be assimilated and transmitted, because it implies and depends above all on the human cooperation. In this way, it can continually spread in the course of history, the salvific project that God originally enrolled in the life and in the charism of the founder for men and women of his or her time.

#### **3.2.5. Charism of Foundation**

In company with the expression “charism of the Founder”, the theology of Consecrated Life also uses the expression “charism of foundation”: this signifies the correlative gift to the founder and disciples to engender the birth and the development of the new community with its original physiognomy. “Charism of the institute” or “charism of the foundation”: these expressions specify the peculiar qualities of the gift, which persists through an historical vocational identity that is lived, guarded, enriched and developed by the entire community.

Thus, the community is enabled to live operatively faithful to its own spirituality, permitting that other persons may be awakening to live the same vocation, as long as the Holy Spirit guarantees its continuity . In the “charism of foundation” is included the origin of the Institute with its peculiar form of life, of aims, spirit and nature (or character) all of which will develop as form of dynamic continuity in time. The patrimony of the Institute is, instead, the spiritual heritage which embraces the spirit, the primigenial and original intentions of the founder, together with all the traditions - written and unwritten - which each Institute possesses since the beginning of its ecclesial life (Cf. PC2b; ES, 15,3; ET 11;MR 11; 14b; CIC, canons 578, 586 -587).

### **3.2.6. Fundamental Dimensions**

In the “Charism of Foundation” one can distinguish five basic dimensions:

a) **Pneumatico-prophetic dimension.**

This aspect is in view of the continuous germinating of an evangelical existence which is lived and witnessed.

**b) Christologico-Evangelic dimension**

This aspect is in view of the understanding and appreciating the centrality of the mystery of Christ as a global experience of life.

**c) Ecclesial Dimension**

This is in relation to the continuous building of the church-family of God mystical body of Christ and of her proving herself true in history.

**d) Spiritual Fecundity Dimension**

This is in so far as it contributes to the permanent fulfilment and transmission of the Christian life.

**e) Eschatological-radical Dimension**

This is due to the actualisation of the evangelical following (*sequela Christi*) contained in the dynamism of a continual tension towards the full maturity in Christ.

**3.2.7. Charism and Institution**

Like every charism, the “charism of foundation” has a close relation with the dynamism of institutionalisation. This institutionalisation does not mean “sclerosing” the Spirit; rather, it constitutes a strong moment to translate into charismatic structures the important historico-selective memory of the fundamental spiritual contents which the community already lives in its existence. The Constitutions and Rules or Norms help to translate into self-consciousness and into collective memory the fundamental inspirations of the Founder, which distinguishes the unique and singular face of each community. The process of institutionalisation involves some dangers. These risks includes:

**a) Ritualization of the charism**

This happens when members maintain, due to ingenuous or naive material fidelity, some historic-contingent expressions of the charism.

**b) Minimization or reductive imitation of the charism:**

It occurs when, in the attempt to strengthen or reinforce the new institution, one imitates generically external structures and models that have been affirmed and

confirmed by time but alien to the original spirit of the founder.

**c) Enlargement of the significance of charism**

This risk occurs when, to the disadvantage of the local and universal ecclesial fabric, the community lose its own spiritual identity and the choral vision of its different and complementary apostolic realities.

**d) Neutralization of the charism**

This danger manifests itself when the community, acquiring power in the society and in the church, blunts or softens plans and dilutes the potentials charged with prophetic novelty of the very same charism.

Consequently, it is fundamental to seek a correct interpretative model of “charism of foundation”. The model ought not to encapsulate this living reality in sterile theoretical discourse. In fact, the interpretation does not consist of a simple conceptual reformulation of this gift of the spirit; but it is a strong moment of an authentic spiritual memory and of a genuine personal-collective self-understanding of the unchanged fundamental and original experience. An authentic renewal, in reality, include a dynamic fidelity to the Institute’s own origins, notwithstanding all the discontinuities of contingent or historical forms. In this case, the discernment implies a delicate spiritual surgery, in order to revisit the patrimony of the origins and the “spiritual density” of the founder which contains the “incarnated” significance of his original charism. Everyone who lives in a community must

endeavour to personally discover the most profound sense of the charism of his or her founder/foundress, in order not to impoverish the identity, and his/her vocation and that of the entire group. The first and indispensable criterion for discernment is the docile and intimate conversion to the gift received in the uniqueness of a common experience.

Who are the persons to interpret the “charism of foundation”? The subjects capable of interpreting the “charism of foundation” are five, namely:

- i) The Founder, since he/she is the personal holder of the gift.
- ii) The disciples, since they are the first persons to be in relation with the Founder and interact with his/her gift.
- iii) The Community: the Founder-Disciples relation, in the indivisible composition of the one body.
- iv) The Hierarchy, in her service of authenticating, testing, welcoming and defending this precious gift of the Spirit.
- v) The Christian people, inasmuch as it is a participant within the local church, of the spiritual gifts that derives from the gift.

### **3.2.8. Interpretative Approaches**

As regards the method of reading the charism, specialists speak of at least three types of approaches: the historical, the experiential and the hermeneutical approaches.

- a) The *historical approach* consists of the historic-documental analysis of the facts, words and writings of the founder and of the community, especially in the time of the origins. Taken by itself, this approach presents the risk of

ideological fundamentalism in which the founder would be seen as the stereotyped model which is frequently imitated fruitlessly in gestures and in words, solely in order to justify one's own actions and opinions.

b) **Experiential approach**

This takes as a starting point the experience as lived today by members of the community, with their corresponding cultural-theological horizons and with their expectations of progress, conservation or ultra-conservatism. This approach too cannot be taken in isolation, because it can involve the danger of considering as normative the spirit of the group, when it reads the spirit of the today's group without verifying the indispensable fidelity to its own origins and, in this way, establishing the premises for a continuous change of identity.

c) **Hermeneutico-spiritual Approach**

This approach takes into account the complex spiritual reality of the experience derived from such charism; it incorporates the two preceding criteria and aims at reaching, in a radical harmony with the spirit of the founder, the fundamental intentions and the "proprium" that characterises the originality and common adventure of the Spirit beyond the historical forms through which it has been realized or expressed in time.

**3.2.9. Criteria of Verification**

It is also necessary to say a word about the four criteria for the the verification of the vitality and authenticity of the "charism of foundation" in the history of the community.

**a) Identity and Continuity.**

This criterion makes each member of the community to be aware of:

- the responsibility to fulfill with efficacy the living memory of his/her own charism within the body and the history of the community.
- The responsibility to actualize the charism of disciple and of the disciple in dynamic and substantial fidelity to the charism of foundation and of the foundation.

**b) Organic communion**

It is the criterion that render a member conscious of the responsibility to ineluctably integrate together his own charism of disciple and of the disciples, in order to manifest in the church and for the world the common project and the same vocation.

**c) Dynamic Adaptation**

This criterion is that which lead to understand the new ways of inculturation of the charism not merely as reproduction of the past, but as full radication in the origin, in the changeable conditions of the signs of the times and of the new expectations of the Spirit.

**d) Charismatic Creativity**

Far from being a criterion of a continuous reformulation *ex novo*, this criterion visibly shows the fecundity of the group in re-appropriating itself, without interruption, into the spirit of the founding charism with the capacity of still attracting, with enthusiasm and impetus, the men and women of its own time.

These criteria are complementarily united, they verify old or new communities in the course of their spiritual life, in their being or not living prophesy and parables for their own time, in harmony with their founders or foundresses.

## **Conclusion**

This article attempts to examine theologically the meaning of *charism* in the Consecrated Life. To this end, it explores what the bible and the history say. Charism is a life-giving gift granted by the Holy Spirit to those whom he calls to found a religious family, an institute. A special attention is given to Founder and charism of the Institute he or she founded. In this regard, emphasis was put on both the participation or sharing in the charism of the Institute, and the interpretation of this charism in the course of history. The focus was, then, turned to the significance of charism as it relates to Institutes of consecrated life, whose members are called to live today and faithfully transmit the charism received from their founders and foundresses. The members of each religious institutes would be more concretely in a better position to indicate their reception, understanding, interpretation and expression of the charism of their Institute. The concept of charism touches on almost all aspects of an Institute of Consecrated Life. It plays a vital and critical role in the life and mission of its members. For this reason, greater efforts should be made to identify and explain some of the more important and urgent challenges emerging from an adequate understanding of and fidelity to the charism of an Institute, if it is to be relevant and credible, especially in Nigeria today.

It is clear that God chose to continue the work Jesus through his Church, his disciples of all times and places. Since every member of the Church is called to share in this work, each has been empowered by the Holy Spirit with a particular gift. For, wherever the Holy Spirit is, there we find his charisms, his gifts. The charisms are perennials because perennial is the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church. In particular, in Consecrated Life the gifts given to the Founders and transmitted to members of their Institutes are meant to promote unity and service, contribute to the building up and enrichment of the Church – thus, advancing her common good; by this means, the Institutes of Consecrated life effectively contribute to the renewal and betterment of the world. The grateful and humble reception and practice of the charism of the institute, a divine free gift, calls for a conscious and convinced acceptance and participation in the charism, a careful interpretation of it, and creative and dynamic fidelity to it, taking into account the signs of the times and the teachings of the Church. Specifically, today more than ever before, the unity and service so much desired in church and society can be live and carried out through: a personal witness of life; an adequate and holistic formation of candidates in the transmission; the inculturation or Africanisation of Consecrated life; and the pastoral contribution of Institutes of consecrated Life to the local churches.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **Religious Life and the Academic Apostolate**

*By*  
*Cletus Nwabuzo, O.P.*  
*Dominican Institute, Ibadan.*

Each time I meditate on the series of parables in the sixth chapter of Matthew's gospel, especially on God and money parable, and on serving two masters (Mt. 6, 24) I often think of the challenge of being a religious engaged in the academic apostolate. To be a religious is to be totally dedicated to God often in an apostolate that is 'until death do us part'; just as the academic or intellectual apostolate demands a total commitment to study and research, and publish. And so to be a religious in an Order or Society of Apostolic life dedicated to the academic apostolate is to be doubly dedicated and doubly challenged. I recognize that quite a large number religious men and women in our country are involved in the Educational sector, and so are involved in the academic formation of Nigerians at the primary and secondary schools. These dedicated religious men and women are also doubly challenged by their apostolate- a total dedication to God and a total dedication to their teaching apostolate. However, in this chapter, I want to focus on the religious who are academics, that is who are professionally engaged in tertiary academic institutions. I speak of their double dedication to God and the academic apostolate in tertiary institutions of the Church and the State and it challenges. I write from a Dominican perspective and experience.

I write as a Dominican schooled in an Order that prides itself with an ability to balance the ancient monastic contemplative tradition with an active tradition of preaching to the world. At the heart of this spirituality is contemplative study and the sharing of the fruit of this study in the preaching apostolate. Thus, from the outset the Dominican is constantly reminded that his study, and invariably his academic apostolate, is not a staid pursuit of academic laurel and accolade in an academic universe of whatever sort but always an extension of the Dominican preaching apostolate. This basic discipline of contemplative study naturally first applied to our study of the sacred sciences of theology and philosophy in preparation of the preaching apostolate. And so the first academics of the Order of Preachers were the Masters of Theology in the Dominican formation houses who had the arduous task of teaching other friars. Theirs was a full time dedication to study within a functional religious community rather than in institutions specifically set up as Universities or Institutes of higher learning. Thomas Aquinas did teach at the University of Paris, but it was within the stadium in Santa Sabina in 1265 that he began to write his famous Summa. His time within a regular community allowed him the facility to live, pray, study and write. A former Master of the Order of Preachers describes the genius of Thomas Aquinas as a carrying “forward Dominic’s fundamental orientation and to broaden the basis of theological education in the Order through his study of Aristotelian philosophy, which enabled him to give an intellectual foundation to the theology of the goodness of creation and the rejection of dualism.”<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> See fr Damian Byrne, O.P., *The Role of Study in the Order* of 25<sup>th</sup> May 1991 published in *To Praise, to Bless, to Preach: Words of Grace and Truth*, Dublin:

Thomas Aquinas' example still inspires the Dominican academic genius today but the model and structure of the Academy of his time has changed a great deal. Many Dominicans involved in the academic apostolate are no longer employed or assigned to the Dominican Houses of studies nor is our academic pursuit limited to the sacred sciences. We are employed in secular universities and academies as well as religious affiliated institutions of higher learning. We are tenured professors holding chairs in all manners of academic disciplines but always assigned to local communities where regular life is also the norm. Here lies the first challenge. In the Order the friar who has an academic apostolate benefits from dispensations from anything that would impede study- in other words his academic apostolate. This is the first benefit that the Dominican friar in the academia loses. Once as a post-graduate student of the University of Lagos in Philosophy I was elected a delegate to the Provincial Chapter of the Dominicans in Nigeria and Ghana right in the middle of the academic year. That meant I was going to be absent from class for three long weeks. I applied to both the Dean of the Graduate School asking to be let out of school for all three weeks of Chapter. He thought I was a joker and wondered how many other days might I ask to be excused from class because I wanted to go to Mass? Fortunately, I was in Nigeria and God, they say is a Nigerian, for both the industrial strikes of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the Non Academic Staff Union of Universities in Nigeria (NASUU) made it possible for me to participate at the Chapter without missing any lectures. By the time the strike ended the Dominicans had also decided

my post-graduate 'waste of time' was also over. They sent me to a regular school with a regular academic calendar and no strikes. But I must be counted among a very lucky few.

The Religious academic is quite often in a world that sets him or her on the margin of the religious community. The total commitment to the academic apostolate even in religious-affiliated institution of higher learning, the Major Seminary for example, leaves little time for the luxury of Chapters and community gatherings. Thus in the Dominican experience in Europe and the North America Provincial Chapters and other important Provincial gatherings are summer events. That is when the friars in all manners of employment, but most especially those involved in the academic apostolate can be present or represented in large numbers. This is quite a difficult situation for the friars involved for they are in most cases like friars on limited service. There are events and things in their provinces and most often in local communities they simply cannot be part of. Electing them into offices is quite another story. Simply put, a friar on limited service to the community that does represent the ideal of religious life. The Dominican experience also tries to remedy this risk of the friar in the academic apostolate leaving on the margin by creating specialized research Institutes and communities that either supports or simply host such Institutes. The Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem and the Leonine Commission now in Paris are two very interesting examples of this effort. Both communities depend directly under the jurisdiction of the Master of the Order rather than on the Provinces where they are situated because they are institutions of the Order. Specialized institutions of research for the Order and the Church, both communities are very peculiar in more ways

than the general outlook of Dominican communities. First, you seem to have a regular community that hosts two groups of friars- the friars who belong to the community as a matter of assignment and others who are assigned to the same community for reason of 'scholarship' or because they are resident scholars, researchers, teachers or specialized students in the research Institute.

The seemingly two tiered system operative in the community provides the friars in the academic apostolate ample opportunity to focus on their primary apostolate as researchers and scholars; But creates often a situation in which the friar researcher cannot quite be involved in the administration of the community or priory. There are statutes regulating the relationship between these specialized institutions and their host communities. And these statutes underline the challenges and tension of the academic apostolate and regular life. It is often the case that the friars whose apostolate tie them to the academic research cannot often be elected superiors of these communities or economic administrators (Syndics), or directors of projects linked even to the development and sustenance of the specialized institutions. What results is akin to the experience of the Apostles in the sixth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, the need for more assistants (Acts 6, 1-7). Thus, you have a community of researchers, scholars, and students, and their auxiliaries. A system of assistants that quite often develops becomes if not well managed a challenge to the very basis of the academic apostolate. The community itself becomes very restrictive and selective. Its apostolate gradually closes in on itself and we have a real crisis of growth and regeneration.

Linked to the restrictive nature of the specialized institutions, and therefore the academic apostolate in these institutions, is the dual challenge of dedication and longevity. The academic apostolate necessarily demands an ardent and Spartan dedication to duty. Its fruits demand intense focus and hard work, and a long term commitment to duty in an often unchanging and confining environment. Longevity has become the most tasking virtue of the Dominican academic in our day. The twentieth century and centuries before did count friars who were pioneers in all fields of the academic apostolate who spent quite literally their life time on archeological sites, linguistic schools or other specialized tasks. The French friars who pioneered Biblical studies and archeological studies of the Ancient and Near East spent fifty years and more on these studies and visits in the Near East. There are hardly any normal friars with this outlook in our day.

The Dominican academic of the older generation seemed to have a monastic fourth vow of stability and does take it for granted or his work demanded a lifelong commitment to the academic discipline in an institution. Those who become itinerant teachers moving from one research center to another also have longevity of service. That discipline to be rooted in one institution for a life time is rare these days but not an openness to service of the Order and the Church in this vital apostolate. I have experienced a flowering of an itinerancy among young and talented Dominican friars open to travel the world in the service of the intellectual apostolate of the Order. They are talented, multi-disciplined and ready to travel the research circuit of the Order in furtherance of the academic apostolate.

In trying to understand this trend in the Dominican academic and intellectual apostolate I was reminded of a developmental issue that are fundamental to both the developed and the developing worlds. It is said that younger talents from the developed world are available for academic itinerancy because their more established Universities have fewer places for newer hands. The established chairs and tested hands are still plenty and in high demand. These make it more difficult for green horns to break into academia. The other ecclesiastical institutions like the Seminaries are closing or merging in some places because of paucity of vocation. So the younger academic has a better chance of beginning overseas and retiring home with a longer academic profile from offshore. For the developing world, the opportunities vary. Our academic institutions are fragile and developing and the often restrictive and retrogressive government policies make the academic apostolate difficult. The Nigerian experience in this regard is very telling.

The first generation of Catholic priests and religious who were employed in the Universities and Colleges of education had to contend with the many difficulties regarding their employment, like everyone else in government employment, and then the identity question. Are they agents of the all influential Catholic Church or are they qualified academics? Then came the demand of the local Church that invariably drafted most of these priests and religious into a pastoral apostolate that is as daunting as their primary job in these institutions. Beneficial as this twining of the academic and pastoral apostolate may have been thought to be, I think it was always wrong headed. None of the apostolate benefited

greatly. There was quite often a losing partner, the pastoral or the academic.

But the greater developmental question for me here concerns the strictures of underdevelopment that have hampered the growth and development of academic institutions in Nigeria and by consequence under-employed religious in the academic apostolate. The unfriendly religious atmosphere in our institutions of higher learning and the frequent employment disputes and the resultant strikes have made these institutions no go areas for many Nigerian religious in the academic apostolate. No serious minded academic with more than pecuniary considerations stays in an unstable academic environment. And so the government or state-run institutions of higher learning have not been fertile fields of apostolate for many religious in Nigeria. The jury is still out on their experience in ecclesiastical run institutions. But the preliminary findings are not very encouraging, there is little money and the environment is clerically stifling. Will the advent of private institutions of higher learning remedy this situation and encourage a better academic environment? The question does not need a simple yes or no answer. It probably will not remedy much, especially if the present general attitude and commitment to the academic apostolate is simply hinged on a selfish ego trip.

The religious in the academic apostolate must personally be inspired by a desire to do something for God. That is why it is an apostolate, freely chosen, deeply committed to a course that has no simple calculable pecuniary tag- I certainly do not mean the religious does not need the pay, and a livable pay, and self-sacrificing. For unless the religious in the academic

apostolate is self-sacrificing he or she may not be able to withstand the very basic challenge of under-development dogging the academia in general in this part of the world. The challenge of under-development is as basic as the fact that you do not have the bare necessities of this apostolate - books, access to library facilities, energy to power anything that can facilitate your research. These are taken for granted everywhere else but Nigeria. Here it is quite an ordeal to get into the academic apostolate.

The academic environment in Nigeria is anaemic, and in itself is quite a challenge of epic proportion. There are debilitating funding difficulties in the public Universities, and very few academic grants of any kind. Private money in these the government institutions are also difficult to come by. And so we think the nascent private Universities are going to remedy in some measure this situation. This is only a prayer for the indices on the ground do not point toward this direction. For one the prize of liberalizing education in Nigeria is so expensive that these private initiatives are gasping for survival just to start. The luxury of funding education itself is only going to emerge long after these institutions have survived the process of licensing. In the meantime what do the religious in the State Universities do? They like all University academics in Nigeria bemoan their condition of service and work environment. Others have been able to seek successfully employment and empowerment overseas. And that leaves Nigeria further impoverished and underdeveloped. However, the academic apostolate remains vital for the religious. Its many challenges notwithstanding, especially in Nigeria, it remains a field of apostolate the

religious communities would have to invest in and take serious. Our vocation of being light and salt in the world requires our presence in the academy where forces that weld our future seem to coalesce. Thus, the religious who embraces this apostolate must be aware of this challenge of life in academia and the opportunities the academic apostolate offers. He or she must be prepared to excel and become an exemplar both for the academic and religious communities. Only with the help of God do we achieve such an aspiration. Dante Alighieri knew this much and so in his poem *The Paradise* (*Il Paradiso*) he offers these few lines:

As the geometer who tries so hard  
to square the circle, but cannot discover,  
think as he may, the principle involved,  
so did I strive with this new mystery:  
I yearned to know how could our image fit  
into the circle, how could it conform;  
but my own wings could not take me so high-  
then a great flash of understanding struck  
my mind, and suddenly its wish was granted.  
At this point power failed high fantasy  
but, like a wheel in perfect balance turning,  
I felt my will and my desire impelled  
By the Love that moves the sun and the other stars.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Text and translation of *The Paradiso* taken from Teresa de Bertodano, *Treasury of the Catholic Church: Two thousand years of Spiritual Writing*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., 1999, p. 9.

## CHAPTER NINE Consecrated Persons and Prayer/Worship

By  
Daniel Aigbona, Csr  
Saints Peter and Paul Major Seminary, Ibadan

### Life as Episodic Moments of Time

*The Divine Comedy* is an original Italian comedy written by Dante Alighieri between 1308 and 1321 A.D. It uses as its subject matter the worldview of the medieval times concerning life after death. This book is considered one of the greatest works of world literature. The original work was simply titled in Italian "*Commedia*" but had its title changed later to "*Divina*" by Giovanni Boccaccio because of the nature of the subject matter addressed by the work. This work was widely considered the central epic poem of Italian literature and indeed it acquired a reputation of being the last great work of literature of the Middle Ages and the first great work of the Renaissance Period. In it, Dante sees life altogether as the unfolding drama of an enlightening and purifying journey, set on the stage of real human life lived in the face of all the trials, attractions, difficulties and pleasures of the modern world, with the earth as its stage; a journey that would explain why he began his epic poem with the words "*Nel Mezzo del Cammina di Nostra Vita*" which translates, "*in the middle of our life's journey*".<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Gallagher, a modern Reader's guide to Dante's the Divine Comedy, Liguori Publication, Liguori Missouri 1996. (Dante wrote this book when he was 35years old).

As human individuals living the vagaries of the mysteries of life and death, with all the benevolent and not so benevolent vicissitudes that constitute the reality of our existence on earth, we are constantly searching for a meaning; a meaning that will ultimately put to rest all the questions about the purpose of life on earth. We are all too aware in the context of this search that we are limited for time because as contingent beings we depend upon another for our existence. It is within the allowance of this concentric time that we must find answers to our questions or leave enough clues for others to build upon when we no longer walk in the history of time. We experience so much frustrations in the interim because we are only to aware that time is not on our side as the count of the grey hairs that appear on our heads are an ever present reminder of the finitude of time which is totally beyond anyone's control.

The mystery of time, which is so fluid, deepens our frustrations and anxieties so much that many existential philosophers have simply given up this search by declaring the meaninglessness of the life of man. Man seeks to know in order to be able to control what happens to him and because life and death still remain within this ambit of the nebulous, the feeling of gloom and hopelessness would be a very logical outcome. The sort of frustration described here may have been aptly captured in the Christmas Eve speech of King George VI during the most difficult days of the World War II:

I said to the man at the Gate of the Year, "Give me a light that I may walk safely into the unknown." He said to me, "Go out into the darkness, and put your hand in the hand of

God, and it shall be to you better than the light, and safer than the known".<sup>2</sup>

It is upon this state of affairs that God has called the religious man or woman to a state of consecrated celibacy lived not only as a witness of meaning and purpose to life but also as an embodiment of the joy and happiness which is really the treasure (unknown to all) that they are actually seeking for; which according to Aristotle is the end to which all human actions tend. Aristotle would say that all men naturally desire to be happy. It is therefore in the nature of the soul to seek for *eudamonia* (happiness) and in order to achieve this one necessarily requires a good character (*(ēthikēaretē)* i.e, the act of being virtuous. Virtue according to Aristotle has to do with the proper function (*ergon*) of a thing. For example the eye has as its proper function the act of seeing and it is only good in so far as it fulfils the function proper to sight. In the same way, human beings do have a function proper to humans and this is to be determined in respect of the activity of the *pusche* (translated normally as soul) acting in accordance with the *logos* (the principle of reason).<sup>3</sup>

Since all men desire to be happy, contends St. Augustine, and man is not just desirous of transitory happiness, which is present for a moment and is gone the next, it follows that what the heart of man really seeks is perfect, eternal and immutable happiness. It is God alone who can satisfy this natural desire; thus, it follows that the heart of man is

---

<sup>2</sup> King George VI, quoted by Leonard Griffith, *Reactions to God* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1979), p.87

<sup>3</sup> Thomson, J.A.K., translator. *The Ethics of Aristotle*. England: Penguin Books, 1976.

actually seeking for God and yet it does not know it. It is this thought, which is so succinctly expressed in his now famous declaration; “O Beauty so ancient and so new, how late have I loved you. You have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”<sup>4</sup>

The Catechism of the Catholic Church also makes the point that, “the beatitudes respond to the innate desire for happiness that God has placed in the human heart in order to draw us to himself. Man cannot on his own assuage this thirst for immutable happiness because it surpasses his human capabilities; this happiness, as is further emphasized, is supernatural and the gratuitous gift of God just as is the grace, which leads to it. This promised happiness confronts us with decisive moral choices concerning earthly goods and urges us to love God above all things (CCC. 361-362).

On this point all the philosophers and religions are universally in agreement; the hunger for meaning and significance is an offshoot of the reality and pain of death and separation such that if this gap of human knowledge could only be assuaged, all life’s questions would have been answered. Though all men seek naturally to be happy, people through different generation and ages have sought for this happiness through different means that range from the philosophical to the pragmatic, from economics to politics, from the aesthetics to the religious, from the atheistic to the moralist etc. It is the irony of human developmental history and growth that the more scientifically developed we are the more man has lost the mystery of hope which engenders the

---

<sup>4</sup> Confessions of St. Augustine, Bk VII Chap 3, pg. 82

desire to live for a future that will yield to the fulfillment of all our desires.

### **God's Creative Act: An Invitation to enter into a Community of Relationships**

The beginning of the Scriptures gives us an account of God who calls creation into existence and populated it with all the plants, fish, birds and animals of all kinds toping it with the greatest act of creation i.e., the creation of the human race. Thus, man and woman are not only called into being for the purpose of "civilizing the earth," they are also called to care for it as depicted in the special charge to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen.1: 28). In the recognition that we are all creatures of God the responsibility is, thus, placed squarely on our shoulders to be conscious of our obligation to both the Creator and all of the created order. When God called man into being, he called him into a community of relationships - relationship with God, with the earth and with all other creatures that all together help to declare the glory of the creator.

The extension of this call was when God decided at different times in history to enter into a covenant with man; from the covenant with the first man and woman (Adam and Eve), to the covenant with Abraham, with Israel and David up to the highest covenant of the incarnation of God in human flesh. The call to covenant is marked by *Hesed*, the Hebrew word for loving Kindness. It is a sign of God's fidelity, an active concern for the well being of people, particularly for the weak and needy. According to EndaMcDonagh, "it is the recognition and reverence for the gift of the other that is at the heart of the moral life of discipleship. So we can say that

the moral life begins not so much in something we do but in the response to God's initiative. It begins with the presence of the 'other', whether another person, another creature, or the otherness of nature, calling us out of ourselves. Whatever the "presence" is, it calls for a response from us... The gift of the other implies an invitation to enter his or her world. It involves a call to move out of and beyond the narrow confinement of the self, beyond one's limited perceptions or biases, in the recognition and exploration of diverse points of view. Thus as a gift, the encounter with the world of another has the potential for conversion."<sup>5</sup>

For the Christian person, our baptism is a call to enter in a new way into the mystery of this loving covenantal relationship, which sets us apart as "a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people set apart to announce the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light (1 Peter 2:9). The Religious life of the Consecrated person is a call to enter more deeply into these various levels of covenantal love realized in the relationships created by our common commitments to serve God in his people. How then must the consecrated person live out this life of witness?

### **The Consecrated Life: A witness to Communal living and Worship**

As we have earlier mentioned, one of the greatest longings of the human heart is to discover in their search the meaning and purpose of life. Many philosophies and religions have tried to provide an answer to assuage this thirst for meaning.

---

<sup>5</sup>Enda McDonagh, *Gift and Call: Towards a Christian theology of morality* (St. Meinrad, Ind. : Abbey Press, 1975), 27-29

When St Augustine first turned to the Manicheans in his resolve to find answers to the problem of evil, it was because he could not quite understand how a “supposedly good God” could allow so much evil to exist in the world. His thirst was assuaged when he discovered in the works of Plotinus (a Neo-Platonist) that evil was not an entity but a simply a privation of the good. St. Augustine consequently consecrated and committed the rest of his life to this God by means of a deep reflective study, prayers and worship. So when men and women devote themselves to God through the instrumentality of a consecrated life, it is usually because they have found some solace and truth in the person and Character of God who becomes the ultimate reference point and moral defining impetus for all other pursuits and relationships in life. When this is done with a deliberate declaration of intent (whether in private or public) within the context of a religious ceremony of worship, we say it is an act of consecration.

Let me first and foremost emphasize the important element of worship here because to worship in itself is a way of bringing each person’s life into a cohesiveness within itself as well as bringing oneself into harmony with others in the community; a sense which was emphasized in the lives of the early Christians in the Acts of the Apostles when it was said that ‘the community of believers were united in prayers with one heart and mind and no one claimed any possessions for himself, but had everything in common. As a consequence there was no needy person among them’ (Acts 4:32-34). Archbishop William Temple defines worship in this way:

Worship is the submission of all of our nature

to God. It is the quickening of conscience by His holiness, nourishment of mind by His truth, purifying of imagination by His beauty, opening of the heart to His love, and submission of will to His purpose. All this gathered up in adoration is the greatest of all expressions of which we are capable.<sup>6</sup>

To pray, therefore, is to offer a form of worship and from its Latin roots '*Precari*', subsumes the sense of asking earnestly, entreating, an invocation that seeks to activate a rapport with an object of worship through a deliberate communication. It is not like magic that tends to summon and command the unseen forces, rather it is borne out of a desire to establish a relationship with a Being who is the sufficient reason for our existence and who at the same time provides us with the capacity to enter into other levels of relationships. So as consecrated persons, we need a relationship with the God we have committed ourselves to worship. The act of praying is one way of ensuring the flow of this communication between God and the consecrated person.

Article 10 of the Encyclical of Pope John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendour*, states that, "the church instructed by the teacher's words, believe that man, made in the image of the creator, redeemed by the blood of Christ and made holy by the presence of the Holy Spirit, has as the ultimate purpose of his life to live "for the praise of God's glory" (cf. Eph. 1:12), striving to make each of its actions reflect the splendor of that

---

<sup>6</sup> Archbishop William Temple, quoted by David Watson in *I Believe in Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, Mich. Eerdmans 1976), 157 cf Ravi Zacharias, *Can man Live Without God*, Nashville Tennessee, W. Publishing group, 1994. P151

glory. Know then O' beautiful Soul, that you are the image of God," writes Saint Ambrose, "know that you are glory of God (1 Cor. 11:7). The acknowledgment of this, is often expressed in the context of worship and prayers which is a way of being in communion with our creator and opening up to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in all our other levels of relationships. It flows from our baptism and is expressed even at a greater depth in the consecrated life.

In the Bible the word consecration means "the separation of oneself from things that are unclean, especially anything that would contaminate one's relationship with a perfect God." Consecration also carries the connotation of sanctification, holiness, or purity. The Code of Canon Law defines it as "a stable form of living by which the faithful, following Christ more closely under the action of the Holy Spirit, are totally dedicated to God who is loved most of all, so that, having been dedicated by a new and special title to his honour, to the building up of the Church, and to the salvation of the world, they strive for the perfection of charity in the service of the kingdom of God and, having been made an outstanding sign in the Church, foretell the heavenly glory" (Canon 573). The Catechism of the Catholic church makes the point that, "from the very beginning of the Church there were men and women who set out to follow Christ with greater liberty, and to imitate him more closely, by practicing the evangelical counsels. They led lives dedicated to God, each in his own way. Many of them, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, became hermits or founded religious families. (CCC 918)

The importance of being consecrated or pure in our relationship with God cannot be overemphasized. As we see in the example of Joshua, the children of Israel had wandered in the desert for 40 years and when the time came for them to make that crossing of the River Jordan into the promised land, they were instructed to, “consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you” (Joshua 3:5). Daniel also lived a Consecrated life by separating himself unto God and living differently from others. He prayed three times a day and fasted and his life was marked by miraculous deliverances (from the lion’s den and the fiery furnace), visions and dreams, and God's favor. We see also in the life of David an example of consecrating oneself to the Lord after he had owned up to his failure in taking the wife of Uriah after he had him killed in battle. He bathed and changed clothes before he worshiped the Lord (2 Samuel 12:20). The change of clothes, became a strong imagery for conversion and this was used copiously in the New Testament (Colossians 3:5-14; Ephesians 4:26-27; 1 Corinthians 7:1-6). The Bible tells believers to be a holy people, separate from the world: “Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you” (2 Corinthians 6:17). In his first letter to the Corinthians, St Paul reminds us: “For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's (1 Corinthians 6:20).

Being consecrated is a critical component in our relationship to God and to those in the world. Therefore, “I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your

spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Romans 12:1-2). It is obvious then that the act of consecration is couched in a total, unconditional and absolute surrender of our whole being, body, mind and spirit to the service and worship of God as Jesus demonstrated in the sacrifice on the cross and as evidenced in the statement of Romans 12:1; "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service"

The state of consecrated life is thus one way of experiencing a "more intimate" consecration, rooted in Baptism and dedicated totally to God. In consecrated life everyone must sincerely seek the will of the father, otherwise the reason itself for this choice of life will disappear; but it is equally important to carry out such a search together with the brothers or the sisters because it is properly that which unites them, "making them a family united to Christ" (The Service of authority and Obedience, Article 12, page 22).

### **An Episode in the Life of Jesus**

One day when Jesus was alone, not far from his disciples he asked them, "What do people say about me?" And they answered, "some say that you are John the Baptist, others say that you're Elijah, and still others that you're one of the former prophets risen from the dead." Again Jesus asked them, "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "The Messiah of God." Then Jesus spoke to them, giving them strict orders

not to tell this to anyone. (Luke 9:18-21) The essential point to this answer is that Peter knew who Jesus was. This knowledge led him not only to accept the initial invitation of Christ to follow him but also made him give up his business of fishing in order to sit everyday at the feet of Jesus and to learn from the master himself.

Let us presume for the moment that our commitment to live the consecrated life is also borne out of a similar profession of faith like Peter that we also know who the Lord is. The presumption here is that we cannot be good disciples of Jesus if we do not really know who he is and by implication will not be able to model our lives on his; essentially no one can be a good disciple if you do not even know the one you are following. The disciple who has learnt well is the one who understands the will of the master and is now ready to be sent. So KNOWLEDGE is always important. Knowledge that is sought for its own sake is useless in so far as Knowledge is always directed to some form of action. Knowledge according to Socrates is virtue in so far as it empowers us to seek the good and leads us to virtuous acts. Because knowledge is a virtue it is presumed that whatever actions flow from the seat of knowledge would always be virtuous such that if we ever do anything that is wrong and immoral, the presumption is that we act out of ignorance. This would be in line with the thought of Socrates.

The Christian life is essentially a manifestation of the beatitudes (Mathew 5). A re-reading of the gospel of St Mathew would reveal that in Mathew's thought system, Jesus' teaching of the Christian life can very well be

summarized in the morals drawn from the sermon on the mount i.e., the beatitudes. Against the background of the oppressive and alienating structures of the old Jewish society, before and at the time of Jesus, Mathew presents us with Jesus who offers the community a new code of conduct such that whoever lived under this new ethic would be included in the new community of the people of God. How relevant is the code of conduct to us in the context of our Consecrated Life today?

Let us attempt to answer this question by noting that Mathew presents Jesus as one, who interprets the law in the light of the demands arising from human needs. Jesus expresses the evangelical demands with regard to God (Mt: 6:1-8) only after he has expressed those issues, which concern the fraternal relationship with regard to the human individuals (Mt 5:21-48). We note as well that Jesus' challenge of discipleship is realizable only when we first and foremost deepen our relationship with God. Only then can we say like Peter, "We have left everything to follow you" (Mt 19:27). Leaving all things, for the sake of experiencing God's presence re-orders one's attitude towards everything. It results in a blessing and the eventual realization of the reign of God.

The rich young man who sought perfection (Mt.19: 21) was not able to make this essential break of re-ordering his attitude by selling all he owned, giving the money to the poor and following Christ. It was an invitation to love, albeit, to love God in the poor. To be able to do this he was invited to a mind's disposition of detachment; detachment from all external encumbrances that would distract him from giving

his full attention to the affairs of God and the kingdom. He was invited to embrace a higher value of total dependence on the providence of God who supplies all our needs (Phil. 4:19). He went away sad for he was unable to be converted from his lifestyle. The Conversion, which is a very necessary prerequisite, for achieving that new perfection demanded of the disciples, (Mt 5:48), was not achieved by the rich young man. Thus, he was not able to bring about the realization of the reign of God in his life, which according to Michael Crosby is composed of people who sell their power, possessions and prestige in such a manner that they enable conditions of powerlessness, poverty and depression in others to be alleviated.<sup>7</sup>

As Jesus was approaching the time of his death, his heart was greatly troubled because he knew that those who were going to hand him over to be crucified were acting not out of justice but out of pure malice. Jesus also knew that the act of his crucifixion would greatly test the faith of his disciples and so he took time to prepare them for the coming events. He said a special prayer for them in John 17, praying that they may be consecrated in the truth, again a subtle reference to Jesus who had earlier identified himself as the way, the truth and the life. The Apostles were however involved in other seemingly more important matters to them, wondering amongst themselves, who was more important. Positions and status mattered more to them than the mystery of salvation that was unfolding before their eyes. Such matters are not only a distraction in our spiritual life but often lead us to jealousy

---

<sup>7</sup> Michael Crosby, Ofm cap, *Spirituality of the Beatitudes: Mathew's Challenge for the First World Christians* (New York: Orbis Books Maryknoll, 1981) p.49

and quarrels (James 4:1-4). Jesus in inviting Peter to pray at the time of his agony was again emphasizing the importance of prayer to the person dedicated to the work of God. In prayer we express trust in the goodness and providence of God who is able to supply all our needs (Phil.4:19). Prayer is said to be the most profound expression of our faith. In our prayer we do not only acknowledge the presence of God, we also express the hope that we would receive what we have asked for. This calls for patience - i.e., patiently waiting for the time God has set for the fulfillment of his promise. As the scriptures say, Will God not judge in favour of his own people who cry to him day and night for help?

### **Conclusion**

Article 1 of the instruction on "The Service of Authority and Obedience", addressed to the members of the Institutes of Consecrated Persons began with a phrase, "*Faciemtuum, Domine, requiram*" translated, "*it is your face O lord that I seek.*" This statement is an apt summation of the life of a consecrated person. By our consecration, we have, thus, committed ourselves to seeking the face of the Lord in all things; a search which if properly understood and with the right disposition of mind is expected to lead to the experience of peace; for in his will is our peace. (see Dante Alighieri, The Divine comedy, Paradise Lost, III, 85) page 7

The question then is do we really like Peter know the Lord whom we seek? Philipians 2 speaks of the poverty and humility of Christ who learned Obedience through suffering. In the same way,

Consecrated persons are called to the following of the obedient Christ within an “evangelical project” or a charismatic one, inspired by the Spirit and authenticated by the church. (Article 9, Pg. 19, Instruction) It is therefore in the context of the relationships fostered in the religious community, a communion of consecrated persons who profess to seek together and carry out God’s will: a community of sisters or brothers with a variety of roles but with the same goal and the same passion, that the life of a consecrated person finds its meaning. For this reason, while all in the community are called to seek what is pleasing to the Lord and to obey him, some are called, usually temporarily, to exercise the particular task of being the sign of unity and the guide in the common search both personal and communitarian of carrying out the will of God. This is the service of authority (Instruction, Page 8).

“Life offers us two precious gifts—one is time, the other freedom of choice, the freedom to buy with your time what you will. You are free to exchange your allotment of time for thrills. You may trade it for base desires. You may invest it in greed. ...“Yours is the freedom to choose. But these are no bargains, for in them you find no lasting satisfaction. “Every day, every hour, every minute of your span of mortal years must sometime be accounted for. And it is in this life that you walk by faith and prove yourself able to choose good over evil, right over wrong, enduring happiness over mere amusement. And your eternal reward will be according to your choosing.

As human actors on earth, we walk the familiar parts of the interplay between the good, the bad and the ugly. At every stage along the way there are a lot of intrigues and moments filled with a lot of suspense sometimes ending in a comical relief and sometimes having a tragic end. We are only too conscious that when the drama ends, we will leave the stage for other actors to continue where we left off. The applause we get at the end of a performance is to be likened to the reward or punishment we stand to receive when we pass out of this world. Just as every actor tries to excel in their performance so as to win laurels, we are called upon to work hard for justice and truth so that we can shine like light at the end of our life here on earth.

The interesting aspect of our human life on earth is that when we come to the age of reason and can examine our environment and discover the limits which nature imposes on us, we believe that we can actually control the order of our life by the imposition of moral considerations on the laws of nature. As human individuals we can never be satisfied by accepting our natural conditions so we set out to change it only to discover when we get older that we have actually returned to the most basic childhood simplicity not as a result of all our use of experience but by the order of the natural condition of human life. God's ways are not always our way and his thoughts are not always our thoughts.



## CHAPTER TEN

### Consecrated Persons and Collaborative Ministry

By

Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony, OSA  
Augustinian Institute, Makurdi, Benue State  
[ikee\\_mario@yahoo.com](mailto:ikee_mario@yahoo.com)

#### Introduction

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

In the building of Christ's body there is engaged a diversity of members and functions. There is only one spirit, who, according to his own riches and the needs of the ministries, gives his different gifts for the welfare of the church<sup>1</sup>.

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

---

<sup>1</sup> Lumen Gentium, 7

religious against female religious etc. According to John Aniagwu:

Where relations with female religious are concerned, the problem has been mainly one of a servant-master relationship. For some priests, it seems that religious should only be seen and not heard. They should wait on the priest to tell them what to and do only what they have been told<sup>2</sup>.

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

### **Understanding Consecrated Persons**

Consecrated persons are members of the Religious Institutes and Societies of Apostolic Life<sup>3</sup>. 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<sup>4</sup>. They totally dedicate themselves to God with the goal of pursuing perfection in charity by faithfully embracing the evangelical

---

<sup>2</sup> John Aniagwu, *Collaborative ministry in the Church*. A paper presented during the Mutual Relations between Bishops and Religious in Nigeria. 2014, 9.

<sup>3</sup> Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony, *Africae Munus and Consecrated Persons*, In *The Catholic Voyage: A Publication of the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria*. Vol. 11. January 2015. P.4.

<sup>4</sup> canon 573.2

counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. In this sense, consecrated persons respond freely to the invitation of the Holy Spirit to follow Christ the poor, the celibate, the obedient son, more closely, thus becoming in this life a sign of the life to come. "The evangelical counsels of chastity dedicated to God, poverty and obedience are based upon the words and examples of the Lord. They were further commanded by the Apostles and Fathers of the Church, as well as by the doctors and pastors of souls"<sup>5</sup>. 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>6</sup>. The consecrated life is also traceable to the post-apostolic church, especially to those early Christians who dedicated themselves to a gospel-oriented life-style, to a radical following of Jesus Christ<sup>7</sup>. 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>8</sup>.

Very significant is the idea of consecration. It is derived from the word 'holy' or 'holiness'. In Hebrew it is *qadash* and in Greek *Hagios*; these are translated to mean 'to consecrate'<sup>9</sup>. In

---

<sup>5</sup> Lumen Gentium 43

<sup>6</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

<sup>7 7</sup> Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony, *Africae Munus and Consecrated Persons*, In *The Catholic Voyage: A Publication of the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria*. Vol. 11. January 2015. P.4.

<sup>8</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>9</sup> Leviticus 15:31; Ezekiel 14:7

Numbers 6:5-7, 12, the Nazirites were referred to as consecrated because of their vows to God. This makes the person holy, a consecration that separates the person from others. Thus the word consecration implies a setting apart or a separation. This separation does not in any way imply superiority<sup>10</sup>, or complete severance from those the consecrated are called to serve<sup>11</sup>. The Second Vatican Council Document says, "The state which is constituted by the profession of the evangelical counsels, though it does not belong to the hierarchical structure of the church, nevertheless, undeniably belongs to the life and holiness of the church"<sup>12</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>13</sup>. Thus, another Second Vatican Council Document exhorts consecrated person thus, "Members of each institute should recall first of all that by professing the evangelical counsels they responded to a divine call so that by being not only dead to sin<sup>14</sup> but also renouncing the world they may live for God alone. They have dedicated their entire lives to his service. This constitutes a special consecration, which is deeply rooted in that of Baptism and expresses it more fully"<sup>15</sup>.

---

<sup>10</sup> Myers, A. C. *Holiness*. The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1987, p. 493.

<sup>11</sup> Myers, A. C. *Sanctify, Consecrate*. The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1987, p. 493.

<sup>12</sup> Lumen Gentium 44

<sup>13</sup> Lumen Gentium 42

<sup>14</sup> Romance 6:11

<sup>15</sup> Perfectae Caritatis 5

### **The Meaning of collaboration**

Collaboration in the contention of Echema is the “coming together of two people or groups that are different, but who for a common purpose, must put aside their differences in order to achieve a common goal”<sup>16</sup>. This definition presents what could be understood as a general understanding of collaboration, which also indicates its necessity in virtually every sphere of human endeavour, be it civil or ecclesiastical. In the ecclesiastical circles, it is often used with the addition of the word *ministry*, giving to birth the nomenclature: Collaborative ministry. It is employed to imply the identification, release and union of all baptized persons<sup>17</sup>. This union is aimed at all the baptized making their contributions, in terms of gifts, towards the good of the Church. Collaborative ministry must involve the clergy, religious and the laity. Words that could describe the phenomenon of collaborative ministry include team ministry, group ministry, partnership, co-responsibility, co-discipleship, collegiality, shared ministry and mutual ministry.

### **The Theological foundations of Collaboration**

In the Old Testament, precisely, the book of Genesis, the idea of collaboration is seen in the Trinity itself. When God wanted to create man he said: “Let us make man in our own image and likeness”<sup>18</sup>. When human beings prided

---

<sup>16</sup> Austin Echema, *Priests and laity collaboration in the postmodern church*, Assumpta Press, Owerri, p. 25

<sup>17</sup> Loughlan Sofield and Carrol Juliano, *Collaborative ministry: Skills and guidelines*. Notre Dame: Ave Marie Press, 1987, p.11.

<sup>18</sup> Genesis 1:26

themselves in the building of the Tower of Babel, God said, "Let us go down and mix up their language so that they would not understand themselves again"<sup>19</sup>. In the Trinity, we find the absolutely one, undivided and indivisible, although distinct, they are united in carrying out the eternal plan of God. Again, when Moses sat as judge over Israel, to avoid working himself to death, he appointed men of integrity to be in charge of tens, fifties, hundreds and thousands of people. This he did that they might be able to deal with minor cases that may not necessarily require his attention. Beyond these texts in the Old Testament, little attention has been paid to the delegation of authority and power<sup>20</sup>.

In the New Testament, the ministry of Jesus was highly collaborative. After the twelve disciples had been with him for some time, Jesus sent them out in pairs, giving them authority over unclean spirits. Jesus empowered them with the authority to teach, heal the sick and cast out demons in his name<sup>21</sup>. When Jesus sent out the 72 to towns that he would eventually visit, he made it clear to them that anyone who listens to them listens to him and that anyone who rejects them rejects him<sup>22</sup>. In the Acts of the Apostles, the Apostles selected from among the people seven men who were of good reputation, filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom for the distribution of food<sup>23</sup>. These are great examples of collaboration in the ministry from the Old and New Testaments.

---

<sup>19</sup> Genesis 11:7

<sup>20</sup> Exodus 18:13-27

<sup>21</sup> Mark 6:7-13

<sup>22</sup> Luke 10:16

<sup>23</sup> Acts 6:1-6

In the wake of Greek neo-Platonism, the Church was seen as 'the school of truth and the fellowship of adepts'<sup>24</sup>. To Roman Stoicism, the Church is principally seen as 'a well ordered community governed by laws'. In the early Church, they were referred to as 'the people of God' or 'the Church of God'. St Paul speaks of the Church as "the fullness of Christ and of fellowship"<sup>25</sup>. He also speaks of the Church as "a mystery and sacrament of salvation"<sup>26</sup>. The Second Vatican Council speaks of the Church variously, as 'the people of God', "Bearer of the message of salvation"<sup>27</sup>, "Mystical Body of Christ"<sup>28</sup> etc. These notwithstanding, the African Synod of 1994 brought out and shared with the universal Church the richness of the African cultural concept of family when it defined the Church as the family of God. This is significant because as Cecil observes, in African culture, the family is the cradle of culture, the fundamental base of humanity and society and the sacred place where all the riches of our tradition converge<sup>29</sup>. These images of the church emphasizes the circular or communo image of the church and de-emphasizes the pyramidal or hierarchical image of the church<sup>30</sup>. If the church is a communion, a fellowship and a

---

<sup>24</sup>Kung H. (1981). *The Church*. New York: Image Books.

<sup>25</sup> Ephesians 3:19

<sup>26</sup> Ephesians 3:4

<sup>27</sup> Gaudium et Spes (1965). In A. Flannery (Ed.). *Documents of the Second Vatican Council* (pp.903-1001). Dublin: Dominican.

<sup>28</sup> Indulgentiarum Doctrina (1967). In A. Flannery (Ed.). *Documents of the Second Vatican Council* (pp.62-79). Dublin: Dominican Publications.

<sup>29</sup>Cecil, M. (ed) (1995). *What Happened at the African Synod*, Nairobi: Pauline.

<sup>30</sup> John Aniagwu, *Collaborative Ministry: Priests, sisters and brothers*. Abuja: Gaudium et Spes Institute, 2001, 14.

body, it can only be healthy and efficient when each part functions perfectly as interdependent dimensions.

### **Collaboration between Religious and the Diocesan Clergy**

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

Efforts should be made to renew the bonds of fraternity and cooperation between diocesan clergy and communities of religious... Great importance should therefore be placed on all those means, even though simple and informal, which serve the increase of mutual trust, apostolic solidarity and fraternal harmony<sup>31</sup>.

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

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

---

<sup>31</sup> *Mutuae Relationes*, no. 37.

of greater responsibility, which are consonant with their vocation and competency<sup>32</sup>.

During any kind of collaboration between the religious and diocesan clergy, it is necessary that due respect be given to the character and purpose of each Religious Institute and the laws of foundations<sup>33</sup>, this is to help them remain faithful to the grace of their vocation<sup>34</sup>. However, for this to be realized, diocesan priests and the religious must learn to dialogue together for “Openness to dialogue is the Christian attitude inside the community as well as with other believers and with men and women of good will. Dialogue is to be practiced first of all within the family of the Church at all levels”<sup>35</sup>. From the teaching of *Ecclesia in Africa*, collaborative in evangelization, catechesis, policy formation and decision making in the diocese and parish, therefore, becomes a kind of dialogue. And for dialogue to bear fruit, there is need for knowledge. The diocesan priest needs to know the religious and the religious needs to understand the diocesan priest. As such, *Ecclesia in Africa* teaches that “better reciprocal knowledge will result if the theology and spirituality of consecrated life are made part of the theological preparation of diocesan priests, and if adequate attention to the theology of the particular church and to the spirituality of the diocesan clergy is included in the formation of consecrated persons”<sup>36</sup>.

---

<sup>32</sup> *Mutuae Relationes*, 38.

<sup>33</sup> Code of Canon Law, No. 680

<sup>34</sup> Code of Canon Law, No. 676

<sup>35</sup> *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 65

<sup>36</sup> *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 50

While the diocesan clergy has a role to play in collaboration, consecrated persons “For their own part... will not fail to cooperate generously with the particular churches as much as they can and with respect for their own charism, working in full communion with the bishop”<sup>37</sup>. They need to understand that they are not strangers of birds of passage in the diocese.

### **Collaboration among Religious Men and Women**

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

Members of Religious Institutes must learn to accept each other and relate amicably as true brothers and sisters who are engaged in the same one mission of Christ. Relationships must be permeated by mutual respect and fraternal charity.

---

<sup>37</sup> *Vita Consacrata*, no. 49

Religious who are in-charge should treat their associates and collaborators as co-workers and not subordinates. Responsibilities must be defined and everyone given the opportunity to carry out his or her responsibility as a free and responsible agent. As a requirement of natural justice, religious authorities must cater for the needs of the members of their communities. Wherever, this fails, it has its effect on collaboration.

### **Collaboration between Religious and the Laity**

Consecrated persons cannot do everything for themselves and by themselves. Following the nature of the apostolates they engage in. The laity are indispensable agents in the missionary activity of the church, thus, the church teaches that “the church is not truly established and does not fully live, nor is it a perfect sign of Christ unless there is a genuine laity existing and working alongside the hierarchy”<sup>38</sup>. Moreover, the laity constitutes the majority among the people of God with about 99% while the clergy and religious constitute about 1%<sup>39</sup>. In the various ministries of consecrated persons, ranging from schools, hospitals, houses for the care of the aged, businesses, accommodations, pastoral centers etc., if the laity are kept out of it would be isolated from the creative currents of the times. They are the link or the point of intersection between the church and the world. They are at the front line<sup>40</sup> and therefore need to have a clear

---

<sup>38</sup> Ad Gentes No. 21

<sup>39</sup> Echema, A. *Autonomy of the local churches of Africa and the question of foreign aid*. In JIT 9, 2007, 61.

<sup>40</sup> Peter Schineller, *The role of the laity in moral transformation of Nigeria*. In Lucerna 6, January-June, 1986, 12.

consciousness of their being the Church<sup>41</sup>. Without the laity, the contributions of the consecrated persons would remain in the convents and rectories without reaching the world.

## **Conclusion**

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

---

<sup>41</sup> Pius XII, Adress to the college of Cardinals, 20 February 1946

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### Consecrated Life in the Church today

*By*

*Sr. Florence Oso, EHI*

*Saints Peter and Paul, Bodija-Ibadan*

#### **Introduction**

The Holy Father, Pope Francis declared November 30 2014-February 2, 2016, the Year of Consecrated Life. With Vatican II Council whose fiftieth year anniversary we celebrate this year, 2015, Consecrated life took a fruitful journey of renewal which, for all its lights and shadows, has been a time of grace marked by the presence of the Spirit. This Year of Consecrated Life challenges us to examine our fidelity to our consecration, to the mission entrusted to us. As part of our own response to this call, it is not only appropriate but also timely for us all to reflect together on such a theme as this to see if our consecration is actually in consonance with the standard and whether it is writing its great history well into the future.

#### **Meaning and Characteristics of Consecration**

Consecration refers to a state to which men and women take public life of Evangelical Counsels. Therefore, when a religious consecrates his/her life, it is a more intimate consecration rooted in baptism and dedicated totally to God. It consists in the perfection of love. Consecration is characterized by:

- **Sacrifice** (Being) Consecration is synonym to sacrifice and this entails giving up, making over something. It is

whole it is total and free; it calls for a generosity which results in joy, satisfaction, contentment, because it is freely made. The choice of total self-giving to God in Christ is in no way incompatible with any human culture or historical situation. (VC.2) Every consecration is accompanied with the pain of denial. This is expressed through the evangelical counsels which are a common ground for all consecrated persons. This remains the constants in consecrated life. The beauty of the total gift of self is like that of presenting a beautifully decorated cake to someone in comparison to that of a piece of cake. Under any circumstances both the giver and the recipient of the full cake would be full of delight. You find life by giving life, you find hope by giving hope, and you find love by giving love.

The spirit of sacrifice helps in focusing on God.

- **Service** (Action) Mtt.20:24-28. You know that their rulers lord it over them and the powerful oppress them. It shall not be so among you. Whoever wants to be more important in your group must be your servant and whoever wants to be first must make himself your slave."

### **Recalling the Origins of Consecrated Life**

Consecrated life springs directly from the evangelical message in its entirety. Christ required of his Apostles a radical life style. This life of *Koinonia* which the Apostles had lived with the master is shown as the ideal which the first Christians tried to live within their own new circumstances. The idea of Religious life is born, not directly and

immediately from the Gospel but from the effort to comprehend the life of Christian perfection.

The Consecrated life is deeply rooted in the example and teaching of Christ who was chaste, poor and obedient. It is this characteristic feature of Jesus that Consecrated persons profess in the evangelical counsels. In every age there have been men and women who have taken to this special way of following Christ, in order to devote themselves to him with an undivided heart. (cf. 1Cor. 7:34).

Consecrated life as we have it today is the result of so many experiences lived in the past and which has been subjected to the general laws of social life. It has its high and low points. Over the years, Consecrated life has metamorphosed from its original monastic form in different stages to the different forms of its manifestations today. Notwithstanding that certain aspects of the life has remained constant.

The first form of Religious life is monasticism which emerged in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century, but it had some significant precursors which set the basic tone for future religious congregations. In the mid to the late 3<sup>rd</sup> Century some Christians in an effort to seek greater personal union with God journeyed into the desert to live in solitude. One of the most famous of such was the Anchorites. Monasticism rapidly spread throughout the whole world like wild fire which seemed to have been fanned by the breath of the spirit.

In the first seven centuries of the Church's history, the radical demand of evangelical counsels was lived by people of every

milieu and condition from both sexes. The evangelical counsels were being lived under varied forms of life, and any form of life according to the evangelical counsels was designated as “monastic life” and the person living this form of life was referred to as “monk”. The word Monk at that time had the same connotation that the word “Religious” have today.

In the 11<sup>th</sup> Century there was a movement of radical reform known as the Gregorian reform which was quick to identify the need for a renewal of monastic life. This became a significant turning point in the history of Religious life. This reform brought about a form of re-conquest because with it, monasticism broke loose of the canonical. This innovation was captured in the desire to move beyond the monastic wall in order to serve God’s people in the society. It moulds and blossomed in every shape and variety: Consequently, the 12<sup>th</sup> Century witnessed the great innovation in Religious life from its original manifestation in monasticism. Evangelical counsels became possible not only for the various types of monks living apart from the world but also for the clergy in the service of the local church. This innovation was fuelled by the desire to move beyond the monastic wall in order to serve God’s people in the society. In the 13<sup>th</sup> Century with St. Francis of Asisi, a new form of the religious life was introduced because he had no intention of shutting himself up in the monastery. The new foundation known as the mendicant orders implies the recognition of the principle of Consecrated life combining the practice of the evangelical counsels with a lay or clerical life. In the new orders the formula for profession rendered explicit the three vows

which had become traditional poverty, chastity, and obedience. Consequently the three essential vows became a condition *sine qua non* of that state. With this in place the Consecrated or Religious life was considered a state in the Church.

16<sup>th</sup> century reform was accompanied with the foundation of new communities and many of the new congregations had feminine branch alongside their own. While the male religious communities became more apostolic in this century, the women remained basically cloistered though some orders of women religious assisted through nursing, but they were to have minimal contact with the outside world. This new form of Religious life was not confined to enclosure but involved works of charity, education and apostolate. With the Apostolic orders, the Religious life was for the first time, fully liberated from the structure of monasticism.

The French Revolution which plunged Europe into the darkness of night was so destructive to the Catholic Church as well as to the Religious orders which suffered greatly during this period. As a result of the Revolution there existed a big gulf between the church and a large section of the people in industrial centres and this raised a new and acute social and educational dilemma. In response to this new demand, many religious communities, especially communities of women who broke out from their enclosure became involved in teaching. The Bishops and Popes acknowledged and admitted the usefulness of the uncloistered communities only after the French Revolution in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Lastly, as a result of the European colonial expansion of the newly discovered worlds,( Africa, Asia and Latin America) many specialized missionary congregations were founded to meet the demands of the mission to evangelize the people of the new worlds. It is in this context that the great Renewal of the Second Vatican Council which reformed the Consecrated life to its present outfit is situated.

### **The Special Values of Consecrated Life**

The consecrated life is such a wonderful gift to the entire Church because it concerns every member of the Church since this state of life is at the very heart of the Church as a decisive element for her mission. (VC.3). The special values of the consecrated life is a rich expression of the Gospel values itself; and its ideals which has cut across all the centuries of its existence.

- Anticipates the future age (eschatological) Mtt.22:30  
“First of all, in the resurrection of the dead, neither men or women will marry, but they will be like angels.”
- Witnesses and co-operators of the Fruitfulness of Holy Mother Church. Chastity lived by the consecrated is the door of the whole consecrated life and it is a fruitful celibacy. Consecration frees a consecrated person for availability to service. Our consecration enables us to be completely free in order to be used by God to reach out to those in need. A consecrated person is free because he/she is betrothed to no one but God and therefore has no other interest but God. With God’s love, which blossoms into an enriching friendship, we are liberated from our narrowness and self-absorption and are indeed

free in Christ. Without going through the labour pangs we become a mothers of so many children. Our consecration, if it is satisfactorily lived should lead us to fertility. Each of us should become a universal mother. When a sister is not a mother to all those whom she works with she then becomes sad, discontented and dissatisfied, a disciple of gloom.

- Contemplation. This is one of the hallmarks of consecrated life. Consecration fosters a closer union with the Lord. Mary Magdalene who sat at the foot of Jesus was said to have chosen the better part. (cf.Lk.10:41) Our community experience is similar to the Transfiguration experience.“It is good for us to be here”.
- Evangelical spirit. Inspires everything we do in consecrated life because We are a joyful people. The beauty of consecration is joy. Consecrated people are schooled in joy, we are taught to practice perfect joy (cf.Jn15:11 May my joy be in you and may your joy be complete”.) We have a thousand reasons for remaining in joy. The certainty of knowing that we are loved by God is enough reason to generate joy in our hearts and in our communities and in our apostolate. The liveliness which is experienced in many community of consecrated person is the result of the joy of the Lord which issues from their daily experiences.
- Fraternal life in love.” There can be no true unity without that unconditional mutual love which demands a readiness to serve others generously, a willingness to welcome as they are without judging them and an ability to forgive seventy times seven”. (VC.42) How beautiful and joyful it is when sisters live together in unity.” How

good and pleasant it is to live together in harmony as brothers. Ps.133: There is an old saying which says “where there are religious, there is joy”. Is this saying still true? If not why? The authentic fraternity found in the community of consecrated persons increases our joy. The sign of fraternity is tenderness, a “Eucharistic tenderness” because fraternity with all its possible diversity is an experience of love which goes beyond conflicts. (51) The communion lived within the community of consecrated persons entails mutual acceptance, concern, communion of goods both material and spiritual, fraternal correction and respect for those who are weak. This kind of communion inoculates us against the diseases of self-absorption. We are called to know that God is able to fill our hearts to the brim with happiness; therefore we need not seek our happiness elsewhere.

## **Some Qualities of Consecrated Life**

### **1. Way to Holiness**

Consecrated life is a beautiful way to holiness. The mystic of living together makes our life beautiful. The ties of brotherhood/sisterhood are very beautiful. Then what happens? We speak badly of one another, we gossip about one another, we bear grudge against one another. All these problems can be resolved if we think of our community as a family. The ties of the community of consecrated persons are supposedly stronger than that of a natural family because it is a supernatural way of life. In the natural family there are problems, yet we do not speak ill of one another, we do not slander one another, if there is anything wrong we report to our father or the mother, with the mind of rectifying the

problem. The consecrated life is a graced life because God gives us opportunities to rectify so many wrongs.

## **2. Sustaining Hope**

We have been called to be sustainers of hope, bearers of serenity and joy, and givers of God's consolation and tenderness towards all. Our total self-giving in service to the Church, to families and young people, to the elderly and the poor, brings us life-long personal fulfilment. Our life as consecrated people is so well packaged in such a way that our different apostolates are oriented towards bringing God's consolation to all. Whenever we teach children and attend to them with love, when we tend the sick ones in love and they feel cared for and loved, we give hope, we give joy and we are filled with joy because we feel fulfilled. The ability to give joy to others resound joy in the heart of one who gives it to the other. "How lovely on the mountain are the feet of him, who brings good news, announcing peace proclaiming news of happiness".

## **3. Higher and Superior Value**

It has objective superiority because it mirrors Christ's own way of life. This is a consecration to God and this is what makes the consecrated life to be of a higher value and superior to marriage- When you make over something over to God, then it is safe. The beauty of it is that it saves the person from worrying, because what you have consecrated consequently belongs to God and he definitely knows how best to take care of that which belongs to Him. For an overall picture of its essential characteristics, consecration is singularly helpful to fix our gaze on Christ's radiant face

without any distraction. It is superior to marriage because the object of the consecrated person's love is God Himself. In marriage the partner gives his/her love and obedience to a mortal, (wife be obedient to your husband) but in consecrated life, it is God. In marriage, the partner can sack, divorce, walk out on, or fail, the other but in consecrated life God can never fail neither does he ever get tired, He is always and ever faithful. Our consecration is an act of God; therefore, let us live our consecration in joy following Christ in faithful service.

#### **4. Experts in Communion and Solidarity**

Consecrated people are witnesses and architects of the plan of unity. Where different cultures experience difficulty in living alongside one another we have been called to offer a concrete model of unity in diversity communion in our differences, living together as sisters and brothers of Christ in Christ, acknowledging the dignity and gift of each person and sharing our respective gifts. In community life we are called to support each other in our joyful yes to the Lord. The kind of solidarity lived among consecrated person is so beautifully up-lifting.

In our community living we see the beauty of complementing one another; the one that has nothing comes to get her needs while the one that has so much dispossesses herself of what she does not need. It is a comfort lived in reasonable detachment. I have nothing of my own, yet I lack nothing.

By these points I have just shared with you, I am not trying to make a proposal, rather, what I have just done is to present to

you what the consecrated life is, what it is meant to be, the ideal from *status quo*. I beg you not to mind the distorted version that our human limitations has reduced it to.

## VI. Consecrated Life Today

We should be grateful to God for our Holy Father, Pope Francis who today has put consecrated life in the limelight by calling for the year of Consecrated life. Today we can say that consecrated life is enjoying good health, a lot of holiness and less scandal. In this year we celebrate 50 years of *Perfactae Caritatis*, the Decree on the adaptation and renewal of Consecrated life issued by the Second Vatican Council. This calls us to see the Consecrated life in the Church with gratitude because there are many lights more than shadow in this path of 50 years and consecrated life today taking into consideration its past, looks at the future with great hope.

Today, there is great holiness in Consecrated life. (If you doubt the holiness of consecrated life go to the monasteries, where there is poverty, where there is fragility, where there is sin but also there is a lot of holiness there. In the convents, consecrated people are dedicating their lives to God and for others without saving anything. This gives great hope to others<sup>1</sup>.

Notwithstanding, we must acknowledge that today's culture affects consecrated life today because culture is a pervasive reality that impacts all dimensions of life. This impact is felt in the call to consecrated life, in formation in consecrated life,

---

<sup>1</sup> V.C.85

in the living of the evangelical counsels, in community life, spirituality and the apostolate of consecrated persons.

We live in a historical, socio-cultural context in which the evangelical counsels are less appreciated and much less understood. The counsels are considered in-human. The world today despises some of the values of consecrated life and therefore consecrated persons become a sign of contradiction to the world because our presence pricks the conscience of our society today. The essence of the Consecrated life is wrongly perceived by the world today where:

**OBEDIENCE:** Obedience seems to attack the fundamental right of the human person, the freedom to make decisions.

**CHASTITY:** Chastity is seen as a deprivation of the goodies of marriage. (Mention them)

**POVERTY:** Poverty is even less appreciated in the world that has made well-being and finances as supreme values, and poverty is considered as an evil to be overcome.

All these have impacted negatively on consecrated life. But should that be? There is a certain culture of consecrated life, based on values, beliefs, practices that are commonly held, we have changed a lot from what it used to be in practice, trying to simplify, modify and even adapt to the culture of the time we live in but there are no changes in principal doctrine because being faithful to Jesus will remain always.

The great challenge to consecrated life today is, a consecrated life that can promote what is new, and become utopia that needs to emerge in our present time<sup>2</sup>.

**PROPHETIA** A consecrated life with less structures, more life, less double standards, more precise witnesses, more smiles and less frowns, etc. The history of consecrated life today must be woven through the thread of constant efforts to substitute barriers with horizons.

Our consecration makes us persons who are given to God without condition, we are to be living memories of Jesus' way of being and acting before the contemporary world. We must discover a form of life in which the person of Jesus and his project in a process of true discipleship becomes the heart of everything. This indicates the fundamental rule of consecrated life which is the following of Christ as taught by the Gospel<sup>3</sup>.

**EVANGELIUM.** What is required of consecrated life today are men and women who are capable of telling us of an experience that is profound and true, which tells us that it is possible for men and women to follow God and be happy always not just for the moment.

## VII. Conclusion

The place of Consecrated life in the world today is love. Love attracts, love makes us overcome huge difficulties and love makes us do crazy things. We must go beyond only human

---

<sup>2</sup> V C, 84

<sup>3</sup> P C, 2

love, which can disappoint and leave us bitter. Therefore, we must seek true love, God. God is love, as the scripture tells us. The world's perception of us is that of a people who have no worries, no troubles and problems at all. Like every human persons, we have our troubles, our dark nights of the soul, our disappointments and infirmities, our experience of slowing down as we grow older but in all these we should be able to discover "perfect joy". Our consecration is an act of God, therefore; let us live our consecration in joy following Christ in the service of others. It helps us to welcome the kingdom of God in our lives and to put our lives at the service of the kingdom. Let us instruct people in the values of the consecrated life so that its beauty and holiness may shine forth in the Church. I implore each one of us that, rather than living in some utopia, we should find ways to create "alternate spaces", where the Gospel approach of self-giving, fraternity, embracing differences, and love of one another can thrive so that our lives can remain attractive in a world where there is often a lack of joy.

Finally, there is no doubt that the spirit is alive and active in the consecrated life today as we see it manifested all around us in the different Religious Orders. The Year of Consecrated Life calls us to live the present with passion. As we listen attentively to what the Holy Spirit is saying to us today we must implement more fully the essential aspects of our consecrated life.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### **The Consecrated Life: Its Place and Role in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

By

*Lawrence N. Okwuosa, SDV*  
*Dept. of Religion and Cultural Studies*  
*University of Nigeria Nsukka*

#### **Introduction**

With the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there was a great expectation of a new world order. The expectation was great and touched all spheres of human life. The Church being in the world of human beings was not left out. In the Church circle it was the clamour for new evangelization – a more effective commitment to her mission in the world. There was this belief that the world was drifting away from the good news and the news of salvation was not reaching the people effectively. Cuing into this season of expectation, consecrated life, which is an integral part of the ecclesial reality, reinforced her slogan for renewal, which was initiated with the Second Vatican Council.

With the Council, consecrated life undertook a journey of renewal which Pope Francis (2014:1) described as having both lights and shadows. In its lights is the return of the consecrated life to the origin, to the Gospel, to the charism of the founders and to the healthy traditions that have come down to the present time. While in its shadows are the many sexual scandals, internal conflicts and decrease in religious vocations that have bedevilled consecrated life since then. This has become of great concern to both the consecrated people themselves and the society at large, in the sense, for

example, that not every consecrated person is a gay or a potential paedophile.

With these worries in our minds, we shall be looking at the place and role of the consecrated people in our time. This forms part of our religious duty to stand up and give meaning and reasons to our faith, especially in difficult times. This is what St. Peter advocated when he wrote in 1Peter 3:15, saying: “Be ready always with an answer to everyone who asks a reason for the hope that is in you”. To do this effectively well, we shall discuss the meaning and purpose of consecrated life, the features of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and, in the light of these, look at the place and role of the consecrated life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. At the end, we shall make some recommendations as the way forward for an authentic living and witnessing of the consecrated life in our today’s world.

### **1. Consecrated Life, What is it?**

The term “consecrate” in Latin language is *consecrare* and it has its root in the word *sacrum* meaning holy, God-like or set apart for God. Hence to be consecrated or to live a consecrated life is to be chosen by God exclusively for himself. As it is only God who makes holy, it is only God who consecrates people. The initiative belongs to him alone. It is only when God decides to incorporate one into his service or fold that the individual cooperates. According to Betti (in Eze (ed.) 2012:30) “consecration signals a profound change in the person and thus distinguishes the form of life to be lived. However, consecration does not bring about an ontological change in the individual, as happens in the one who receives the sacrament of baptism or confirmation or

Holy Orders, with the resultant effects. It, instead, causes an 'ethical' change, which obliges the individual to a new title of fidelity to the common baptismal consecration. It is, therefore, not to be considered a 'a second baptism' because its effects are reversible and can be annulled and in fact, they can be nullified by the Roman Pontiff''

The history of the Catholic Church is blessed with the lives of men and women who understood Christ's call 'come follow me' (Mk 1:17) in a radical manner. It is this radicalism to answer Christ's call that moved the first recognized religious, Anthony of Egypt, like the first disciples, to abandon everything and move to the desert so as to be alone with God. Because of this radical life style in living of the gospel's values religious are seen as counter or contrast society (Lohfink 1986). By this, we mean a prophetic people, who act as the spiritual check and balance of God's new people. Moloney (1980) sees them as a protest movement against a Church that had conformed itself too much to society at large. The Church in differentiating this form of life, the consecrated life, from all other forms of life in the Church says that it is "a life to follow Christ more freely and to imitate Him more nearly by the practice of the evangelical counsels" (*Perfectate Caritatis* 1). Invariably, consecrated life is essentially the embracing of the evangelical counsels (cf. CCC 914), which comprises of the three vows of chastity, poverty and obedience that men and women religious profess.

The three vows are the distinguishing marks of the consecrated life. The vows represent the total renunciation of the world, of all human goods and comforts. Consecrated

people negate the three most important aspects of human life, that is, economy, social and political in order to be with Christ. Hence, the vows are the declaration of their choice for Christ alone who is above all things as the joy and meaning of their life. They embrace and promote Christ's message of salvation and in their daily life share in His passion and resurrection by being in solidarity with the world.

Because the vows, like the consecrated people, are not ends in themselves, rather the point to another the presence of God's kingdom in our midst. With their lives, consecrated acknowledge the presence of God's kingdom in our midst in the person and message of Jesus Christ. They are the eschatological signs of the Reign of God. In this way, we understand that the kingdom of God is not an abstract reality. Like Ulrich Schaffer (in Fuellenbach 1994:31-32) said, it is not tied to buildings of wood or stone, names or titles, times and plans, language and expressions, our abilities and inabilities, but tied only to the possibility of living in you and me as Lord of life.

By being embodiments of the Kingdom of God in human life, consecrated people are called to play the following roles in the world:

**i. To provide productive models of Christian faith:** In this function, consecrated people are reminders of the intimate link between being a Christian and following Christ. Against the backdrops and cultures which tend to differentiate the two, making the following of Christ an abstract thing, consecrated persons according to J. B. Metz (in Fuellenbach

1994:134) have to provide productive models for the Church and the world at all times and in every culture on how to follow Christ. These models should illustrate how fellowship with Christ is to be lived in the new social, economic, intellectual and cultural situation of today. Following Christ is not a theological discourse or the application of the Church's Christology but a life to be lived and demonstrated in the concrete circumstances of our time. It is to act in Christ's stead – doing what He would have done if He was to be with us today. For example, the scripture told us that when He saw them like sheep without a shepherd He became one for them; when He found out that they had nothing to eat, He multiplied bread for them; when they brought their sick and the possessed to Him, He had pity on them and healed them, etc.

So, consecrated people are to provide productive models of imitating Christ in every age through the act of discernment empowered by the grace of the Spirit of Christ. This would imply “entering” the mind of Christ, being one with Him and abandoning totally to his will. And the result would be that through the lives and actions of consecrated people the world would come to know who Christ really is, what vision of God he proclaimed, lived, worked and died for; what vision of the world, human society, the individual person and creation as a whole he presented (Fuellenbach 1994:137).

**ii. To play corrective role:** Because of the tendency for the Church to “fall asleep” instead of keeping watch and pray (Mk 14:38) consecrated life is a gift from God to watch against this tendency. This role is prophetic in nature. Like the

biblical prophets, consecrated people are called to condemn the sins and indifference of the people to the teachings of Christ and their holiness of life. In line with this, *Vita Consecrata* no. 84 teaches that Consecrated people like prophets should feel in their hearts a burning desire for holiness of God and having heard His word in the dialogue of prayer, they should proclaim that word with their lives, with their lips and with their actions, becoming people who speak for God against evil and sin. In other words, consecrated people are the watch dogs of the Church by being alive and alert to the signs of the time and confronting them with gospel's values.

**iii. To witness to community living:** By embracing the consecrated life, the chosen people make the person of Jesus Christ and His mission of salvation the centre of their life. And what this means in concrete terms is that they belong whole and entire to Christ's universal family. Their charism and apostolate are translated to universal fraternity or family. In this family what matters is the sharing in God's love and mercy, which was made manifest in Christ's death and resurrection. These events gave humanity a new life and a new joy. It beholds on consecrated people, then, to make this new life and joy they share with Christ reach all corners of the earth. And the point of departure in this is by presenting religious life/communities as seats of God's love, mercy, justice and peace (Fuellenbach 1994:139). Consecrated people should be able to invite and welcome the world to their world of faith, they should be able to proclaim and present the Messiah to the world in the way they live out their joy of salvation with one heart and one soul (Acts 4:32). Definitely,

like Tertullian said, the world would say of them: “See, they say, how they love one another” ([Apology, Chapter XXXIX](#)).

## **2. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century World in Perspective**

For us to understand the consecrated life, its place and role today, it is inevitable a cursory look at the world we live in. That is, the circumstances in today's world which can exercise a positive or negative influence on the consecrated life and present a context where consecrated persons ought to live and bear witness to the Gospel.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has been described as the golden age of human life. In this age, man has achieved and consolidated the achievements of the past ages in terms of science and technology. With what man has been able to achieve in the fields of medicine, architecture, information technology, space exploration and agriculture, it will not be an exaggeration to say that, in this age, impossibility is nothing. Man has truly defined and demonstrated that he is at the centre of reality. What man does not think or do is inexistent. This age has been described variously as:

- i. The age of absolute liberalism and democratization. Actually, this was prepared in the ages past but has come to acquired a horrifying status in the sense that it favours a society in which individuals are free to choose their goals and allegiances and they militate against the promotion of collectivist non-liberal goals (Browning 2000:153-154). This has led to relativism of all kinds. Whatever matters is an individualized rendition and interpretation of reality, which in most cases is against

any claim to authority and universality either in values or in any camp of knowledge (Uwalaka in Njoku, F (ed.) 2001:45).

- ii. Krishan Kumar sees the 21<sup>st</sup> century as the end time age, that is, the age of living at the end. He said “We seem to feel ourselves suspended in a transitional state where the only certainty is the lack of certainty” (in Browning 2000:57).
- iii. For Jonathan Sacks (2005), the famous Jewish scholar, our age is the age of moral emptiness. By this, he means that the contemporary man has lost himself in the consumer culture and relegated religion to the private sector. With man, it is all about unlimited relativism and untoward pluralism which are decimating eternal truths.

All these when put together translates to what is called progress in today’s parlance. This progress is not ideological concepts but translated into great technological and scientific progress. Technological and scientific progress has guaranteed easy communication around the world, even though, concerns about stress from the overuse of mobile phones, the Internet and related technologies remains controversial. The world has become a global village. News spread like wild fire and information is easily accessed via the electronic media. Notwithstanding the lopsided distribution of this material progress, generally there is improvement on healthcare, education, jobs, housing and alimentation worldwide.

Unfortunately, this progress has not resulted to a culture of universal family or brotherhood. Notwithstanding the evident globalism, there is an alarming level of nationalism and racism in the world. The dichotomy between the rich and the poor still persists. The material gains of this century have not trickled down to all spheres of the society. Instead, we have a situation, whereby the rich are getting richer and the poor poorer. We still witness the trampling of the dignity of the human person in various forms, the value of human rights, especially the right to life and freedom, respect of conscience and the right to objective truth and religion. Violence of all kinds, especially those animated by religious fanaticism, is on the increase. Terrorism and genocide still remain a problem in this century with the concern of the wars in Darfur, Syria, Sudan and Ukraine. Al Qaeda terrorists, Boko Haram insurgents and ISIS attackers have marred the relative peace that this century has witnessed. Low estimates on the deaths in these wars and terror attacks are in millions with so many millions of people in displacement. There has been much outcry against the perpetrators with very weak international response.

In this age, there is a subtle revolution going on in the family life. The coming out of gay people from their cocoon is today called gay pride. Same-sex marriage has slowly become more accepted, and has become legal in some countries. In 2001 the Netherlands became the first nation in the world to legalize it and since then many other nations have followed suit. Countries, like African nations, that fought against it were threatened with economic sanctions. Divorce, single parenting, teenage pregnancies and child trafficking are in

the increase showing the near collapse of the traditional family system.

With regards to religion, our age, according to Arthur (2000:1), is the age of real revolution in the religious awareness of humanity. We are living in a moment of history in which the access to different religions has unprecedented depth and breadth. We live in an age of religious pluralism that Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1962:11) had to say that the religious life of mankind from now on, if it is to be lived at all, will be lived in a context of religious pluralism. No longer are people of other persuasions peripheral or distant, the idle curiosities of travellers' tales. The more alert we are, and the more involved in life, the more we are finding that they are our neighbours, our colleagues, our competitors, our fellows. Confucians and Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims, are with us not only in the United Nations, but down the street. Increasingly, not only is our civilization's destiny affected by their actions; but we drink coffee with them personally as well. Unfortunately, this closeness of the religions to one another has not resulted in world peace. What we have in terms of religious pluralism is religious relativism where there is no certain truths and where individuals freely make their own cocktail of religion by choosing and picking different materials from different religions and putting them up together as a religious belief.

### **3. The Role and Place of Consecrated Life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

From what we have seen from the overwhelming and complex situation of our time, the contemporary man is lost in time, dispersed in the fragments of reality, alienated in a

kind of relativism that includes ethics, cultural, social, politics and economics. Man lives his identity and functional crisis by negating the supreme value of life. Threatened in his human finiteness, the individual is at the search of sense and fulfilment, solidarity and communion in order not to be alone in solitude and conscious of his limits. He is in need of communicating the emptiness that he feels within himself, the fear of nothing, the sense of the end that is near, the tragedy of evil that torments him in the heart and mind, around himself and in the midst of people.

The truth is that the contemporary man is insecure and lives in fear; he is stressed, confused and unsure of himself. He lives out the experience of truth only aesthetically and rhetorically. He experiences life from the point of continuous flux. Since, for him everything changes and nothing is permanent, his understanding of love, affection becomes something transient, liquid, unstable and destined to change (Scognamiglio 2006:42-43). The contemporary man avoids permanent commitments and exclusive bonds. This is what Zygmunt Bauman, a sociologist, called "Liquid Society".

How the consecrated people are able to handle this complex situation vis-à-vis the teaching of St. Peter would go a long way in determining the true place and role of the consecrated life in today's world. Actually, this is not the first time in the history of the church consecrated people would be facing challenges in their mission in the world and in the church. Like in the past, the issue bothers more on authenticity and application of the gospel values to the signs of the time. For

this, we shall examine some of the core points of witnessing in the consecrated life. They are:

- **Renewed witnessing of God in the world:** Basically, it is the duty of every Christian to witness of the goodness of Christ in the world, but the consecrated people are called to do so in style. Having left homes, parents, careers and the world, in parenthesis, they are presumed free to dedicate their whole life to this service. Hence, in a world at risk of obliterating every influence, image and memory of Christ in the social circle, it is the duty of the consecrated persons to renew their witnessing of Christ beginning with the way they live their lives. This is not to say that there is no witnessing going on, rather what is at stake are the quality and focus of such witnessing. It is not enough to witness to the world; consecrated people should be able to identify the “world” at risk today. The fundamental option for the poor if it must make sense today must be inclusive. It must include both the materially poor and the presumed materially rich, who may be suffering from psychological, moral and spiritual poverty like desperation, lack of identity and sense of life direction. All people, both the rich and the poor, need Christ to enjoy holistic existence and to be saved.

Again, it is not enough to witness God’s love for humanity, it is necessary to buttress God’s plan for the entire humanity. What is God teaching us and the entire humanity in the midst of these confusions? What does the gospel say in situations like this? Are there salvific lessons to learn from what is happening? How can we avoid a repeat? With authentic generous listening to the world and worthy response to these

questions, consecrated people would invariably be educating the world on the new culture of love initiated by Christ. They would be mapping out a new chapter based on the gospel of Christ for the entire humanity.

- **Formation of world conscience:** The challenge for all citizens in a pluralist democracy is to form and inform their conscience, and to that conscience be true, including the discharge of any public trust and the formulation of laws and policies which enhance the prospects for freedom and human flourishing for all, regardless of their religious beliefs (Frank Brennan 2011). In this war of winning the human conscience, consecrated people should not be found wanting, if they are to have an authentic place and role in the world today. They should not feel comfortable with being the conscience of the society but, in turn, form the world's collective conscience. As prophetic persons, they must guarantee the enforcement and sustainment of truth, justice and peace everywhere and at all times. They must find a way to make it clear that certain behaviours or attitudes are not only at variance with human ethical values but also against the gospel values. They must not divorce morality from religion and vice versa. In their dealings with the world, there must be a definite understanding of the concepts of evil and good, right and wrong; no mid way should be tolerated for any reason at all. Christ, himself, abhorred it.
- **Promotion of authentic human culture:** Learning from the mistakes of the early missionaries who annihilated the people from their culture, by blackmailing cultures they did not understand, in the name of religion, consecrated persons

should appreciate and promote human cultures. For example, in Africa, many customs and rites, once considered to be strange, are seen today, in the light of ethnological science, as integral parts of social systems, worthy of study and commanding respect. African rich cultural values should be seen as the work of the Holy Spirit, who precedes all human efforts in missionary activities. Hence, it beholds on consecrated people to recognize, accept, and even animate whatever honours the human person and his dignity. Whatever does not look like the gospel should not be condemned at face level, developments in the sciences and technology, which are parts of human culture should be examined and possibly given new meanings and expressions in the light of the gospel.

This happened in the medieval age when the presence of institutes of consecrated life had a great influence in the transmission and formation of culture. The monasteries, for example, were the places in which the cultural riches of the past were handed on and the new culture of Christian humanism was developed. This has proven true whenever the light of the Gospel has enlightened new nations and cultures. Many consecrated persons have been the promoters of culture and often the defenders, researchers and scholars of indigenous cultures (Working paper for the 1994 World Synod of Bishops, 107). Consequently, it is not out of place for today's consecrated people to get themselves involved in the promotion of culture and in the dialogue between culture and faith. This would go a long way in defining their relationship with the world as not one of antagonism. Christianity is not

at war with any culture and does not belong to any particular culture instead it Christianizes the culture at her disposition.

- **Facilitation of interreligious dialogue:** The awareness of the pluralistic and cross-cultural nature of our contemporary world in terms of religions, politics, ideologies and philosophies calls for dialogue. Today, we are more conscious of the fact of diversity than ever before. And in order to make the best out of the situation and avoid unnecessary conflicts and wars, the different groups must engage in dialogue at different levels. We cannot do without dialogue today because that would amount to isolating ourselves and talking to ourselves alone without anybody else listening. Since according to Hans Kung (1991:105) there can be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions. There can be no peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions; consecrated people should facilitate interreligious dialogue.

Contrary to popular understanding, interreligious dialogue does not negate the Christian faith; make relative all truths and affirm every religion as a valid means of salvation. Authentic interreligious dialogue aims at the sharing of those truths that transcend and unite us all as children of the same father, God. A good point of departure in this is the recognition of man's need for prayer. St. John Paul II affirms this by saying that the Spirit of God is present in the prayer of every person who prays, Christian and otherwise (Gioia 1997:174-175). Developing a kind of world ethic that would provide the world with the peace and justice it needs badly should be a collective duty among the religions. Waging

“holy war” against religious terrorism, environmental degradation and global warming should be a matter for all the religions of the world together.

The fact remains that Christ never avoided the religions of his time and this consecrated people have to appreciate and imitate. Christ went to the synagogue, read from the Jewish sacred text and because he understood it very well was able to affirm unequivocally that he is its fulfilment. For this, consecrated people cannot but get involved in this unique contemporary mission of dialogue with other religions. Even St. Paul did the same thing at his time. In his famous Areopagus speech of the Unknown God, he engaged the religions of his time with the gospel truth.

#### **4. The Way Forward**

For the consecrated life to meet up with the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century world, it must embrace the spirit of change ranging through the age without losing itself and essence to change itself. This spirit of change has the blessing of the Council Fathers who fathomed the need for renewal in the consecrated life. To improve in its engagement with the world, there is need to examine first the understanding and application of consecrated life purely from the evangelical counsel. How consecrated people live and apply these vows in the imitation of Christ in the 21<sup>st</sup> century world is very important. The vows as we all know are the lowest common factors among all the consecrated persons.

Coming to the vow of poverty, John Hardon opines that not a few are saying that actual poverty in following Christ is no

longer feasible, if it was ever defensible, in the religious life. Whatever else it is, poverty does not mean, for some religious today, deprivation. It is said to be essentially a subjective disposition which ranges all the way from “being concerned for the poor”, emphasize on personal self denial and not group acquisitiveness, to “being open to the Spirit” in the changing circumstances of the times. These new concepts of poverty have led religious institutes to write into their updated juridical structures such provisions as demands for salaries corresponding to lay persons engaged in the same work, dress and apparel that has discarded the religious and clerical garb in favour of secular clothes with accumulating wardrobes.

Unfortunately, in our world today, the only vow of poverty that would make sense to the people is a poverty that changes the fate of the poor around. It is a self-emptying poverty for the sake of the other, which is for the sake of the kingdom as Christ said, “When I was hungry you gave me to eat” (Mt 25:35). No matter how this is conceived or formulated the poor or society at large wants to benefit from the vow. They do not understand and it makes no sense that consecrated people vow poverty but they live in visible affluence. No explanation to this would convince the critical mind of the 21<sup>st</sup> century person, who wants to see the poor religious truly poor.

In the spirit of change, unfortunately, alien ideas have been introduced in the interpretation and living of the vow of chastity. Complete chaste life in the following of the chaste Christ is considered either psychologically harmful or

sociologically unproductive and emotionally unhealthy. Reports in the public press about the marriages of “priests and nuns” are simply the end result of sometimes years-long liaisons that are no longer considered sinful for religious. Since nothing is hidden from the wary eyes of the 21<sup>st</sup> century world, they have come to doubt that consecrated hearts are truly on fire with passion for Christ and the lost ones of the kingdom. The talk about the heavenly wedding with the Lamb and consecrated persons representing this wedding and reproducing spiritually for the kingdom of God makes no sense any more. In Africa, for example, virginity, chaste life and total dedication to one’s spouse are priceless virtues. In moving forward today, consecrated people must honestly answer Pope Francis’ question in clear terms. He asked: “Is Jesus really our first and only love, as we promised he would be when we professed our vows? (2014:1). Only if Jesus is, will we be empowered to love, in truth and mercy, every person who crosses our path. Only when the world sees this to be true of us would they entrust their hearts to us to be saved.

Against the backdrop that the vow of obedience is all about group conformism, maintenance of law and order and respect for instituted authority, which has succeeded in making some adult religious perpetual infants, the vow should be seen as guiding every religious towards channelling his or her talent, ambition and resources towards the promotion of communal charism. By living out this vow, consecrated people reveal their identity as truly charismatic people; people empowered by the authority of the Holy Spirit, dotted with his gifts and sent to the world since no one sends himself or herself. But

what happens, when decorated religious cannot act under this influence or is seen to be afraid of the world in their operations? For our critical world, these are signs of incompetence and inauthentic life. And since a bad sales person sells nothing, uncharismatic consecrated persons do not make impressions.

All these orientations would involve change in religious formation, apostolate and community life. The formation of consecrated people in seclusion should be discarded. They should be formed in an attitude of openness and fraternal dialogue and possibly not outside the people and culture of their possible ministration. In this kind of formation, spiritual direction must be complemented with psychological examinations and therapies to determine the suitability of candidates for the life. It is presumed that formation should be holistic thus necessitating the collaboration of all within and outside of the community. Formation of consecrated people should not be left in the hands of the intellectual few who may not be dotted with other human qualities for such a delicate task.

For fraternal love and joy to exist in the communities and, thus, empower the consecrated to give their best in the world, religious community should really be homes/families to them in facts and in deeds. The injustices of condemning a consecrated person to find a “paying job”, subjected to countless pressures to conformity, or having to look for financial security from blood relatives, or watching less qualified persons preferred because they are willing to compromise must be abhorred. Success belongs to God and

must not be measured in material terms alone. Since what goes on in the communities have become public the impression all these make in the public arena is that consecrated people do not really believe, especially in divine providence.

To finish this paper without saying that consecrated life must employ traditional African values of respect for elders, sharing and solidarity in their everyday community life and dealing with the outside world would amount to real abstract thinking. Though, consecrated people are loved and respected they should understand that it is all because of Christ, who they represent and if they must be seen as such, they must reciprocate this love and affection by being their brothers' keepers. They must not be found wanting in humility and respect for elders. Christ, though the Son of God had to obey Mary even when his hour has not come by changing water into wine at the wedding at Cana. Consecrated people should learn to stoop down to conquer the world. If they want the world to *under-stand* them and be at their *stand*, they must learn to be *under*.

Having reached this far, we can re-echo what Benedict XVI said that: "The consecrated life whatever difficulty it may face will not go into extinction. It is the grace of God for his church. Hence, we should not join the ranks of the prophets of doom who proclaim the end or meaninglessness of the consecrated life in the Church in our day; rather, we should clothe ourselves in Jesus Christ and put on the armour of light - as Saint Paul urged (cf. *Rom* 13:11-14) - keeping awake and watchful".

## **Conclusion**

All said and done, it is only a religious who has experienced truly the love of God that can be of immense help to the world today. Since one cannot give what he or she does not have, it is necessary that religious people examine themselves thoroughly to determine if actually they are called and if actually they are living their life in accordance to the voice they heard. When this two do not complement each other it would really be difficult for an authentic witnessing to take place as this story illustrates:

During the time of the desert monks, around 450 AD, a young monk went to an old and holy monk and asked him, "Father, how is it that so many today leave the monastery? The old man answered him, "When a good hunting dog sees a rabbit, he will immediately run after it, howling and barking with excitement. This will, of course, attract other dogs, and they in turn will run and bark and howl like the one that saw the rabbit, although they have not actually seen it themselves. After a while the ones who did not really see the rabbit, but relied only on the barking and howling of the first dog, will get tired and give up the chase, because they are no longer interested. They drift off and go home. Only the dog that really saw the rabbit will go on running and eventually catch up with it. That is the way with many who enter", the old monk concluded. "Only the one who has his or her eyes on Christ and has seen him will and can survive. The others, who came

only because the enthusiasm of others had drawn them will lose interest and leave”.

## References

- Abbott, W. M (ed. 1966), *The Documents of Vatican II*, New York: Guild Press & America Press.
- Arthur, C (2000), *Religious Pluralism: A Metaphorical Approach* Aurora, Colorado: The Davies Group.
- Browning, G et al (eds. 2000). *Understanding Contemporary Society: Theories of the Present*. London: Sage Publications.
- Catholic Church (1997), *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Revised in Accordance with the Official Latin Text Promulgated by Pope John Paul II*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- Fuellenbach, J (1994), *Proclaiming His Kingdom*, Manila: Logos Publications, Inc.
- Gioia, F (ed. 1997), *Interreligious Dialogue: The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church (1963-1995)*, Boston: Pauline Books and Media.
- Hardon, J, The Apostolate of Religious Witness, in [http://www.TheRealPresence.org/archives/Religious Life/](http://www.TheRealPresence.org/archives/ReligiousLife/), accessed on 30-07-2015.
- John Paul II (1996), *Vita Consecrata, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Consecrated Life and Its Mission in the Church and in the World*, Rome: Vatican Press.
- Lohfink, G. (1986), “Religious Orders: God’s Therapy for the Church”, in *Theology Digest* 33, pp. 203-212.
- Metz J. B. (1978), *Followers of Christ: Religious Life and the Church*, New York: Paulist Press.

- Moloney, F. J (1980), *Disciples and Prophet: A Biblical Model for the Religious Life*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd.
- Njoku, F (ed.) 2001), *Philosophy, Christianity and Science in the Third Millennium*. Owerri: Assumpta Press.
- Pope Francis (2014), *Apostolic Letter To All Consecrated Life*, Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- Sacks, J. (2005), *The Persistence of Faith*, London: Continuum.
- Scognamiglio, E (2006). *Il Volto Dell'Uomo*, Torino: Edizioni San Paolo.
- Smith, W. C. (1967), *Questions of religious truth*, New York: Scribner.
- Tertullian, (trans. Jeremy Collier), *The Apology*, London: The Ancient & Modern Library of Theological Literature, vol. 31