

# **CONSECRATED PERSONS AND MUTUAL RELATIONS:**

**The Dynamics of Collaboration within  
the Ecology of Mission**

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

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## **FOREWORD**

It is very obvious that a number of significant challenges facing modern society, micro and macro, are rooted in unwholesome and unhealthy relationships. On the other hand, cultivating and sustaining balanced, mutually respectful relationships help immensely in team building, conflict prevention and resolutions. Suffice it to say that a lack thereof is significantly associated with a deep and long-standing crisis of meaning and values bedeviling our modern society. This is a task for all, between selves and others, within and outside own groups, associates and associations. To bridge this horrid trench and mitigate against its drowning force, the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria (Men) in this publication introspectively examines consecrated persons and explores the mutual relationships that within and outside (intra and extra) their communities and missionary areas.

This publication evaluates how consecrated persons perceive themselves and are perceived, with regard to the relationships that exist between them and those they come in contact with daily, in their areas of apostolate: bishops, priests and lay faithful; also the youth, the aged and physically challenged persons as well as families and non-clerics on their staff. Our mission to announce the Gospel by the witness of our lives is not restricted and does not exclude others. On the contrary, it allows for the complementarities of all immersed in the heart of the world. In interpersonal relationship, all should learn to act prudently, peacefully, justly, temperately, respectfully, with tolerance and Christ-like disposition.

The theme of this publication is of profound significance as it concerns real experiences. The substance of what is written in this book is the fruit of experiences of consecrated persons and the diocesan clergy. This work will immensely inspire and provoke deep reflection as well as challenge consecrated persons, the hierarchy and laity in coming to deeper understanding of the essence of mutual relationships and collaborations. The ideas and experiences of the contributors make them familiar with the nature, restrictions, dynamics and tensions that sometimes impede the harmony and mutual relationship that ought to exist in mission areas of our apostolate; even among those who work for us, our non-clerical staff. This is what the contributors seek to unravel in this work and to provide mitigating avenues against our society mired in deceit and illusion, hostility, lack of love, rivalry and inadequate remuneration.

With care and good understanding, we can move from tension and hostility to genuine, harmonious, cordial, humane and mutual relationships. No one can deny the radical challenges we are undergoing in our times. We are all aware that we live in a period of history that is not only an epoch of changes, but also a change of epoch. Any such change of epoch is often bedecked with complexities, since it is a process filled up with uncertain outcomes without any foreseeable end-point. This is a genuine reason for an urgent call to stand up to the challenge with exhaustive innovative insights and radical responses towards fostering collaborative ministry in mission.

I find the articles in this book very soul-nurturing. They are responses to the complexities, diversities, and sheer weight of the problems confronting consecrated persons in their areas of missionary work. There is need for openness to enhance collaboration. It breeds creativity and ingenuity. It enables us to read the signs of the time (cf. GS, 9). Such elasticity is expressed in a situation where opinion, consultation, conferences, debates, and symposia are encouraged. Collaborative ministry draws us together in mutually supportive and enthusiastic relationships. These articles will ultimately help the readers to embrace the challenges and become effective agents of transformation in relationship.

To the contributors and editor, Rev. Fr. (Prof) Anthony Kanu, OSA, the Secretary of the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria (Men), I express my warmest appreciation and admiration for this publication. It is my desire that this interesting and inspiring work be an impetus for renewal among consecrated persons and all they come in contact with in their apostolate.

**Very Rev. Fr. Dr. George M. Okorie, SMMM,  
President, Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria (Men)**

## INTRODUCTION

The position that a scholar takes as regards the importance of mutual relations in the Church is heavily dependent on the particular scholar's understanding of the Church. The historical evolution of the Church reveals that the Church has had a dynamic image. In Latin, the early Fathers of the Church referred to it as the *Ecclesia*- 'the called out ones'. From this perspective it is understood why the Church is spoken of as 'the elect', 'the saints' and why Jesus asked Peter to 'build my Church' (Mt 16:18). In the wake of Greek neo-Platonism, the Church was seen as 'the school of truth and the fellowship of adepts' (Kung, 1981). 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" (Ephesians 3:19). He also speaks of the Church as "a mystery and sacrament of salvation" (Eph 3:4). The Second Vatican Council speaks of the Church variously, as 'the people of God' (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1965), "Bearer of the message of salvation" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1965), "Mystical Body of Christ" (*Indulgentiarum Doctrina*, 1967). These understandings of the Church call for mutual relations among the community of believers.

However, the issue of mutual relations has become one of great importance with the passage of time, especially, as continuing cultural, economic and political changes have brought present conditions to such a point of development that completely new delicate and complex problems have

arisen. This led to emergence of the document on the *Directives For The Mutual Relations Between Bishops and Religious in The Church*, written by the Sacred Congregation For Religious and For Secular Institutes and the Sacred Congregation For Bishops. More so, at a meeting with Religious Superiors in Rome in November 2013, Pope Francis indicated the importance of mutual relations in the Church by calling for a review of the document on Mutual Relations between Bishops and Religious Superiors. In this book titled: CONSECATED PERSONS AND MUTUAL RELATIONS, scholars of different backgrounds, but with the same emphasis on the importance of mutual relations in the Church have addressed the issue of mutual relations and collaboration in the Church from different perspectives: from the perspective of the local church, bishops, families, the sick, the lay faithful to the aged. A cursory glance at the perspectives expressed by these scholars in this work reveals an understanding of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ, the People of God, a New People Vivified by the Holy Spirit, a Visible Sacrament. At the like this, when Pope Francis has called for a review of MUTUAE RELATIONES this work is a valuable material and a contribution to the pool of discussions mutual relations, not just between consecrated persons and bishops, but between consecrated persons and the other departments of the Church.

**Rev. Fr. (Prof.) Kanu Ikechukwu Anthony, O.S.A**  
**Executive Secretary CMSN (Men)**

# THE THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF MUTUAL RELATIONS

KANU, Ikechukwu Anthony, OSA

## **Introduction**

The Church, constituted by different departments that work towards the same goal, cannot avoid discussions on mutual relations. For in the Church are priests, who participate in the ministerial priesthood of Christ. There are also consecrated persons, who are members of the Religious Institutes and Societies of Apostolic Life<sup>1</sup> according to the law of the church<sup>2</sup>, totally dedicating themselves to God with the goal of pursuing perfection in charity by faithfully embracing the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience<sup>3</sup>. In the Church are also the Laity. Justine the Martyr<sup>4</sup> and Clement of Alexandria<sup>5</sup> refer to them as those who say 'Amen' to the prayers of the leaders of the Church, in a way trying to emphasize the fundamental and complementary role they play in the Church. By virtue of their baptism, they participate in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ<sup>6</sup>. They are sharers in the mission of the whole

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<sup>1</sup> Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony, *Africae Munus and Consecrated Persons*, In *The Catholic Voyage: A Publication of the Conference of Major Superiors*

<sup>2</sup> canon 573.2

<sup>3</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>4</sup> *Apologia*, 1. 67.5

<sup>5</sup> *Strom*, VI.5. 42. 2

<sup>6</sup> *Lumen Gentium* 30

Christian people in the Church and in the world<sup>7</sup>. They constitute about 98% of the totality of the Church. If the Church must remain effective in her call towards evangelization, then there is the need for priests, the lay faithful and consecrated persons to work together. It is on this basis that this piece studies the theological foundations of mutual relations. It employs the concept 'mutual relations' not in the 'traditional sense', but as including priests, lay faithful, in fact, the relationship between all agents of evangelization in the Church. It, therefore, focuses on the basic theological perspectives that are very fundamental in a discussion on mutual relations among the different arms of the Church's agents of evangelization.

### **The Church as a 'New People' Vivified by the Holy Spirit**

The Second Vatican Council emphasized the singular constitutive nature of the Church, presenting her as *Mystery*<sup>8</sup>- a mystery in relation to the mysteriousness of God who is her Bridegroom. From the time of the descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles on Pentecost day, there exists in the world a *new People*<sup>9</sup>, which, vivified by the Holy Spirit, assembles in Christ in order to have access to the Father, and this is the Church. She is gathered from all nations and merged into such an intimate unity by the power of the Holy Spirit that its reality cannot be explained by recourse to any mere sociological formula; for real *newness*, transcending the human order, is inherent in it<sup>10</sup>. Only in this transcendent

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<sup>7</sup> Lumen Gentium 31

<sup>8</sup> Lumen Gentium, No. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Lumen Gentium, No. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Lumen Gentium, No. 9

perspective can we rightly interpret the relationships among various members of the Church. The element on which the uniqueness of this nature is based is the very presence of the Holy Spirit. He, in fact, is the life and vitality of the People of God and the principle of unity in its communion. He is the vigor of its mission, the source of its multiple gifts, the bond of its marvelous unity, the light and beauty of its creative power, the flame of its love<sup>11</sup>. The reality of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church as a principle of communion, is a theological basis for mutual relations, and thus makes the otherwise a scandal.

### **The Church as the Body of Christ**

The theology of the Church as the body of Christ is intimately related to the idea of the Church as a mystery. As the body of Christ, unity in Christ involves a mutual communion of life among her members. God, in fact, “willed to make men holy and save them, not as individuals without any bond or link between them, but rather to make them into a people”<sup>12</sup>. The very life-giving presence of the Holy Spirit builds up organic cohesion in Christ: indeed, He unifies the Church “in communion and in the works of ministry, He bestows upon her varied hierarchic and charismatic gifts, and in this way directs her; and He adorns her with His fruits”<sup>13</sup>. The elements, then, which differentiate the various members among themselves, the gifts, that is, the offices and the various duties, constitute substantially a kind of mutual complement and are actually ordered to the one communion

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<sup>11</sup> Lumen Gentium, No. 4; 7; 8; 9; 12; 18; 21.

<sup>12</sup> Lumen Gentium, No. 9

<sup>13</sup> Lumen Gentium, No. 4.

and mission of the self-same *Body*. Consequently, the fact that in the Church there are priests, laymen or religious does not indicate inequality in regard to the common dignity of the members; rather it expresses the articulation of the joints and the functions of a living organism.

### **The Church as a Visible Sacrament**

A sacrament is simply defined as an outward sign with inward grace. If the church is referred to as a visible sacrament, it means that there are outward and inward dimensions of the church which are ultimately related to each other. Thus, there is the visible social organism and an invisible divine presence intimately united. This is similar to the very mystery of Christ. In fact, “as the assumed nature, inseparably united to Him, serves the divine Word as a living organ of salvation, so, in a somewhat similar way, does the social structure of the Church serve the Spirit of Christ who vivifies it, in the building up of the body”<sup>14</sup>. The intimate reciprocal connection of the two elements, therefore, confers upon the Church her special *sacramental* nature, by virtue of which she completely transcends the limits of any simply sociological perspective or divisions. The People of God is, therefore, for all men “the visible sacrament of this saving unity”<sup>15</sup>.

### **The Church as a Witness to the Gospel**

In spite of the diversity of gifts, offices and duties, there is the common vocation of all: union with God for the salvation of the world. All members of the Church, clergy, laymen and

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<sup>14</sup> Lumen Gentium, No. 8

<sup>15</sup> Gaudium et Spes, No. 42

religious, each in his own manner is a sign and instrument both of *union with God* and of *the salvation of the world*. All have a responsibility towards holiness: “all in the Church, whether they belong to the hierarchy or are cared for by it, are called to holiness”<sup>16</sup> and the apostolate: the entire Church “is driven by the Holy Spirit to do her part for the full realization of the plan of God”<sup>17</sup>. The gospel message calls for unity and the discarding of all forms of divisions. It becomes a scandal when those who should become the witnesses of the gospel fail to collaborate with one another.

### **Ecclesial mission flows from God**

The necessity of collaboration among the different agents of evangelization in the church is strongly linked to the fact that the mission of the People of God is one, springs from God’s call and tends towards the glory of God. The Father, in fact, consecrated the Son and sent Him into the world, Mediator between God and men. On Pentecost Christ sent the Holy Spirit from the Father to exercise inwardly His saving influence, and to promote the spread of the Church. The Church's mission is by its very nature nothing else than the mission of Christ continued in the history of the world. It consists principally in the co-participation in the obedience of Him who offered Himself to the Father for the life of the world. Mission, which begins with the Father, therefore, requires that those who are sent exercise their awareness of love in the dialog of prayer. Any ecclesiastical mission that begins from God and not from human ambitions would have no difficulties with collaboration.

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<sup>16</sup> Lumen Gentium, No. 49

<sup>17</sup> Lumen Gentium, No. 17

## **Conclusion**

The foregoing has studied the theological foundations of mutual relations among the different pastoral agents in the Church. It recognizes that the mission of the Church is a matrix of all ministries and thus implies a good degree of collaboration that makes sense in the light of the gospel. Dialogue and collaboration are already a reality on various levels in the Church. There is no doubt, however, that they have to be developed further, so that they produce more abundant fruit. Mutual relation is fundamental because there is only one mission in the Church to which all peoples have been invited to participate in, contributing through their various gifts. Every agent must, therefore, see itself in a common task in the ministry of Christ. Reflections on the theological themes of: The Church as a 'New People' Vivified by the Holy Spirit, the Church as the Body of Christ, Ecclesial mission flows from God, the Church as a Witness to the Gospel, the Church as a Visible Sacrament, reminds us of the fact that the different forms of life in the Church should not be compartmentalized but should complement one another in the service of the reign of God. It is only in this way that the Church becomes a witness to the Gospel of Christ.

## **COLLABORATIVE MINISTRY IN MISSION: A REFLECTION IN LIGHT OF 'MUTUAE RELATIONES'**<sup>18</sup>

Elias I. Ayuban, Jr., CMF

### **Introduction**

The theme, "Collaborative Ministry in Mission", is of particular importance today [be it here in Nigeria or in any part of the universal Church], especially that the document on mutual relations between bishops and consecrated persons is in the process of revision. We understand that the draft of the new *Mutuae relationes* has already been completed, but we still have to wait for a while because the Conferences of Bishops and Associations of Major Superiors still need to give their final comments and feedback on the draft. Once all the necessary retouches will have been made, it will be presented to the Holy Father for final examination and approval prior to its publication.

As early as the Synod of Bishops in 1994, an updating of the 1978 document was already proposed, but it was only last year that Pope Francis gave the *Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life* and the *Congregation for Bishops* the mandate to review and update the current *Mutuae relationes*. After a series of dialogues between

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<sup>18</sup> Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes and Sacred Congregation for Bishops, *Mutuae relationes, Directives for the Mutual Relations. Between Bishops and Religious in the Church*. May 14 1978. The document is now in the process of revision.

the two Dicasteries, both agreed on the basic criteria for the revision of the text that is, **communion** and **co-essentiality**<sup>19</sup>.

In January of this year, an inter-Dicasterial plenary was held to come up with a draft of the future document that would define the relationship between bishops and consecrated persons. It will be composed of three main and complementary parts: (1) theological, (2) juridical and (3) pastoral. The new document is also more inclusive because it comprises all forms of consecrated life and is not only limited to religious men and women as the 1978 document was.

## **1. Some tensions regarding collaborative ministry**<sup>20</sup>

The relationship between bishops and consecrated persons is not always smooth. There are some tensions and misunderstandings, especially in the area of collaborative ministry. There are areas where selfishness, competition and isolation manifest themselves; where

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<sup>19</sup> The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life has involved the Council of 16 of the Union of Superiors General and the Union of International Superiors General in Rome while the Congregation for Bishops made an ample consultation with the Episcopal Conferences. The Congregation for Oriental Churches also made some contribution.

<sup>20</sup> But the concern on collaborative ministry and the difficulties are not only between the consecrated persons and the bishops, but also with other ecclesial entities. There is a share of challenges and difficulties in relations between men and women, between clerics and lay people, between the particular and universal church. The lay people are also protagonists in this regard, but for the purpose of this exposition, let me only focus on the relationship between bishops and consecrated persons.

human weaknesses, aware that the list below is far from being exhaustive.

Many of such conflicts arise when bishops do not recognize the charisms of institutes of consecrated life (=ICL) and societies of apostolic life (=SAL). At times, the pastors behave as if they are major Superiors of consecrated men and women, especially the contemplatives, when in fact, they are not. Some even intervene in the assignments of the members and the designation of superiors, forgetful of the 'just autonomy' accorded to all ICL and SAL (can. 586,§ 1; can. 732, CD 35,3-4).

While there are major superiors who appeal to their particular foundational charisms, there are also bishops who invoke their apostolic authority and pastoral responsibility, viewing charisms in function to the urgent needs and projects in their particular churches. Further, it is not also uncommon that there are bishops who express their regrets over difficulties in involving religious men and women in the diocesan apostolate because their superiors too frequently change them. As a result, the stability required by pastoral care is jeopardized.

There are likewise consecrated persons, particularly the members of pontifical right ICL and SAL, who insist that they work for the universal church to kind of justify their lack of insertion in the particular church. Consequently, bishops complain that they are acting as if they were a parallel church because of their lack of participation in

the diocesan programs and activities. Disagreements in this regard are mainly caused by the wrong interpretation of the term 'just autonomy' or even the word 'exemption' pertaining to religious institutes and societies of apostolic life.

It is also observed that an excessive identification of religious with certain apostolates, like parishes entrusted to religious, can generate a loss of their own identity and fidelity to the spirituality and mission of their institutes. Along this line, the Second Vatican Council, in its Decree on the pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church *Christus Dominus* <sup>21</sup> affirms: "Religious engaged in the active apostolate, however, must always be imbued with the spirit of their religious community, and remain faithful to the observance of their rule and spirit of submissiveness due to their own superiors" (CD 5,2).

Lastly, there are religious who accuse certain bishops of wanting to control, or worse, to appropriate their patrimonial goods. On the other hand, there are also bishops who complain about not being consulted or informed on matters of alienation of properties in their respective dioceses whose price exceeds the sum determined by the Episcopal Conference, in accord with the praxis of the Holy See (cf. can. 638, §§ 3-4; can. 1292 §§ 1-2).

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<sup>21</sup> Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church *Christus Dominus* (=CD), October 28, 1965.

Consequently, these situations create disagreements, tensions and disharmony that oftentimes do not remain within the ecclesiastical fora, but are talked about in public and sometimes end up in civil courts, causing scandal among the faithful and members of other faiths, and even among non-believers. This lack of communion between the pastors and consecrated persons highlights the need to grow in these mutual relations.

## **2 Indispensable principles of collaborative ministry**

The theology, spirituality and ecclesiology developed by the second Vatican Council teach us that the different forms of life in the Church cannot and should not be compartmentalized, but are always in correlation with one another. All forms of life in the church are intended to complement one another in the service of the Reign of God. Without the necessary interconnection and interdependence, without the synergy and without communion and collaboration, paralysis and inefficacy in our Church ministry will result<sup>22</sup>.

We will now examine the key principles of collaborative ministry outlined by the Second Vatican Council and the Magisterium of the Church. It is my hope that this examination will provide clarifications and solutions to the above-mentioned concerns.

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<sup>22</sup> J. R. Carballo, *Verso Nuove e Autentiche Mutuane Relationes: Principi Irrinunciabili*, in *Sequela Christi*, 2017/1(Anno XI.III) 108.

## 2.1. *Ecclesiology of communion*

When we speak of collaborative ministry, our point of departure must be an ecclesiology of communion. The Church is “sign and instrument of communion, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men [and women]” (LG.1) <sup>23</sup>. This ecclesiology of communion is founded on the theology of the Trinity: one body of which all are members (Rm12:4-6; 2Cor. 12:13). The Church is convoked by God and is regenerated by the Holy Spirit who dwells in those who believe and pervades and rules over the Church as a whole, and who guides her mission and brings about that “wonderful communion of the faithful” (UR,2)<sup>24</sup>.

The title of Book II of the New Code of Canon Law. The people of God is aptly called by *Lumen Gentium* and adopted by *Mutuae Relationes* (in. 1) as “The New People of God. We say ‘new’ because it succeeded the old one, which is the ‘people of Israel’. The two ‘peoples’ are different in regard to territory, time and mission<sup>25</sup>. To speak of the Church as

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<sup>23</sup> Second Vatican Council Depreciable Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* (=LG). November 21, 1964

<sup>24</sup> Second Vatican Council, Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio* (=UR) November 21, 1964.

<sup>25</sup> The ‘Old people of Israel’ was limited by territory, in as much as it was constuted exclusively by people that inhabited Palestine; by time in as much as it ceased to be such when the messiah came. In contrast, the ‘New People of God’ is not bound by territory because Jesus sent the apostles to preach (even) to the farthest ends of the earth; and not by time because it must endure until the end of the world. The mission of the ‘Old People’ was to prepare men and women for the first coming of the messiah and to receive the message of his Kingdom. The mission, however, of the ‘New People of God’ is to prepare men and women for the second coming of the messiah to ‘merit’ eternal life in his kingdom

communion is, therefore, to speak of the Church as the People of God constituted “not according to the flesh, but according to the Holy Spirit” (LG. 9).

By virtue of our baptismal consecration, there exists a true equality and unity among Christ’s faithful (LG. 31: can 204. 204,§.1, allowing us to share a common dignity as children of God (e.g. the Pope is not more Christian’ than a poor farmer). And because of this equality, we all contribute, each according to our own condition and office, to the building up of the Body of Christ’ (LG 32; can 208)

This right of equality is founded on divine law and belongs to each member of the faithful by the simple fact of being a member, not by concession from the community nor from the authority. This ‘equality’ consists of one and the same divine filiation, one and the same baptismal consecration, a common priesthood, and the same call to holiness, the same responsibility for the mission of the Church to extend the Reign of God and without distinction of blood, social condition or gender.

However, equality is not uniformity. There also exists the principle of diversity (LG. 32: AG 28<sup>26</sup>) as manifested in the diverse conditions of life, diverse ‘rites; diverse forms of apostolate and vocations and multiplicity of ministries

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<sup>26</sup> Second Vatican Council Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church Ad Gentes (=AG), December 7, 1965

(VC31<sup>27</sup>). But these diversities by no means damage the fundamental equality given in baptism and made strong in the Eucharist (AG 394, LG 3,7b). In the midst of all these, there remains interdependence in the life of grace, not only a functional collaboration or interaction because all vocations and all forms of life are integral parts of this Church.

A tripartite communion of three forms of life (VC 31), or the three fundamental states of life (see VC 16), is the only way to be a Church where bishops and priests, religious and the laity, are at the service of the growth of the Body of Christ in the history and mission of the world (VC 4). From an ecclesiology of communion, it is necessary to walk in mutual openness, in communication, in total availability and mutual cooperation, respecting the life and mission of all in the Church<sup>28</sup>.

The bishop is the chief agent of (hierarchical) communion: with the Pope and the Episcopal college (can 336), with other bishops in general (can. 375, § 2), with bishops as teachers of the faith (can. 753) and the people of God (can. 204, § 2). He is the first promoter of collaboration in ministry in the particular Church, without ever forgetting the universality of the Church's mission, of which every bishop is called to be a sign and a servant.

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<sup>27</sup> Pope John Paul II, Post Synodal Exhortation on the Consecrated Life and its Mission in the Church and in the World *Vitae consecrate (=VC)*, March 25, 1996.

<sup>28</sup> J. R. Carbalo, *op. cit.* 116

On their part, the consecrated persons should be “experts in communion”. In the words of Pope Francis, “So I am hoping that the ‘spirituality of communion’, so emphasized by Saint John Paul II, will become a reality and that you will be in the forefront of responding to the great challenge facing us in this new millennium: ‘to make the Church the home and the school of communion.’” He then reminds the consecrated men and women that communion is lived first and foremost within the respective communities of each institute, among the members of different institutes, in the ecclesial community, and even beyond its boundaries<sup>29</sup>.

## **2.2. Co-essentiality between hierarchical and charismatic gifts**

**2.2.1. Pope John Paul II.** In the Apostolic Constitution *Vita Consecrate*, n. 29, affirms that in the light of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council “the profession of the evangelical counsels indisputably belongs to the life and holiness of the Church. This means that consecrated life, present in the Church from the beginning, can never fail to be one of her essential and characteristic elements, for it expresses her very nature. This is clearly seen from the fact that the profession of the evangelical counsels is intimately connected with the mystery of Christ, and has the duty of making somehow present the way of life which Jesus himself chose and indicated as an absolute eschatological value”. In short, the profession of evangelical counsels, and the charisms

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<sup>29</sup> Pope Francis, Apostolic letter to All Consecrated people on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life. Nov. 21 2014 n. 3

associated with it are thus part of the very essence of the Church and are born out of divine institution<sup>30</sup>.

In the Pentecost of 1998, before the members of ecclesial movements in Rome, the same Pope used the word 'co-essential', saying: "I have repeatedly stressed that there is no contrast of opposition between the institutional dimension and the charismatic dimension of the Church, of which the movements are a meaningful expression. Both are co-essentials to the divine constitution of the Church founded by Jesus because they contribute together to make known the mystery of Christ and His salvific work in the world."<sup>31</sup>

**2.2.1. Pope Benedict XVI.** The then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, former Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, strongly supported his predecessor's intention for a full receptivity of the movements in the

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<sup>30</sup> "There is no one who has questioned the divine institution of consecrated life, considering it as a purely human institution, born on the initiative of Christians who wished to live more deeply the evangelical ideal... What Jesus wanted and instituted is the consecrated state of life, its general value and its essential elements". Cf. John Paul II, Wednesday General Audience, October 12, 1994.

<sup>31</sup> Pope Paul II Teachings, Vol. XXI, 1 (1998) 1065. However, te ((Osservatore Romano found the expression so new, that ut tried to suppress it with a term "almost co-essential". Earlier, Pope John Paul II, speaking at the Second International Congress of Movements held in 1987 in Rocca di Papa, says, "In that Church both institutional aspect and the charismatic aspect, both the hierarchy and the associations and movements of the faithful, are co-essential and contribute to life renewal sanctification...." John Paul II Teachings, Vol. XI (1987) 478

Church.<sup>32</sup> Along this line, he thought that it would be appropriate for the Congregation to prepare a document on this subject, which concerns the co-essential relationship between hierarchical and charismatic gifts. This desire paved the way for the publication of the *Letter Iuvenescit ecclesia*.<sup>33</sup>

**3 The co-essentiality between hierarchical and charismatic gifts in IE...** The title of the Letter is in Latin, *Iuvenescit ecclesia* (The Church rejuvenates), although there is not Latin version of the document. In Italian, the language in which it has been written, the Letter begins with these words: "*La Chiesa ringiovanisce in forza del Vangelo e lo Spirito continuamente la rinnova, edificandola e guidandola 'con diversi doni gerarchici e carismatici'*" or "The Church rejuvenates in the power of the Gospel and the Spirit continually renews her, builds her up, and guides her 'with hierarchical and charismatic gifts' IE, t; also cf. I.G. 4).

What rejuvenates or keeps the Church young is, therefore, the Gospel. On the other hand, the Letter focuses on the action of

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<sup>32</sup> Benedicto XVI, Discorso ai partecipanti al peregrinaggio dalla fracernita di Comunione e Liberazione in occasione del XXV Annversario del Riconos Pontoficio, 24 Marzo 2007, in *Insegnamenti di be nedetto XVI*, III, 1(2007), 558.

<sup>33</sup> The Letter *Iuvenescit ecclesia* (the church rejuvenates), is published by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The document is addressed to the bishops of the Catholic Church and focuses on "the relationship between hierarchical and charismatic gifts for the life and mission of the church". The first are those conferred by the sacrament of ordination (Episcopal, priestly and diaconal), while the second are freely distributed by the Holy Spirit. The publication of the letter-May 15, 2016, Solemnity of Pentecost.

the Holy Spirit and the charisms that, to a certain extent, are instrumental in rejuvenating the Church. These gifts of the Spirit or charisms are of two types: hierarchical and charismatic. Foremost among the charismatic gifts are the charisms of different ICI, and SAL, which is the focus of this reflection.

Therefore, charisms, whether hierarchical or charismatic – are co-essential because they find their same origin in the plan of God, in the founding intentions of Christ Jesus and in the action of the Spirit. We remember the teaching of Scriptures in this regard. “There are then differences of charisms, but only one is the Spirit; there are diversities of ministries, but one is the Lord; there are diversities of operations, but only one is God, who works all in all” (1Cor.12:4, 6).

The hierarchical gifts are charisms for the building up of the organic body of Church, the charismatic gifts, on the other hand, in their diversities are necessary for the life and mission of the Church that should not be lacking. Both are co-essential, stable, permanent and irrevocable (IE.13)

On the one hand, the hierarchy “who has been entrusted with hierarchical gifts, carrying out the discernment and accompaniment of the charisms, must cordially receive that which the Spirit inspires within the ecclesial communion, being mindful thereof in pastoral activities and esteeming their contribution as an authentic resource for the good of all” (IE.20). Since charismatic gifts come from the only Spirit that constitutes the only Church, “these must be received with gratitude and joy”.

On the other hand, those who realize that they have received the charismatic gifts must remember that such gifts must be tested and have to go through “ecclesial maturity”, while at the same time ever mindful that the cross is always an integral part of an authentic charism.<sup>34</sup> The founders and foundresses are required to recognize the authority of the pastors in the Church as a reality within Christian life itself... and place themselves at the service of the ecclesial mission (cf. IE. 20).

Thus, the hierarchical and charismatic gifts cannot be put parallel to each other or juxtaposed, resulting in opposition between the institutional Church and the charismatic Church. Since hierarchical gifts and charismatic gifts “have the same origin and purpose” as “they are gifts of God, of the Holy Spirit, of Christ, “to contribute to the good of the Church and to its evangelizing mission” (IE 8), these gifts must have a “mutual reference” and live a harmonious and complementary relationship (IE 20).

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<sup>34</sup> There is always a close connection between charism and cross. It is not uncommon for founders/foundresses to encounter adversities in various forms. For example, St. Francis of Assisi had to struggle painfully with the difficulties that his new Rule gave rise to among those of his brethren who were not sufficiently well identified with his spirit. St. Alphonsus Liguori, the founder of the Redemptorists, had to witness the division of his congregation, by no less than the Pope. St. Teresa of Jesus and St. John of the cross had to undergo a lot of trials in their effort to reform the Carmelite Order.

### **2.3. Right relationship between the universal and particular Church**

On November 5, 2010, on the occasion of the Ad Limina Apostolorum visit of the Brazilian Bishops of the South II Region, Pope Benedict XVI talked about how the relationship between the consecrated people and their pastors should like. He began with an exposition of the “just relation between the universal and the particular”. He says, “the right relationship between the ‘universal’ and the ‘particular’ can be seen not when the universal recedes in the face of the particular, but when the particular opens up to the universal and allows itself to be attracted and appreciated by it”<sup>35</sup>.

The Pope Emeritus adds that in order to have sound mutual relations, it is necessary, on the one hand, for consecrated persons to take into consideration the pastoral exigencies of the particular Church and, on the other hand, for bishops to take into account the charismatic uniqueness and distinctive character of consecrated persons. This principle is already found in the current Mutual relations, which removes the idea of ‘isolation’ and ‘independence’ of the religious community in relation to the particular Church, as well as its practical absorption in the same (particular Church)

It is not, therefore, to affirm the particular at the expense of the universal. But rather to harmonize the particular with the universal, in such a way that not one is lost. It is clear to Pope Benedict that the first principle for mutually adequate relations at present is: neither absorption nor isolation, but

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<sup>35</sup> Benedict XVI, Address to the bishops of Brazil on the occasion of their visit Ad Limina Apostolorum, November 5, 2010.

communion. Both shepherds and consecrated people need to look at how best to serve the kingdom. The bishops and the consecrated people are both concerned as to how best to serve the kingdom. The bishops and the consecrated people are both concerned as to how to serve the Reign of God. It can never be one-directional, but two-way as the term “mutual” suggests<sup>36</sup>.

This supposes a real encounter that leads to mutual recognition; it also presumes an attitude of sincere and humble dialogue both by the pastors and by the religious. For the bishops, it is to respect this as the will of the lord, knowing that charismatic gifts, as we have seen, are equally gifts of the Spirit. On the part of the consecrated men and women, it concerns thinking about the universal but acting on the particular Church, as the Second Vatican Council affirms, is the proper place where the one and only Church subsists (cf. L.G 23, 26; CD 11). Consequently, the consecrated men and women realize the presence of the universal Church in the measure that they concertize in one specific particular Church. The particular Church is not only a geographical part of the universal Church, but its concrete manifestation and its realization, provided that it is in full communion with the universal Church.<sup>37</sup>

This means that consecrated life lives its relationship with the universal Church inserted in the particular Church. Thus, Pope John Paul II addressed the General Superiors in these

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<sup>36</sup> J. R. Carballo, op. cit. 108-110.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid

words: “In whatever part you find yourselves, your vocation is for the universal Church through your mission in the local Church. It is necessary that the consecrated life develops in every local Church.... The unity of the universal Church through the local Church: this is your way.”<sup>38</sup>

Hence, consecrated persons cannot express their sign value if not in a particular Church, that is in a concrete and historical context. It is within the ambit of the particular Church that consecrated persons are called to give witness to Christ. This is the way to avoid that the consecrated persons become isolated and would appear as if they were privileged.

### **3.3. On exemption and just autonomy<sup>39</sup>**

As we have earlier mentioned, one of the sources of conflict on mutual relations between bishops and consecrated persons is due to the lack of respect by some bishops of the proper autonomy of consecrated persons in relation to the particular Church, or the misinterpretation on the part of

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<sup>38</sup> John Paul II, Audience to the Superiors General, November 24, 1978.

<sup>39</sup> The term exemption has not been abrogated either by the Second Vatican Council, or by the Code of Canon Law (cf. I.G. 45b. CD 35.3 can 591). Through the course of history, Popes did withdraw certain religious institutes from the jurisdiction of the local Ordinaries. The practice known as exemption gave a certain degree of freedom to religious to confront and resolve difficulties, i.e to combat heresies or to reform the life of the clergy. The policy of the Church since the Council of Trent is to restrict the privilege of exemption. However, the 1917 Code retained the privilege of exemption of those religious who legitimately had such privileges before the promulgation of the Code. Cf. S. Woywod, *A Practical Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*, vol. 1 3<sup>rd</sup> revised ed. (New York. Joseph Wagner, Inc., 1929), pp. 178 and 185.

consecrated persons of what “just autonomy” in relation to the bishops means.

The New Code of Canon Law provides, “ just autonomy of life, especially of governance, is acknowledged for individual institutes, by which they possess their own discipline in the Church and are able to preserve their own patrimony intact, as mentioned in canon 578<sup>40</sup> (can.586,§ 1). The same canon continues by affirming: “It is for local Ordinaries to preserve and safeguard this autonomy” (can. 586,§ 2). Just autonomy concerns all institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life (cf. can. 732) without distinction: whether clerical or lay, men or women, pontifical or diocesan right.

Autonomy is a right for every institute and its members that flows primarily from its charismatic origin, therefore, from the specific nature of its charismatic foundation. Institutes are public juridic persons that act in the name of the Church (can. 675, §3; can. 116, §), with the power of the superiors received from God through the ministry of the Church, that is, from the universal law by the fact that institutes are erected and constitutions are approved by the competent ecclesiastical authorities (can. 617;can.618; can. 734. MR 13; VC 48; 100<sup>41</sup>).

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<sup>40</sup> Canon 578. “All must observe faithfully the mind and designs of the founders regarding the nature purpose, spirit, and character of an institute, which have been sanctioned by competent ecclesiastical authority and its sound traditions, all of which constitute the patrimony of the same institute”.

<sup>41</sup> Congregation for Bishops. Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops Apostolorum successors(=ApS), February, 22, 2004.

Such autonomy encompasses the life and discipline of the institute in their totality. In the concrete, it extends to the patrimony and charism of the congregation, the profession of evangelical counsels, the fraternal life in common, the formation of members, their rights and obligations, the internal structure and organization and even, to a large extent, to its proper works of apostolate (CD 35,3). Hence, the bishop cannot interfere in the life and in the government of institutes and cannot interpret authoritatively their foundational charism.

However, such autonomy, notwithstanding a genuine and native right, is not independence. Consecrated life is indeed a gift of the Spirit for the good of the church and can never be understood independently from the life of the same church. Christus Dominus, affirms this: "There is, then, an internal organization in religious institutes, which has its proper field of competency and a measure of real autonomy, even though in the church this autonomy can never become independence" (CD 35, 3 - 4)

Autonomy and dependence are two dimensions in which ICL and SAL act in the church like all the members of the church. They are not anti - thesis, but should be in harmony with each other. The autonomy and dependence, however, vary according to the nature of the institute, whether diocesan (can. 594 - 595) or pontifical (can. 593) or exempt (can. 591). The competence of the bishop, however, is not exclusive, but cumulative with the Holy See, that is always competent for all ICL and SAL.

Hence, autonomy, or even exemption, should be placed in the proper perspective. Although, the magisterium teaches and the legislates that just autonomy is recognized for all institutes, VC clarifies that: "It is helpful to recall that, in coordinating their services to the universal church with their service to the particular churches, institutes may not invoke rightful autonomy, or even exemption [...] in order to justify choices which actually conflict with the demands of organic communion called for a healthy ecclesial life" (VC 49b).

*Ecclesia in Asia*<sup>42</sup> (=EA) echoes the same: "While maintaining respect for their specific charism, they should integrate themselves into the pastoral of the diocese in which they work. The local churches, for their part, need to foster awareness of the ideal religious and consecrated life, and to promote such vocations (EA 44c; can.385).

Pope Francis, in his address to the Episcopal Vicars of consecrated life, says, "Today more than ever it is necessary to live the just autonomy and exemption for those institutes who have it in strict relation with insertion in such a way that the charismatic liberty and catholicity of consecrated life are expressed also in the context of particular church."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Pope John Paul II. Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on Jesus Christ the Saviour and His Mission of Love and Service in Asia. November 6, 1999.

<sup>43</sup> Pope Francis; Address to Episcopal Vicars of Consecrated Life, October 28, 2016.

### **3.4. From the perspective of the pluriformity of the church**

The church as a multifaceted reality is what makes her truly Catholic, universal. Indeed, consecrated life is part of this multifaceted dimension of the church and it presents itself as a paradigm of her catholicity, which is not the overcoming of the particular, but rather its appreciation within the whole where the detail, as its differences, gains full significance.<sup>44</sup>

The mission of the church is likewise unique and multiform in its concrete expressions. The pluriformity of the expressions of the church's only mission is motivated by the diversity of cultures in which it embodies itself and by the diversity of the charisms of those who act in the church itself: bishops, priests, consecrated persons and lay people. In the church, not everyone is called to do the same thing. Each one is called to act and to serve according to the gift received by the "multiform grace of God" (1 pt 4:10). "The unity of the church is not uniformity, but an organic blending of legitimate diversities," as Pope John Paul II reminds us in his Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*<sup>45</sup>.

### **4. Collaborative ministry in mission between bishops and consecrated persons**

Gone are the days when vocation to consecrated life was seen as a private avenue for the sanctification of the individual. After the second Vatican council, much stress has been given to the insertion of consecrated life to the life and mission of the local church.

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<sup>44</sup> J. R. Carballo, *op. cit.* 113-115

<sup>45</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter at the Close of the Great Jubilee of the year 2000* *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (=NMI), January 6, 2001, n. 46

The second Vatican council, in christus Dominus, affirms that members of institutes of consecrated life must work for the good of the local churches. "All religious... and members of other institutes professing the evangelical counsels, are under an obligation, in accordance with the particular vocation of each, to work zealously and diligently for the building up and the growth of the whole mystical Body of Christ and for the good of the particular churches" (CD 33a)

Echoing the same theme, Pope John Paul II, during the first year of his pontificate on November 24, 1978, highlighted the role of consecrated people in the local church: "Whenever you are in the world, you are with your mission 'in a given local church.' Therefore your vocation for the universal church is realized in the structures for the local church. Every effort must be made in order that consecrated life may develop in the individual local church, in order that it may constitute their particular strength. Unity with the universal church through the local church, that is your way."

#### **4.1. Contributions of consecrated men and women in church**

The first visible contribution of consecrated men and women is enriching the particular church through **works of apostolate**. The Synod of Bishops 2001 extolled the consecrated people by saying: "In the area of apostolate, we can see members of institutes of consecrated life enriching the local churches, making more evident in them the gift of holiness and catholicity. Through many of their works and their presence in the places where they take care of people, in schools, or other places of education, hospitals, and others,

consecrated persons show and realize the presence of the church in the world of health, of education and integral growths of persons

The second is the **witness of one's consecration**. Despite the fact that the different works of apostolate are the most tangible contribution of consecrated persons in accord with the nature of the institute, it is not the primary one. Canon 673 affirms: "The apostolate of all religious consists primarily in the witness of their consecrated life, which are bound to foster through prayer and penance." It is their first duty to foster those objectives by prayer, works of penance and the example of their own life for which this sacred synod strongly urges them to increase their esteem and zeal. So, we distinguish between apostolate and apostolic works. Apostolate in the sense of the testimony of life concerns all institutes, even those engaged principally in contemplation. But apostolic works belong to apostolic institutes engaged in external works of the apostolate (can. 675 3).

This second contribution is sometimes called the mission of being, or signifying, although in reality, one cannot exist without the other. The first Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II to men and women religious on their consecration in the light of the ministry of the redemption, n. 15, clarifies: "Even though the many difficult apostolic works that you perform are extremely important, nevertheless the truly fundamental work of the apostolate remains always what ( and at the same time who) you are in the church." In view of aging membership in many congregations, every

consecrated person brings his/her own beauty, gifts and talents, notwithstanding age.

The third qualitative contribution of consecrated persons, of religious in particular, is the '**presence of a community**'. The presence of a community is more preferred; a lone religious is not ideal. Vita Consecrata says: "It is important to keep in mind that the church entrusts the participation in the mission of Christ to the institute as such. The presence of religious, even as a simple one, can be more helpful when it exists as a religious body, family and group" (VC 92). In fact, from the canonical point of view, the title "The Apostolates of the Institutes" (Chapter V; Cann. 673 - 683) itself underlines that it deals with the mission of the institutes rather than the activities of the individual religious."<sup>46</sup>

At the backup of these contributions is the distinctive sign of consecrated life, which is **prophecy**. Pope Francis addresses consecrated persons in his Apostolic Letter to the Consecrated Men and Women on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life: "I am counting on you 'to wake up the world,' since the distinctive sign of consecrated life is prophecy. As I told the superior general: 'Radical evangelical living is not only for religious: It is demanded of everyone. But religious follow the Lord in a special way, in a prophetic way.' This is the priority that is needed right now: 'to be

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<sup>46</sup> Our retreat facilitator many years back Fr. Christo Rey Garcia Paredes, who is here with us today, says that we (religious) are not called to become soloists, but members of an orchestra, not called to become individual stars, but to form part of a constellation (of stars).

prophets who witness to how Jesus lived on this earth... a religious must never abandon prophecy.'"

#### **4.2. Towards a collaborative ministry in mission**

In *Christus Dominus*, nn. 33-35, the relationship between the bishops and religious in the ambit of pastoral activity, is developed. These conciliar dispositions are eventually integrated into the Code of Canon Law as we shall see below.

In organizing the works of the apostolate of religious, diocesan bishops and religious superiors must proceed by way of mutual consultation (can. 678 3; ApS 100). In order to foster harmonious and fruitful mutual relations between bishops and religious superiors should meet to discuss those affairs which pertain to the apostolate in their territory (CD 35,6).

The diocese can entrust works to ICL and SAL such as minor or major seminary, a school, a hospital, a specialized work, an action among a peculiar category of people, young, elderly, immigrants, and others (can. 681, 1). In these cases, there should also be a written memorandum of agreement (note that a verbal mutual agreement is not enough) which must expressly and accurately define, among other things, the work to be done, the members to be assigned to it and the financial arrangements (can. 681 2; can. 520, 2).

The purpose of this written agreement is not only to provide a permanent proof of the contract or avoid lawsuits in the future. More importantly, it has a more profound meaning for it is a recognition of the unique charismatic gift of God to

the church, which is the ICL or SAL. It also demonstrates the intention to willingly and faithfully take care of such gift, safeguarding its identity in the church and guaranteeing the just autonomy of the institute's life (can. 586).

“Among the various institutes and also between them and the secular clergy, there is to be fostered an ordered cooperation and coordination under the direction of the diocesan bishop of all the works and apostolic activities, without prejudice to the character and purpose of individual institutes and the laws of foundation” (can. 680). Every apostolate must be done in communion with the Church for the fact that it is done in its name and for its mandate (can. 675, § 2).

All consecrated persons should always look upon the bishops, as successors of the Apostles, with devoted respect. They are subject to the power of bishops whom they are bound to follow with devoted submission and reverence in those matters which regard the care of souls, the public exercise of divine worship, and other works of the apostolate. In exercising an external apostolate, religious are also subject to their proper superiors and must remain faithful to the discipline of the institute. The bishops themselves are not to fail to urge this obligation if the case warrants it” (can. 678, §§ 1-2; CD 35,1).

In view of the urgent need of souls and the scarcity of diocesan clergy, religious communities which are not dedicated exclusively to the contemplative life can be called upon by the bishops to assist in various pastoral ministries.

They should, however, keep in mind the particular character of each community. Superiors should encourage this work to the utmost, by accepting parishes, even on a temporary basis”<sup>47</sup> (CD 35,1b).

“All missionaries, even religious and their assistants living in his jurisdiction, are subject to the prescripts issued by the diocesan bishop in matters concerning promotion, direction and coordination of endeavors and works which pertain to missionary action” (can. 790, § 2).

The written consent of the bishop in his diocese in the erection of a house implies the right to perform the apostolate proper to the institute (can. 609; can. 611; ApS 101a), except for the right to build a church for clerical religious institutes (cf. can. 1215, § 3). For a religious house to be converted to

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<sup>47</sup> However, the religious Priests are not there only to supplant the scarcity of secular priests. The religious should stay even if there is no such scarcity because neither the secular nor religious priests can completely represent the unfathomable richness of Christ the Priest. “The gift of religious life, in the framework of the diocese, when accompanied by genuine esteem and rightful respect for the particular features of each institute and each spiritual tradition, broadens the horizon of Christian witness and contributes in various ways to an enrichment priestly spirituality, above all with regard to the proper relationship and interplay between the values of the particular church and those of the whole people of God. For their part, religious will be concerned to ensure a spirit of true ecclesial communion, a genuine participation in the progress of the diocese and the pastoral decisions of the bishop, generously putting their own charism at the service of building up everyone in charity.” Pope John Paul II, Post-Synodal Exhortation on the Formation of Priests in Circumstances of the Present Day, *Pastores Davo Vobis*, March 25, 1992, n. 74.

apostolic works different from those for which it was established, the consent of the diocesan bishop is required (can. 612; ApS 101a). The same consent is necessary when an ICL or SAL establishes a school in the diocese (can. 679).

Religious priests can be members of the Presbyterian council (can. 498, 2<sup>o</sup>) where they can choose from among their rank (ApS 99d). There is also the possibility of members of ICL and SAL to be part of the diocesan pastoral council (cf. can. 512, §2) and members of the parish pastoral council (cf. can. 536, § 1).

## **5. Recommendation to promote collaborative ministry**

### **5.1. Parish and diocesan levels**

The parish, the vicariate, the diocese are the places where different charisms and ministries live, and where it is necessary to give mutual recognition, convergence, complementarity and co-responsibility in the apostolic mission. In these areas, the ordained ministry and the consecrated life become a fraternity, a living testimony, a concrete service of charity. The parish is the locus of grace and communion. The small gestures of hospitality, common prayer, celebration of feasts, exchange of opinions help eliminate misunderstandings and promote harmony.

The **associations** of religious at the diocesan level continue to be, according to Mutual relations, very useful. Therefore, with due consideration for their distinctive character and goals, they should be encouraged: a) both as organisms of mutual liaison and of promotion and renewal of religious life

in fidelity to the directives of the Magisterium and with respect to the distinctive character of each institute; b) and as organisms for the discussion of mixed problems between bishops, and superiors as well as for coordinating the activities of religious families with the pastoral action of the diocese under the direction of the bishop, with prejudice to the relationship and negotiations, which would be carried on directly by the bishop himself with each individual institute (MR 59). But this should be open to other forms of consecrated life, and not only to religious.

### **5.2. Commission on mutual relations**

The Bishop's Conference and the association of major superiors can create commissions that can help promote mutual relations. They can organize assemblies of conferences on common themes and discuss urgent relevant issues. The canon law society, if there is one, can also create a similar commission to assist the bishops and major superiors in matters that have canonical importance.<sup>48</sup>

### **5.3. Vicar for the religious**

It is strongly recommended to appoint an Episcopal Vicar for consecrated persons, especially in big dioceses. The Vicar enjoys an ordinary administrative power exercised vicariously (can. 479, §§ 2-3). The bishop can also delegate some powers to him. He can extend help in areas, like economy and administration of patrimonial goods. But it is

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<sup>48</sup> I used to serve as Chairman of this commission before going to Rome for work and I found this service on behalf of the Canon Law Society of the Philippines opportune and effective in helping, promoting good mutual relations.

better that the vicar is a consecrated man or woman, of good moral standing, who is familiar with both canon and civil law. The superior needs to give consent to this appointment (can 481, § 1). The same consent is needed for his/her resignation which should be accepted by the bishop (cann. 187 - 189). The vicar likewise can help coordinate the various apostolic activities of ICL and SAL, organize meeting presided by the bishop or his delegates, n. 30<sup>49</sup>.

#### **5.4. Formation of the seminarians and consecrated persons**

The indications from MR 3o in this regard are still very much relevant. "Right from the initial stages of both ecclesiastical and religious formation, the systematic study of the mystery of Christ, of the sacramental nature of the church, of the ministry of bishops and of religious life in the church should be programmed. Therefore:

- a) Religious from the novitiate on should be brought to a fuller awareness and concern for the local church, while at the same time growing in fidelity to their own vocation;

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<sup>49</sup> To facilitate the realization of the following initiatives: a) meetings of bishops and religious superiors to study these topics together: b) special courses for diocesan priests, for the religious abd for the laity engaged in the active apostolate, in order to arrive at new and more appropriate adaptations: c) studies and experiments especially appropriate for the formation of the religious men and religious women: d) the preparation of suitable pastoral document for the diocese that present these subjects in a challenging way for the reflection of the faithful.

- b) Bishops should see to it that the diocesan clergy understands well the current problems of religious life and the urgent missionary needs, and that certain chosen priests be prepared to be able to help religious in their spiritual progress (cf. OT 10<sup>50</sup>; AG 39), though generally it is preferable that this task be entrusted to prudently chosen religious priests (cf. Mr 36)

However, knowledge of consecrated life on the basis of their contact with the religious is not enough, there is a need for their collaboration in the pastoral field. Correlatively, the consecrated persons should be formed to a theological comprehension of their vital insertion in the particular church and therefore in the hierarchical ministry.<sup>51</sup>

### **Conclusion:**

Bearing in mind the problems that exist in the field of mutual relations, we would not want to think that there are always and only problems. There are not only problems; there are many places where pastors and consecrated people have a great understanding and fruitful collaboration. I know this from experience as I spent my four years in priestly ministry working as a parish priest in the parish of Tungawan, under the then prelature of Ipil, Philippines (now a diocese).

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<sup>50</sup> Pope Paul VI, Decree on priestly Training *Optatam* (=OT), October 28, 1965.

<sup>51</sup> It is important to identify the contents and materials to offer, like 'The Church, People of God, organic hierarchical communion and the variety of charisms, and ministries, the nature of consecrated life and its collaboration in the structure of the Church; the particular Church and the pastoral ministry of the Bishop; the just autonomy of consecrated life (PDV 59).

Like in my experience, there are so many bishops who know the consecrated life well and appreciate it as a reality belonging to the life and holiness of the church. There are so many bishops who accompany the consecrated life, with a kind, fatherly and solicitous love, without renouncing their authority received from the sacred order as there are so many consecrated people who are well-inserted in the particular church in close collaboration with the pastors, without renouncing the universal dimension that characterizes the consecrated life. Although, as we say, "A tree that falls makes more noise than a forest that grows in harmony."<sup>52</sup>

But, indeed, collaborative ministry can only happen where there is a genuine encounter between people or among groups of people; where this people respect and mutually recognize each other; where each party communicates in humility and promotes a spirit of fraternity. There is no collaborative ministry, when some for fear of convenience, bend in front of others. There is no collaborative ministry when dialogue is lacking or when people do not listen. There is no collaborative ministry when one commands and the other has to submit. There is no mutual relationship when autonomy is confused with independence.<sup>53</sup> Words such as: humility, dialogue, listening, respect, synergy, collaboration, acceptance, integration, knowledge, coordination, creativity and harmony are indispensable in building the Church that is truly a **home and school of communion**. (NMI 43).

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<sup>52</sup> J. R. Carbalo, op. cit. 107

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 106.

Collaborative ministry in mission is a shared responsibility. While consecrated men and women should not disappoint the **legitimate** desires of the bishops for the good of the particular Church, the bishops, must accompany the consecrated men and women with benevolence, paternity and solicitous love (IE. 22). As *Christus Dominus* exhorts them: "In exercising their office of father and pastor, bishops should stand in the midst of their people as those who serve. Let them be good shepherds (cf. Jn.10, 1ff) who know their sheep and whose sheep know them. They should stay close to them like "shepherds living with the smell of the sheep."<sup>54</sup> And let them be true fathers who excel in the spirit of love and solicitude for al...."(CD 16).

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<sup>54</sup> Pope Francis. Homily during the Holy Thursday Chrism Mass, March 28, 2013

## **CONSECRATED LIFE AND THE CHALLENGE OF COLLABORATIVE MINISTRY IN THE CHURCH**<sup>55</sup>

Anthony Akinwale, O.P.

I have been invited to present a paper on the “joys and Challenges of Collaborative Ministry in the Church”. I have chosen to treat the topic by considering and commenting on collaborative ministry in the experience of consecrated persons. This informs the liberty I have taken to modify the topic given to me. I shall thus be speaking on “Consecrated Life and the Challenge of Collaborative Ministry in the Church”.

In modifying this topic, I have not jettisoned the themes contained in it. Instead, I intend to identify some key words in the theme and subtheme as formulated. It is by identifying these that I hope to identify the joys and challenges of Collaborative ministry as they apply to consecrated persons in particular.

First to be identified is the notion of collaboration. It is my considered opinion that the notion is in need of clarification in this conversation. But ours is not to speak of collaboration *per se*. Given the fact that we are speaking of collaboration within the church, and not just any kind of collaboration, a more fruitful conversation would take place if we would relate our notion of collaboration to our ecclesiology, our theological understanding of what the Church is. Such a

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<sup>55</sup> Paper read at the International Workshop on Consecrated Life, Divine Love Retreat and Conference Centre, Abuja, Nigeria, November 14, 2017.

relationship makes it imperative that we identify another key theme, and that is, the church.

How we understand the church will lead us to understand collaboration within the Church as service within the Church and outside the church in the name of the church. What has been said thus far gives us a list of themes: collaboration, church, ministry. But we must add a fourth one, and that is, consecrated life itself, which is a way of life lived in the Church and before the world. I shall, in this paper, attempt to unpack these themes and attempt to relate them to each other. That informs the two parts of the paper.

In the first part, I shall attempt to explain the notion of Church by way of a brief retrieval of the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council. In the Second part, I shall identify a number of misconceptions of collaboration which we need to avoid, as well as related and equally avoidable misconceptions of consecrated life, in order to arrive at an adequate notion of ecclesial collaboration.

### **The Church as communion**

It is appropriate that I begin with the notion of church. What is the Church? What does it mean to be a Church? The question is of crucial importance because consecrated persons have no identity without Christ - the head and his body - the church. I say this bearing in mind the beautiful Christological and ecclesiological insight of Augustine of Hippo that the *caput* and the *corpus* form *unus Christus*<sup>56</sup>. in other words, Christ as head is not without his body, and the church his

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body is never without her head. That is why the identity of the consecrated person would be indefinable without Christ and the church. Pope Francis, in his pontificate, wisely counselled the Church, and by extension, consecrated persons to the person of Christ the head and his body the church makes it possible to make a differentiation of vital importance between communities of consecrated persons and non - governmental organizations. I shall clarify our understanding of the Church. Taking my inspiration from the Second Vatican Council, I propose that we understand the Church in three ways: as a mystery of communion, as the people of God, and as a communion of charisms.

The first point I would like to make about the Church is that she is a mystery of communion. The word "mystery" itself calls for clarification. A mystery is not a reality we cannot understand but one that we cannot perfectly understand. Our knowledge of the Church always falls short of what she really is. We can only grasp an aspect of it at a given time, and whatever is known of it calls for a deeper understanding. As mystery, we do not have a perfect understanding of what the church is. The church does not perfectly fit into categories of political science, sociology or psychology, statistics and prognostics do not tell her whole story. As a mystery, whatever we know of the church invites and challenges us to know more about her. That she is mystery of communion is what we learn from reading the very first article of the Constitution on the church which says: "the church in Christ, is like a sacrament, that is, a sign and instrument of communion with God and of unity among men

and women,"<sup>57</sup> Despite her imperfections, despite divisions within her, she is still an instrument in the hands of God used by God to accomplish "the utterly gratuitous and mysterious design of his wisdom and goodness". The design whereby he created human beings "to share in his own divine life".<sup>58</sup>

Secondly, we learn from the Second Vatican Council that the Church is the people of God. The Council offers us an understanding of the Church that bears the traits of Scripture and patrology. Thought this ecclesiology is principally articulated in the constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*,

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<sup>57</sup> In his sermon 341, Augustine illustrates this inseparability of the head and the body of Christ having in mind Christ's question to Paul when he was still Saul: "why do you persecute me?" According to the Bishop of Hippo, "Indeed, the head and the members form only one Christ, not that Christ is not complete in himself, but because he has deigned to form one whole with us, even though he is complete without us, not only as Word, only son equal to the father, but also in his human nature with which he clothed himself and in which he is God and man wholly together....And when Paul, who had become a preacher of Jesus Christ, was suffering from others, persecutions similar to those he had inflicted himself, said: 'it is to complete in my flesh what is lacking in the suffering of Jesus Christ' (Col 1:24). Showing in this way that his sufferings should be looked upon as the very sufferings of Christ: what cannot be understood of the head himself who in the heavens can suffer nothing similar; they must be understood, therefore, as being in his body, in other words, in the Church, because this body joined to its head make only one Christ." This text of Augustine is well-commented on by Jean-Marie Tillard in his *Church of Churches: the Ecclesiology of Communion* (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier/Liturgical press, 1992) 20-22. This beautiful work is crowned with the post-humous publication of his *flesh of the Church, Flesh of Christ: At the source of the Ecclesiology of communion* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001).

<sup>58</sup>Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, 1.

it can also be learnt by synthesizing the teachings of *Lumen Gentium* and the other three Constitutions that came from the Council, namely, *Dei Verbum*, the constitution on Divine Revelation; *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Constitution on liturgy; and *Gaudium et Spes*, the Constitution on the Church in the Modern world.<sup>59</sup>

From *Lumen Gentium*, we learn that the Church is an assembly of the people of God. From *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, we learn that the Church is the people of God assembled to worship God. From *Dei Verbum*, we learn that this assembly is convened by the word of God to listen to the word of God authentically interpreted by the Magisterium. And from *Gaudium et Spes*, we learn that the Church is the people of God that goes on mission in the world. The mission of this people is to bear witness to the word of God heard in the liturgy. It is to bear witness to the presence and power of the God encountered in the liturgy. A synthetic statement of what the church is, following these four Constitutions would be: the Church is the assembly of the people of God, convened by the word of God to hear the word of God in worship, and to bear witness to God in the world.

The third point I would like to make comes from Pauline ecclesiology, and that is, the Church is the body of Christ animated by the Holy Spirit. The Church is the people of God that received power from on high at Pentecost when she was given the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the bond of love of the Father and the Son, that is, love of the Father for the Son

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<sup>59</sup> Cf. Anthony Akinwale, *Charism and Contradiction: Theological Reflections on Consecrated life* (Ibadan: Pauline Fathers, 2016)

and love of the Son for the Father. The Church then is an assembly of the people of God built, gifted and enlivened by this Spirit. She is the people of God in communion in the body of Christ.

The fact that she is communion, and the fact that this communion is animated and gifted by the Spirit means the Church is a communion of charisms. She is the presence and action of the risen Christ made manifest on Pentecost by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit that gifted her with charisms. Ministry is service, the Spirit is given for service, and service is the mission of the Church. A minister is one who serves. The one who does not serve, even if he or she is highly efficient, cannot be called a minister in the proper sense of the term. Such a person is most appropriately a mini star and not a minister. In other words, the mission of the Church, the body of Christ, is in communion with its head. Carrying out her mission, she must be able to say what Christ said: "The Son of man has come, not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (MK 10:45). She is the body of Christ enlivened by the Spirit to empower her to serve. The apostle Paul enables us to understand this in his First Letter to the Corinthians when he wrote about charisms and their purpose. Each charism is a particular manifestation of the spirit granted to each person to be used for the good of the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:6).

### **Collaborative Ministry of Consecrated persons in the Church**

If we are to talk of collaborative ministry in the church, our notion of collaboration must be ecclesial. It must flow from our understanding of the Church. The notion of Church

which I have briefly developed in the preceding section counsels us to distance ourselves from a number of misconceptions of collaboration. These misconceptions flow from an ecclesiology which, by its defects, betrays the ecclesiology of communion of the Second Vatican Council. I shall first consider these misconceptions in order to state what collaborative ministry is not before explaining what it is.

The first misconception is the one that sees collaborative ministry as competition. In the specific case of consecrated persons, collaboration is neither competition among members of the same community of consecrated persons, nor competition between communities of consecrated persons, nor competition between consecrated persons and diocesan priests, nor competition between consecrated persons and the lay faithful. Collaboration is misconceived as competition when two or more religious institutes are struggling over who wins the “contract” to run a diocesan project. It sometimes gets to a point where the competition is between diocesan priests and religious priests over who runs a parish. It is in fact the case that ecclesial collaboration and competition would be contradiction in terms. St Paul warned the Corinthians who indulged in a “competition of charisms” that the charisms are for ecclesial edification, not for self-aggrandizement. There is of course the competition Paul recommends by saying “set your mind on higher gifts” (1 Cor 12:31). Those higher gifts are faith, hope and love, the greatest of them being love (1 Cor 13:13). We may therefore describe the competition Paul recommends as a caritative competition. It is the competition of charity in which we try

to excel in showing love, where we strive to excel in working for the common good of the Church, for the glory of God and for the salvation of souls.

There is a second misconception of collaborative ministry to be avoided. It is the one that sees collaborative ministry as division of labour in a factory where consecrated persons are like migrant workers providing cheap labour for the economic benefits of the proprietor, or a factory where consecrated persons live and act like mercenary merchants for their own economic benefits. That happens where a diocese tends to see consecrated persons as migrant workers making profit for the diocese, and or where consecrated persons see themselves as merchants who have been sent to a diocese by their religious institutes to make money for their institutes. It is a situation where either the diocese or the religious institute or both place priority on profit to the detriment of preaching the Gospel and to the detriment of the vocation of the consecrated person. While it is certainly the case that preaching the Gospel has financial implications, economic concerns must not replace evangelical concern. Money ought to be at the service of the Gospel and not the other way round.

And there is a third misconception to be avoided. It is the one that sees collaborative ministry as what to do because there is shortage of ecclesial personnel. In this case, collaborative ministry is misconceived as that which is necessitated by the fact that this parish or this diocese is in need of extraordinary ministers of the holy Eucharist, and such shortage now compels us to ask the women religious in

the parish or diocese to be so instituted. Or, the diocese is in need of personal to run a parish or project, and a religious institute is invited to run the parish or project, until the day the diocese is able to find a diocesan priest to run it. Then they religious institute may be shown the way out. That would reduce collaborative ministry to the ministry of a spare tyre. No one remembers the spare tyre unless there is a flat tyre. The spare tyre is brought out to be used to continue mobility, and forgotten as soon as a new tyre is purchased.

These three misconceptions of collaborative ministry flow out of a pervasive misconception of the place of consecrated persons in the Church, and that is, a functionalist misconception of consecrated persons that would reduce them to a workforce in the Church, a community of pious philanthropists who sometimes pray. This functionalist perception is found, not only in some dioceses, but also among consecrated persons themselves.

But consecrated life is or ought to be motivated by charity, not by philanthropy. Charity is, primarily, love of God, and, secondarily but necessarily, love of neighbour, Philanthropy is primarily, perhaps solely, love of the human person. The philanthropist may not be consciously motivated to do good by his or her pursuit of perfect charity, that is, love of God above all things. When, for example, we have a community of consecrated persons devoted to the medical apostolate, consecrated persons within such a community are not to be mistaken for Doctors without Borders. Both are taking care of those in need of healing. But their motivation is different. Whereas consecrated persons do so because of charity,

Doctors without Borders perform their heroic work for purely philanthropic motives. The difference is brought home by a precious articulation of the identity and mission of the religious by the Second Vatican Council. According to the Council,

Religious should carefully keep before their minds the fact that the Church presents Christ to believers and non-believers alike in a striking manner daily through them. The Church thus portrays Christ in contemplation on the mountain, in his proclamation of the Kingdom of God to the multitudes, in His healing of the sick and maimed, in his work of converting sinners to a better life, in his solicitude for youth and his goodness to all men, always obedient to the will of the father who sent Him.<sup>60</sup>

Here one is able to see that consecrated persons are what they are and do what they do because of Christ and because of his Church, because of the caput and corpus, because of Christ the head and his body the Church. Theirs is to portray Christ to the world, and it is this desire to portray Christ, not merely philanthropic motives, that makes them what they are and makes them do what they do. To forget or to ignore this Christological and ecclesiological referent is to run the risk of reducing themselves to NGOs, or, worse still, migrant workers, merchants and mercenaries, a risk against which Pope Francis gave a timely warning at the beginning of his pontificate. This double risk of forgetting and ignoring the Christological and ecclesiological referent of consecrated life

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<sup>60</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, 46.

is a clear and present danger to our understanding of collaborative ministry.

The highly commendable efficiency with which the Church, through her religious, provides vital social services like education, health care, rural development, to mention but these, makes it attractive to see the value of consecrated persons almost exclusively in the value of the hospitals and schools they run for dioceses and for their religious institutes. When it is said that consecrated persons are gifts to the Church, what is of then meant is that they provide or administer infrastructure for and in dioceses, or for and in their religious institutes. What immediately, oftentimes solely, comes to mind is how the diocese or religious institute is remunerated by way of financial returns. In a way that ignores the beautiful vision of authentic development articulated in social encyclicals like Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio*, and John Paul II's *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, to mention but these, a vision that sees development as bigger than bright economic indices and technical infrastructure, instead of development centred on the human person, collaborative ministry is thus either exclusively or primarily reduced to technical partnership in view of economic benefits. If this is the nature and intention of collaborative ministry, it then becomes impossible to collaborate when, for whatever reasons, economic benefits are not forthcoming to the diocese or to the religious institute.

What is being described here is how the cult of success, technical efficiency and economic buoyance, the cult of market forces, influence the perception of the Church, of the consecrated person, and of collaborative ministry. The

temptation is almost irresistible to reduce consecrated persons to just a workforce providing cheap but efficient services in the Church and in the society. Their value would then be determined by the economic value they add to the dioceses in which they work and to the religious communities to which they belong. It leads to their being considered as migrant workers, and they for their part, considering themselves as merchants and mercenaries at worst, more professionals at best.

Consecrated life is a gift to the Church, not so much because of what consecrated persons do, even though what they do is of great importance, but because of the “striking witness and example of holiness” that the life of evangelical counsels represents. In the words of the Second Vatican Council, in consecrated persons the holiness of the Church is expressed in many ways by the individuals who, each in his own state of life, tend to the perfection of love, thus sanctifying others; it appears in a certain way of its own in the practice of the counsels which have been called “evangelical”. This practice of the counsels prompted by the Holy Spirit, undertaken by many Christians whether privately or in a form or state sanctioned by the Church, gives and should give a striking witness and example of that holiness (*Lumen Gentium*, 39).

Consecrated persons are, therefore, not an ecclesiastical work force that provides cheap labour for the Church. They are, first and foremost, witnesses before being labourers. What they are and what they stand for take precedence over what they do. The caritative quality of what they do confers witness value on their persons and on their apostolates.

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I have so far attempted to retrieve the ecclesiology of communion of the Second Vatican Council. I have also attempted to identify three avoidable misconceptions of collaborative ministry which flow from a misconception of consecrated life. It is now necessary to move from what collaborative ministry is not to what collaborative ministry ought to be.

The starting point of an adequate theology of collaborative ministry is an adequate theology of baptism. The adequate theology of baptism that is needed here can be summed up by the simple statement that the sacrament of baptism confers grace on its recipient through the anointing by the Holy Spirit. Many are the precious lessons on collaborative ministry that flow from this.

First, collaborative ministry is rooted in baptismal grace and not in shortage of personnel. The Spirit received in baptism endows each person with charisms to be used to bear witness to the presence and action of the same spirit in the Church and in the world.

Secondly, given the ecclesiology of communion retrieved from Scripture and early Christian writers, and bequeathed by the Second Vatican Council, given our understanding of the Church as communion of charism, collaboration is not to be understood as competition. Instead of collaborative ministry as competition, I propose that we see collaborative ministry as a symphony of charisms in a Church that is communion of charisms. In this symphony, each person uses his or her charisms to render praise to God. This will fit into

what Christ said in the Sermon on the Mount. "When they see the goodness you do, they will give praise to your father in heaven" (Mt 5:16).

Thirdly, Since what gives meaning to the existence of consecrated persons in the Church is their witness value in a Church that is the people of God, in a communion of charisms, collaborative ministry in the Church is neither division of labour in a factory nor a competition of charisms. It would have been appropriate to conceive collaborative ministry as division of labour if we were to hold on to a functionalist and utilitarian conception of consecrated life. But instead of collaborative ministry as division of labour, collaborative ministry should be seen as a manifestation of the nature of the Church as communion of charisms.

### **Conclusion**

The joys of collaborative ministry are to be found in an appropriate understanding of what the Church is, of what ecclesial collaboration is, and of what consecrated persons stand for within the Church and before the world. The challenges can be reduced to one. It is the challenge of adequate understanding of what we are as a Church. Why we are a Church, what collaboration is, and what it means to be consecrated persons. Deriving these joys and responding to these challenges necessitate our reading or revisiting the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council.

We are in a position to understand what collaborative ministry is when, to use the words of Jean-Marie Tillard, we understand that the Church is where "the life which comes from the Spirit takes form only in the communion of all

believers". In this communion, "The people of God is composed of men and women who together in an osmosis of charisms and functions. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, welcome, understand, actualize, celebrate, transmit the faith which causes them to become the Church of God advancing towards that day when their Lord will give back the Kingdom to his Father."<sup>61</sup>

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In the final analysis, collaborative ministry is the manifestation of the presence of the unique baptismal grace which each of us received when we were initiated through baptism, the Eucharist and confirmation. This grace is given, not for competition but for communion, for the exercise of charisms at the service of communion. It is given so that, in this communion, all in the Church may live in solidarity, solidarity in bearing witness to the Gospel, the saving message of Christ. Thanks to this baptismal grace, collaborative ministry, in the true sense of it, is the action of Christ in his body the Church transcending what Tillard Calls a "descent into individualism". It flows to and from "concorporation" because it is "the action of the lord in his body".<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>Jean-Marie Tillard, *Church of Churches*, 83.

<sup>62</sup>Jean-Marie Tillard, *Church of Churches*, 28.



## **COLLABORATIVE MINISTRY WITH THE RELIGIOUS IN THE LOCAL CHURCH**

+John Cardinal Onaiyekan

In this my brief reflection, I use the word Religious rather generally without the usual distinction of Religious, members of Circular Institutes, members of Institute of Society of Apostolic Life, not to talk of other forms of Consecrated Life with which we are now quite familiar. Let us go back to the history of the origins of faith in our land. It is on record that the evangelization of most of our countries of Africa was a task that was entrusted by the Holy See to different Religious Missionary Institutes. The case of Nigeria is very clear. Nigeria - East of the Niger and south of the Benue was totally under the control of the Holy Ghost Fathers. The rest of the country - west of the Niger and North of Niger/Benue was the territory that was assigned the Society of the African Missions (SMA). The wonderful work that these missionary institutes did in our country has been reported before in many occasions, through the full story is still to be told. What is certain is that this was nothing less than heroic work of evangelization which God blessed in a magnificent way. The result is what we have in our lands today. The transition from mission territory to local church was also largely the result of the work of the missionaries. The first Episcopal Conference of Nigeria was made up almost entirely of missionary bishops, mainly from Ireland. Soon, the transition also became one between expatriate and indigenous clergy. This was not only because of the demands and exigencies of the post-colonial era. In the whole of Africa and Nigeria in

particular, it is also because it was in line with the development of the church of God everywhere. After the stage of missions, the local church is expected to take root. And so, very soon the missionary bishops gave way to Nigerian bishops at the beginning mainly from members of religious clergy. Here we remember especially the late Bishop Nwedo, CSSp of Umuahia, Bishop Godfrey Okoye, CSSp, first Bishop of Port Harcourt and later of Enugu. Both of them were members of the Holy Ghost Congregation. Later, the choice of Nigerian Bishops began to fall more on the diocesan clergy. We should also recall here that when local religious institutes started to emerge, it was largely due to the work of our missionary bishops. For example, we recall the Sisters of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus founded by Archbishop Taylor SMA of Lagos, the Sisters of Our Lady of Fatima in Jos by Bishop Redington, SMA, Bishop Nwedo CSSp who founded the Daughters of May, Mother of Mercy, Bishop Charles Heery, CSSp with the Immaculate Heart Sister, and Bishop Okoye, CSSp who founded the Daughters of Divine Love. This means that we have large groups of Founders who are not bishops, like Fr. Ononuju, CSSp, who founded the Holy Family Sisters of the Needy and Fr. Emmanuel Edeh, CSSp and his Sisters of Jesus the Saviour. There are still others whom we have not mentioned. What all these means is that as a result of the work of missionaries in our land in the last 50 years or so, there has been a veritable boom in religious life in our nations and particularly in Nigeria. This boom is found not only in the number of members which is indeed overwhelming but also in the number of institutes that have been set up. We are still seeing new groups emerging.

## **THE QUESTION OF NEW INSTITUTES**

Often, we have had cause to discuss the issue of the proliferation of Religious Institutes. We see so many efforts made by some individuals who believe that they have a calling and a special charism to start new institutes in Nigeria and in the other parts of Africa. The fact that we cannot deny is that all these projects often have candidates who are ready to join them, especially when there are the attractive prospects of being carried abroad. But this is all the more reason why there is need for serious discernment because the church will not gain from a disorderly multiplication of religious institutes with no clear charism and no firm base. Here we see the role of the bishops who have to ensure that the clear directives from the Holy See are conserved. We still have the problem of the prospective founders going around shopping for bishops when they have been refused by one or two others. The Bishops Conference has discussed this matter without any clear solution. To what extent can it be allowed that the project of a Congregation rejected by one bishop within Nigeria should be accepted by another bishop only to have the sisters of that congregation knocking at the door of the bishop who had already rejected them? This calls for a common approach and policies at the National level, not without the strong collaborations and input of the conferences of the Men and Women Religious. The important thing is to discern the right projects of these new congregations. Is it a matter of personal ambition or worse still, are we here dealing with mission that will be bordering on human trafficking, especially when Founders and Foundresses recruit young girls to carry them abroad for “apostolates” that is not so clearly evangelistic. Let us hope

that somebody during this conference may be able to offer reflections on this issue.

## **A FEW WORDS ON THE PLACE OF RELIGIOUS IN THE CHURCH**

From my readings, there is no better place to start than the Vatican Council II and especially the Vatican Document: *Lumen Gentium* which is a Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. That document states very clearly the position of the religious in the church. Sometimes, there are arguments and in fact, controversy as regards the relationship between the non-clerical religious and the laity. Maybe the confusion is because of the formula we have in Can. 207 which says:

“There are in the Church sacred ministers, who are in law are called clerics; the others are called lay people.” This gives the impression that any person who is not a cleric is a lay person. However, when we go back to *Lumen Gentium*, the picture is quite different. The *Lumen Gentium* speaks of the Laity, Religious and Clergy. And number 31 says that all are laity except the clergy and the religious. It also states in No. 43 that the Religious are not midway between Clergy and the Laity but that they are drawn from both. There is also the famous statement in *Lumen Gentium* 44, which states that the state of the evangelical counsels “while not entering into the hierarchical structure of the church, belongs undeniably to her life and holiness”. Notice the stress of “undeniable”, as if to put all arguments to rest. This is often repeated in many of the Post Vatican II documents Religious Life. Reading the *Lumen Gentium*, I have the feeling that the document was very positive on what the Religious is in the church and ends on

No. 45 with what can be considered a wonderful and beautiful eulogy of the Religious Life.

Another Vatican II document on the Religious Life Which we often quote is *Perfectae Caritatis* which however was a “Decree on the up-to date renewal of Religious Life” in the church. Already from *Lumen Gentium*, 43, it is stated that the religious should “have a stable and more solidly based way of Christian life.” There is a debate on whether we should indeed continue to speak of the Religious life as a state of perfection over and above the rest of us who are living in a state of “non-perfection”. Even with regards to evangelical counsels, while the religious take them in form of solemn vows, that is recognized by the church, the Vatican II expects all priests to live in accordance with the spirit of the same evangelical counsels which are presented as “special spiritual requirements in the life of the priest”. (LG. 15 17). In practical terms, there is not much difference between the religious clergy and the secular clergy at least in Nigeria. We are all expected to observe the life of celibacy and chastity, to live the life of poverty in the sense that we share our goods with the rest of the presbyterium and we live the life of obedience to our bishops that is no less than the obedience which the religious have for their religious superiors. At the end of the day therefore, we are all pursuing holiness and perfection which *Lumen Gentium* so admirably expresses in Chapter V on the universal call to holiness.

### **RENEWAL OR DECLINE?**

The Council Document *Perfectae Caritatis* on the Renewal of Religious life, set out to find ways and means of renewing

and re-invigorating the Religious Life in the church of God. Looking back now after 50 years, we have seen in many parts of the church, anything but renewal. Rather we have watched with grave concern and sadness what can be called a decline in Religious life. We only need to see how the Religious Novitiates and emptying out and the numbers of the members of the religious institute dwindling and aging. In many parts of the world, this must certainly be a demonstration that there are limits you can go with modernization and adaptation. There are certain things that are supposed to be held strongly which should be maintained no matter the times and no matter where we are. It should seem that the neglect of the essentials of the religious life has been largely responsible for the haemorrhage we have seen in Religious life in many parts of the world.

Thanks be to God, the story in Africa is different. We have seen the emergence, growth and buoyancy in many parts of Africa and Asia. I believe that this is because of the prudent management of inculturation and modernization in our local churches. We can see this when we look at the age bracket of the membership of some international congregations in which African members are beginning to grow in dominance, especially when you look towards the future. It is therefore not surprising that some of these institutes have started to install Africans at the top level leadership in their Generalates in Rome. See for example the White Fathers, OLA and SHCJ. Similarly, congregations that have their origins in our continent are flourishing with large numbers of membership. This is all the grace of God and it is wonderful in our eyes. We want to believe that this is because God has a special duty

for the church of God in Africa and for this reason he is preparing such a big army of both religious and a secular clergy to face the task. Finally it will not be presumptuous to believe that may be the church in Africa would have a lot to offer the rest of the world church to revive the ailing religious life in other parts of the Catholic world. I believe firmly that the church needs religious and a local church which is watching its religious dying and their convents closing down should be something for grave concern. Such a local Church ought to be worried to find ways and means of changing the situation. This discussion has been very clearly addressed in the document: *vita consacrata* which Pope St John Paul II issued in 1996 after the Synod of Bishops on the Religious. There we see very clearly the real situation in the world of today and the need to look for new ways to reverse the trend that is leading nowhere.

## **COLLABORATIVE MINISTRY**

Collaborative Ministry is in the very nature of service in the church. This is because there is only one common ministry; the ministry of Christ himself to which all the people of God are invited each with his/her own charisms and gifts. It is in this regard therefore that the religious must see themselves in a common task in the one ministry of Christ. In this, the Bishop is the head of the local church just as the Pope is the head of the entire church of God. The Religious Superiors have their just autonomy in respect of their members. But as far as the pastoral life and apostolate of the church is concerned, the leadership belongs to the local ordinary. He is expected to work out a harmonious way of working together with the relevant religious superiors in respect of the work of

evangelization in which all are involved. Therefore, the religious are at the service of the local community in which the church of God is present. There is need for collaboration with other religious groups. Above all, there is need for collaboration with the diocesan clergy and finally with the entire people of God, the Christ's faithful. In most dioceses, the bishop has with him, priests who are both religious and of the diocesan clergy. All of them form one single presbyterium because they celebrate the same Eucharist under Episcopal supervision of the local ordinary.

The cooperation between the diocese and religious institutes is to be organized so that confusion should be avoided. That is why Contracts are necessary. This is mentioned in CC 680 & 681. But the Contract is for the good of the whole church. It is not supposed to become an instrument of cohesion, blackmail or of undue demands on the part of the parties concerned. Experience has shown that where there is good will on all sides, the contracts are not too difficult to put together and observed. In our Bishops' Conference, we have had few occasions when complaints have been lodged by some religious to the effect that some bishops are reluctant to enter into contracts with them. I personally believe that there is need for common action in this regard. My experience shows that very often, when contracts are not forthcoming, it is often not our of reluctance to do contracts, but often because the bishop may not even know what to do. This is an area where there is need for more discussion and consultation, especially with a valid and competent input by an experience Vicar for Religious.

## **SOCIAL SERVICES OF THE CHURCH**

The history of the Catholic Church in Nigeria is rich in record of social service for the people in our nation especially in the area of schools and health services. These are all in line with the example of the Lord Jesus Christ who went about doing good, preaching and teaching and curing the sick. In the earlier days, the missionary bishops owned all schools and the religious, made our female worked harmoniously with the local bishop who often is also somehow related to or belong to the same family. Examples are the SMAs with OLA Sisters and the Holy Ghost Fathers with the Holy Rosary Sisters. However, things have changed and there is need to clarify issues more.

There is still a lot of collaboration between the diocese and the religious congregations in the area of management of schools and hospitals which belong technically to the diocese but run by religious institutes under clearly laid out conditions. When this is done, the result is a fruitful collaboration in which everybody stands to gain. More recently however, we have been noticing some sad cases of focus on the proprietorship by the religious of apostolic institutions in such a way that it appears like a competition between the diocese and the religious institute instead of collaboration. We have even heard of some scandalous litigations as regards ownership, much to scandal of the lay faithful who continue to believe, and rightly too, that the Church is one family. We pray that such cases would no longer be allowed.

But I regret to say that I am seeing a trend that is very worrisome. There is the perception that it seems that religious institutes, especially females, are no longer ready, or are now very reluctant, to take apostolates in the area of health and education for the diocese/They would rather have their own school which they consider their own property. If this is because of inability to collaborate, then it is indeed sad. Such an attitude tends to distance the institute from the life of the diocese, making collaborative ministry almost impossible. It is sadly no wonder that some bishops have for such reasons decided to start their own diocesan religious institute that they hope would be available to serve their diocese. Such a scenario does not augur well neither with the religious congregation nor the diocese. What is required therefore is a careful review of the situation such that fruitful collaboration can continue between the religious and the diocese.

In this regard, I must mention what Canon 634 says about acquisition of temporal goods by religious institutes. After affirming their rights in this matter in par 1, the 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph warns: "They are, however, to avoid all appearance of luxury, excessive gain and the accumulation of goods". When it appears that a religious community is seeking to start a school in a diocese for the purpose of making money, then there is something really wrong. When we tell people, especially civil authorities, that we are not for profit agents, we must not be found to be telling lies! Obviously schools and hospitals should be run in a decent and effective way. They should not be run at a loss. But if it becomes only a money making venture, obviously the original intention of the service of the church easily gets lost. With the boom in

religious life in our country, there is all the more reason why we should look carefully on this issue, so that it does not deteriorate into a situation that would create a crisis in not too distant future. The fact is that the religious belong under the church and they must work under the bishop. The bishop also knows that the religious belong to the holiness and inner life of the church. He must rejoice that they are in his diocese and do all he can to make their apostolate fruitful and happy. These are not things that contracts alone will sort out. There are matters that require reflection and prayer.



## **"COLLABORATIVE MINISTRY" CONSECRATED LIFE WITHIN THE ECOLOGY OF MISSION**

Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, CMF

"Ecology of mission" is an expression that leads to understand mission as an ecosystem in which we find "mission" in different layers and levels, but all of them in mutual interconnection. One perspective of this eco-system is the main topic of my conference. "Collaborative Ministry". This is the key to understand a very important sentence of the Second Vatican Council in the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity "Apostolicam Actuositatem":

*"Mission is one; the ministries are many" (AA, 2).*

"Mission" is not the work in which we are engaged. Mission is not what we do for glorifying God. Mission is, above all, "the mission Dei": a movement coming from Heaven to the earth, to humanity, in which we are involved and engaged. This mission is the matrix of all the Christian ministries. This missionary ecosystem implies a collaborative ministry that makes sense in the light of the Gospel. This vision shows how to exercise our charismatic ministry in a collaborative manner. It requires spiritual maturity, a deep sense of being members of the mystical body of Jesus, a holistic awareness of belonging to a cosmos, in which everything is interconnected.

Consequently, my reflection will be divided in four parts:

- 1) **The meaning - the challenge:** why “collaborative ministry”?
- 2) **The matrix:** “Missio Dei” and the Ecology of Mission.
- 3) **The dynamics:** ministerial functions of different members in the same Body of Jesus;
- 4) **The innovation:** “Shared mission” - collaborative Ministry in consecrated Life.

## 1. THE MEANING AND CHALLENGE: “COLLABORATIVE MINISTRY”

In the last years, authors from different Christian denominations have reflected on “Collaborative Ministry”<sup>63</sup>. It is a developing concept. Other terms are used for the same idea: total ministry<sup>64</sup>, local shared ministry, ‘every-member ministry’, “shared mission”<sup>65</sup>.

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<sup>63</sup> Cf. Stephen Pickard, *Theological Foundations for Collaborative Ministry*, Ashgate, Farnham, 2009; Craig Van Gelder (ed.), *the Missional Church and leadership formation: Helping Congregations Develop Leadership Capacity*, William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2009; Ian K. Williams, *Enabling collaborative ministry in rural Anglicanism*, in “*Rural Theology*” 2 (2004) pp. 89; Cf. R. Greenwood, *Transforming Priesthood*, SSSPCK, London, 1994; id., *Practising Community*, SPCK, London 1996; id., *The ministry Team Handbook*, SPCK, London, 2000; Id., *Transforming Church*, SPCK, London, 2002; A., Bowden, *Ministry in the Countryside*, Mowbray, London, 1994; A. Bowden and M. West, *Dynamic Local Ministry*, Continuum, London 2000.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. S.C. Zabriskie, (1995), *Total Ministry*, University of Nottingham, Alban Institute, New York, 1995.

<sup>65</sup> Diocese of Auckland, 2003.

## 1. "Collaboration": the meaning

For the sake of clarity, we can define "collaborative ministry" as follows:

*"the clergy, consecrated life (male and female) and lay people of the local and global church working together, as Christian ministers, each in their own right, being mutually supportive, and acting in fellowship with the wider church"*<sup>66</sup>.

In our times, we can identify the three following approaches to ministry:

- First: the ordained minister is the sole minister and people receive that ministry. Ministry in the Catholic Church has been closely identified with the ordained ministry. This traditional model is still the dominant paradigm. It is not the same to "work with" than to "work for" someone in a hierarchical relationship.
- Second: help and delegation: the distinction between delegation and collaboration is not always appreciated. In delegation, there is not the same sense of mutuality and partnership.
- Third: Collaborative ministry: in collaborative, we work with differences, we create a climate of mutual feedback and an open communication, we do not give a clear role to boundaries<sup>67</sup>.

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<sup>66</sup> Ian K Williams, Enabling collaborative ministry in rural Anglicanism, in "Rural Theology" 2 (2004) pp. 89.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. S. Goldman and W.M. Kahnweiler, A collaborator profile for executives of non-profit organizations, en "Non profit Management and Leadership", 10 (2000), pp. 434-450.

Collaborative ministry is not only confined to ministry teams inside the Catholic Church. A border understanding of mission leads us to collaborative working with Churches of other denominations<sup>68</sup>, other Religious, and even with agencies outside the church<sup>69</sup>. Collaboration is a concern not only in the Church, but also in current political thought<sup>70</sup>.

## **2. The main challenge: theological and practical**

In spite of this, our communities have to face not only practical but also theoretical – theological – difficulties. There are some deeper problems that have an impact upon the present state of mutual relations in the Church of God.

At the level of “collaborative ministry” we have to confront the right and mutual relationships between Clergy, Laity and Consecrated Life, the structures of a real collaboration in mission, the awareness of being “Laos of God”, and above all, members of the Body of Jesus in vital interconnection?

Consecrated Life is now – more than never – agent of an ecclesiology of communion and mission: “shared charism” and “shared mission” are the names of this new awareness. The interconnection with other members of the Body of Jesus (laity, ordained ministry) is an unavoidable imperative for

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<sup>68</sup> Cf. D.B. Cozzens, *The Changing face of Priesthood*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, 2000.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. S. Shaw, L. Carnelly, H. Petch, *Sowing the Seed Church and rural renaissance in Yorkshire and the Humber*, The Churches Regional Commission for Yorkshire and the Humber, Leeds, 2003.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. M. Hudson, *Managing at the Leading Life*, Directory of Social Change, London, 2003.

our Institutes. We feel called to share charism and mission with people that the Holy Spirit attracts to join us in a collaborative ministry.

- **The first question:** ontological or functional understanding of the ordained ministry? Western culture is a *highly functionalist culture* in which questions of ontology are regarded as irrelevant. However, we have to find how to interconnect ontology and function in our understanding of the ordained ministry<sup>71</sup>.
- **The second:** It is a more systemic problem: the pervasive influence of the *philosophy of the individual* with thought and social life. John Zizioulas has put sharply the question: ‘ministry and ordination are not basically approached from the angle of the concrete ecclesial community, but of the individual person “ontology” or his “function”’<sup>72</sup>. This generates a fundamental narcissism that exercises a latent and powerful force in the discernment of vocation for orders. Here an individual’s sense of call becomes the focus and the testing of vocation. The ‘a communal

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<sup>71</sup> Thus, the doctrine of *apostolic succession* is a point of debate. What a priest becomes in ordination at the hands of a bishop? The unhappy dualism (ontology and function) persists and is deep seated practical, officially and theologically.

<sup>72</sup> Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, p. 209. Zizioulas relates this problem more to issues to do with the separation of ministry from Christology and Trinitarian theology and the difficulty of relating the Church’s ministry to that of Christ’s. These theological and ecclesial issues are important and the weakness identified by Zizioulas makes the tradition far more vulnerable to the influence of the prevailing cultural of individuals.

bias' of our society that has been and continues to be the most serious impediment to the development of a richer theology of orders in the Church of Jesus Christ<sup>73</sup>.

- **The third:** When orders operate out of a clerical and individualistic paradigm, things do not bode well for the mission of the Church. Too much energy is consumed defending old positions, undertaking new programs for engagement, or retreating into safe and irrelevant ecclesiastical havens.
- **The fourth:** In the past times the relationship of consecrated life with the Laity were not easy. Our consciousness of spiritual superiority has created a hierarchical relation: lay people became our servants, but not our partners. A new kind of clericalism was instilled in us.

We have to confess how poorly our formation and education has insisted in acquiring habits for collaborative practices among all of us (clergy, religious and lay people). Clergy generally evidence minimal aptitude for such a way of ministry, perhaps even less than lay people. Some leaders show little understanding of what it means to be 'working with

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<sup>73</sup> The term was used in the 1994 report *Ordination and Ministry in the Uniting Church*, p. 14 n. 3: 'By "acomunal bias" (paracialidad no comunitaria) is meant the prevailing ethos of modern culture that favours individualism, competitiveness, and personal independence. What is presupposed is that the individual unit is self-contained and self-determining. In such a context, community is seen as necessary for the satisfaction of the individual, who is considered to be completely autonomous. Community is necessary but not intrinsic to being'.

others’ in ministry and leadership. A truly collaborative approach to ministry seems to require something of us in our minds and in our practices. Collaborative ministry is not an easy issue. We are called to change our mission and of ministry’s paradigms.

## **II. THE MATRIX: “MISSIO DEI” AND THE ECOLOGY OF MISSION**

The word “mission” means different things to different groups. For many people, mission is what the church does, or things we do to help grow the church. But the mission theology involves a Trinitarian understanding of mission; what is commonly referred as the “mission Dei”<sup>74</sup>. The Trinitarian paradigm of mission leads us to a new understanding of “collaborative ministry”.

### **1. Trinitarian understanding of Mission**

Central to this understanding of mission is the work of the triune God in calling and sending the Church through the Spirit into the world to participate fully in God’s mission within all of creation. In this theological understanding, the Church is understood to be the creation of the spirit<sup>75</sup>: it exists in the world:

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<sup>74</sup> Cf. Leslie Newbiggin, *The Open Secret*, 1978.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community created by the Spirit*, Baker, Grand Rapids, 2000; Id., *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community led by the Spirit*, Baker, Grand Rapids, 2007.

- As a sign that the redemptive reign of God's kingdom is present.
- As a foretaste of the eschatological future of the redemptive reign that has already begun.
- As an instrument under the leadership of the Spirit to bring that redemptive reign to bear on every dimension of life.

Mission is not what the church does. Mission is what the church is. We need a systemic understanding of mission. The Bible reveals "mission" first and foremost as a divine attribute: "mission Dei". God himself is the main protagonist and actor of mission<sup>76</sup>. The Biblical God is the missionary Trinity, the restless Trinity (Metchild of Madburg), the perichoretic Trinity, always engaged in the dance of Mission as Creator, as Redeemer, as Sanctifier.

The "Missio: Dei flows from the womb of the Abba, who sent Jesus out of love for us. The letter to the Hebrews explicitly called Jesus the "Apostolos", i.i. the missionary of God. The main purpose of Jesus' life was to fulfil the mission he has received from the Father: "Thy will be done". The Good Friday Jesus put an end to his mission exclaiming from the Cross: "Consumatum est" - "It is finished"<sup>17</sup>." (Joh 19:28.30). But the "mission Dei" didn't conclude. Jesus has promised to

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<sup>76</sup> Cf. Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, *La mission: la clave para entender la vida consagrada hoy*, (published in different languages and places: [http:// sedosmission. Org.old.spa/paredes.1.htm](http://sedosmission.Org.old.spa/paredes.1.htm); Id., *Complices del Espiritu: el nuevo paradigma de la Mision*, Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid 2015; Jacques Gadille, *La incesante conversion a la mission Dei. Un recorrido historic*, en "Spiritus" (ed. Latinaermicana) 48 (2009), pp. 38-46.

his disciples: *“I will not leave you orphans, I will send the spirit who proceeds from the Father”* (Joh 15:26).

Jesus’s mission was carried on by the Holy Spirit: *“and he bowed the head and gave up his spirit”* (Joh 19:30); *“he breathed on them and said to them: “Receive the Holy Spirit”* (Joh 20:22). As Jesus ascended into heaven, and was seated at the right hand of the Father (Heb 1.3), the Holy Spirit was sent to us. The Holy Spirit is on permanent mission. It is not an alternative to the mission of Jesus. It reminds us that mission, which leads to fulfillment, which makes possible all that Jesus began and promised.

The Holy Spirit shared his mission with the Church. For this purpose, the Holy Spirit has been poured into our hearts and has given to us (Rom 5:5), manifesting his missionary energies in different charisms. Everybody who is part of the Church is called to participate in the mission of the Spirit. The Spirit is *“epiphanic”* in all those charisms, that energize the mission of the Church, defined by Paul in Cor 12:7).

## **2. The Trinitarian language of “collaborative ministry”**

The language of mission is Trinitarian<sup>77</sup>. The language of *“collaborative ministry”* has to be also Trinitarian. Christian

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<sup>77</sup> Edward Hahnenberg, *Ministries: A Relational Approach*; Robin Greenwood, *Transforming priesthood*; L. William Countryman, *Living on the Border of the Holy: renewing the Priesthood of All*, Morehouse, Harrisburg, 1999; Kenneth Mason, *Priesthood and Society to the Holy, a life of encounter at the borderlands between God and the world*, Canterbury Press, Norwich 1992), ch. 2 (esp. p. 36) on the ‘priesthood of humanity’.

identity is fundamentally relational. The mission of the Spirit is accomplished through a huge number of missionary ministries and collaborators. On the day of Pentecost, the Spirit came upon a new people and anointed them. Thousands and thousands of collaborators and accomplices have carried on through the centuries, the mission: "*Mission is one; ministries are many*" (AA.2).

The mission of the Spirit is the mother of the Church: it is the mother of each congregation, each community. The Holy Spirit acts through multiple ministries, services and charisms. The "mission Dei" becomes in this stage of the history "mission Spiritus"; and it is the key to understand the "mission Ecclesiae". It is the hinge on which everything turns, the core which sustains it. Through the church, as the body of Christ Jesus, the Spirit carries on the mission.

Moreover, the Holy Spirit does not restrict the number of his collaborators: he speaks through the prophets, both through Christian prophecy as well as through religious prophecy, and even through secular prophecy. He acts through so many human beings, without discrimination, who have received his gifts and put them, consciously or unconsciously, to his service. But the Spirit never acts on behalf of those who collaborate with him in a violent way. "Where the Spirit is, so too is freedom". Hence, he applies no pressure and so it is very easy to "sadden the Spirit" in this game of freedoms in which we reject compliance and try to impose our own will.

### 3. The deepest foundation: the perichoretic life of God – The Creator

The ‘mode of togetherness’ of the life of the Holy Trinity is emblematic of the inclination of such a God towards the world and the human being. Rublev’s icon captures the collaborative spirit so well. The perichoretic (lit.: ‘dancing around’) life of God is the deepest foundation for a collaborative ministry. Recognition of this fact has provided the springboard in contemporary theology of ministry for so-called relational understandings of ministry.

To collaborate means to work with another. The accent is on ‘with’ rather than ‘for’ or ‘under’.

- It is a cooperative activity that requires trust in others, humility concerning one’s own wisdom and competences and a desire to release the creativity and gifts of those with whom one works.
- This kind of collaborative way generates an ethos and mode of engagement even as it directs certain kinds of work practices.

Drawing from early Church sources (for example, the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus and John Chrysostom), some authors point to the fundamental interdependence between “presbyter and people (“laos”)”. That means that the ordain ministers are not a caste outside the “laos” of God: they belong to the “laos” of God and are members of the body of Jesus<sup>78</sup>. The presbyter needs the people to be a

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<sup>78</sup> Christopher Cocksworth and Rosalind Brown, *Being a Priest Today*, Collaborative ministry is not an optional extra but the manner in which the ministry of the gospel is a Gospel ministry.

presbyter. The people need a presbyter to be the people of God'. The one 'inter-animates the other. It is necessary to establish a dynamic of reciprocity.

Collaboration is not something alien from creation as such. Rather, the social and cooperative form of life belongs to creation. Collaboration is encoded into the way God creates and acts. It is more than an interesting fact of cultural and social anthropology. The theological roots lead to cooperative and collaborative life founded in creation and orientated towards redemptive existence. When the church acts in a collaborative manner it actualize its own deepest reality

The search for more integrative relations between the ministries within the church remain a continuing challenge. The church is a living web of interconnection. We have to re-conceive the ministry using a relational language, recovering the Trinitarian theology of 'Perichoresis'. Interdependence and relational categories are necessities to an integrative understanding of ministry.

### **III. THE DYNAMICS: COLLABORATIVE MINISTRY BETWEEN THE MEMBERS OF THE BODY OF JESUS**

#### **1. A collaborative**

In the writings of the apostle Paul, Christian ministry is described in terms of partnership and has a collaborative character. It arises out of a baptismal theology of death to self and new life in Christ. This is the litmus test (Prueba decisiva) for all ministry that bears the name of Christ. The whole people of God are called, by the virtue of their baptism, to collaborate, working together of the coming kingdom.

Baptism, community and ministry are thus inextricably linked. Baptism is the sacrament of initiation into the Christian community. The Church is a community of faith, of service (Diakonia) and witness (Martyria). The whole community has a ministerial role, that arises from the baptism.

*The Holy Spirit bestows on the community diversified and complementary gift... for the common good of the whole people... all members are called to discover, with the help of the community, the gift they have received and to use them for the building up of the church of for service of the world to which the church is sent<sup>79</sup>.*

In the first Christian communities, we find a curious process: charisms become ecclesial ministry or services, and ministries are divided into ordained and not ordained ministries. Very soon the attention become more focused on orders. At this point, was reasserted that the ministry of those ordained ‘is constitutive for the life and witness of the Church’: the presence of the ‘ordained’ was required for four reasons:

- To remind the community of their reliance upon Christ,
- To build the community in Christ,
- To strengthen its weakness,
- And to offer for the community and example of holiness.

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<sup>79</sup> Baptism, Eucharist and ministry. Faith and order paper no 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), P. 20, par. 5.

The Ordained 'can fulfill their calling only in and for the community' and 'cannot dispense with the recognition, the support and the encouragement of the community. A strong relationship between ordained and Laity is proposed in a positive way.

The growth and development of the ministries and the people of God has been a renewing force in the Churches. We have to put a renewed emphasis upon the ministry of the whole people of God. The ministries belong to the missional nature of the ecclesia. To speak of a collaborative ecclesia, is to speak of a collaborative ministry. By virtue of being the body of Christ, the church is a collaborative entity. As a creature of the Word and Spirit the ecclesia of God is a new community in relation of God and the world. It has emerged as a miracle of grace from the work of the Spirit of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## 2. "Baptism represents the first order" (J. Zizioulas)

The baptismal paradigm for ministries, represented by the *orthodox theologian* John Zizoilas<sup>80</sup>, says that the "Baptism represents the first order" - chronologically and ontologically - of the Church. For this reason "there is no such thing as "non-ordained" persons in the Church'. The rites of baptism and confirmation (which involves "laying of hands") are 'essentially an ordination'. In this sacramental action, "the person does not simply become a Christian" but he (sic) becomes a member of a particular 'ordo' in the Eucharistic community. When this is forgotten, the laity becomes the

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<sup>80</sup> John Zizioulas, *Being as communion; studies in personhood*, Longman and Todd, London, 1985, p.216

“non-ordained” – unnecessary in the Eucharistic community – and clericalism appears’.

Aidan Kavanagh-Benedictine Theologian – has drawn attention to the gradual distancing of the ordained Christian ministries from the plebs Dei from the high middle ages to the twentieth century. He noted that the ‘effects are all around us; the other Christian ministries, where they survived have been presbyteralized, and the rest of the Church has been deministeralized<sup>81</sup>.

Today there exist a significant confusion amongst clergy regarding their role and authority within the modern church. The ordained ministers has to reinvest their own role in a rational understanding of the church as a body with different members. An urgent theological task is that of clarifying the relations between the ministries. The ministries of the Church are interrelated. They are shaped and energized by Christ and the Spirit.

We must reassess (re-estudiar) the relationship between the ordained minister and the ordained community<sup>82</sup>. The purpose and tasks of ministry concern the Church’s purpose and mission. A present challenge is how to recognize and honour both. Philip Rosato has answered that “the ordained represent his (Christ’s) transcendent headship of, and the

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<sup>81</sup> Aidan Kavanagh ‘Christian ministry and ministries’, in “Anglican Theological Review”, 66, supplementary series no. 9 (1964): 38.

<sup>82</sup> Werner Jeanrond, ‘Community and Authority. *The Nature and Implications of the Authority of the Christian Community*, in Gunion and Hardy(eds), *On Being the Church*, p. 98.

baptized his immanent presence to the Church, and through it, his headship of and presence to humanity”<sup>83</sup>. These two separate modalities of Christian priesthood are ‘oriented to each other’

## 2. When charisms become “ministries”

Charisms are gifts of the spirit ‘that has ministry as its goal’<sup>84</sup>. Charisms’ are expressions of the spirit-filled life of the ministerial community of the church’. Ministry ‘is the proper and normal expression of charism in the life of the church’. The ministry is linked to an activity of the spirit rather than a creation of the church. Ministry is the public and communally recognized form of charism.

Charism of service – special endowments of the spirit for service, for example, prophecy, teaching, words of wisdom, preaching, healing, interpretation of tongues, care of others<sup>85</sup> – is different from other manifestations of the spirit whose purpose may not include service, for example, the gift of tongues, the single state (1 Cor. 7:7). Charisms of service ‘can be conferred and exercised sporadically for the good of the community’<sup>86</sup>. The move from occasional to a more permanent exercise of charism is signaled by the term ‘ministry’

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<sup>83</sup> Philip Rosato, ‘Priesthood of the Baptised and Priesthood of the Ordained. Complimentary Approached to their Relation’, *Gregorianum* 68/1-2 (1987), 260

<sup>84</sup> Aidan Nichols, *Holy Order: Apostolic Priesthood from the New Testament to the Second Vatican Council*, Veritas, Dublin, 1990.

<sup>85</sup> Francis Martin, *The Feminist Question*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1994.

<sup>86</sup> Francis Martin, *The Feminist Question*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1994, pp. 59-60

#### **IV. THE INNOVATION: "SHARED MISSION" - "COLLABORATIVE MINISTRY" IN CONSECRATED LIFE**

In the last decades, our institutes of consecrated life have introduced into their language the term "shared mission", that - in a certain sense - corresponds to that of "collaborative ministry". It has been very successful and has become a key feature in government, education, vision and mission.

##### **1. Sharing charism and collaborative ministry: source of energy and joy**

One of the most striking phenomenon in consecrated life is the awareness of "sharing" our charism with other forms of Christian life and even non-Christian forms of life. The Holy Spirit blows like the wind, you do not know where it comes from nor where it goes (Joh 3:8), he distributes his gifts as he likes, to whom he likes and in his own time.

Charisms of hospitality, compassion, mercy, protection, providence, evangelism, education, catechesis, attention to different forms of poverty etc. are recognized as the gifts the spirit gives to people of different forms of Christian life so that they can express and act out a specific charismatic dynamism is the mission and the spiritual life of the church. Charism is, in this case, shared by consecrated and lay persons. Lay and religious form charismatic "families"

The exhortation "Vita Consecrata" recognizes the phenomenon: "the charism of an institute of consecrated life can be shared with the laity" (VC, 54); but, also, adds; the

structures of communion should not be an obstacle to legitimate autonomy and identity of each of the forms of life (VC, 70). From these afore mentioned perspective, we can talk about “shared mission”. It was tersely put by the second Vatican council: “Est in Ecclesia unitas missionis, pluralitas autem ministerii” (“In the church there is unity of mission and plurality of ministries.”: AA,2).

The discovery that Christians are members ‘one of another’ creates energy and joy in ministry and empowers the church in an age of mission. The Christian ministry is a source of joy, when it arises out of a collaborative practice: team - work, shared ministry, common purpose combined together to further the mission of God in the world. The joy of ministry resides in collaborative practices, where all play a part and regard the ministry as a truly shared task rather than the monopoly of one particular group. The attitude of shared ministry is not automatic: it has to be worked. It often encounters resistance from clergy and laity alike.

The joy of ministry is costly but the outcomes are an expression of all the ministries of God. Traditional orders of ministry are enhanced and blessed through collaboration. The newer ministries are freed and energized. This reciprocity in ministry generates deep joy; something that gave the apostle Paul remarkable energy for new mission and faithful witness (e.g., Phil. 4:1; 1 Thess. 2:20).

## **2. A key issue is the matter of power.**

Life in relation to others involves the exercise of power. Power is not a bad thing. It is - as to be - the expression of

the dynamism of the spirit in us. Without an emerging sense of personal power, we do not become developed and matured. Those who grow up without a sense of empowerment can easily misuse power and abuse of it.

A collaborative approach to ministry requires both sharing of power and a generative bestowal of power. This is a deeply regenerative action and increases the power available. However, this dynamic is counter intuitive and something most of us resist out of fear of our own diminution. We are more used to 'grabs for power' or inappropriate relinquishing of power.

We have to be attentive to revert to either autocratic or unhealthy, submissive forms of relation. The autocratic form of relation deals with fear and anxiety about loss of control. Delegation is more often not true delegation but task assignment. This kind of leadership knows little about true collaboration or collegiality. Autocratic leadership offers certainty and sureness. The auto critic leader uses the gift of others but creativity, where it is not allowed, is carefully managed. When we kill creativity, there is little or no understanding of what it means to be members 'one of another' (Rom. 12:5), orientated towards the other as the ontological foundation of life ministry.

Where competition rather than cooperation dominate the scene it is axiomatic that power will be skewed in unhealthy ways. The collaborative spirit is an alien experience within the competitive environment of modernity.

### **3. Seven principles**

It is extraordinary to find oneself as part of a sent group, like a family sent by the one who sent Jesus and who now sends the spirit, as a collective gift to all, to instil encouragement and power. From this I would like to draw some very important conclusions:

- The charismatic mission, or the charismatic family's contribution to the one mission, not born primarily of a human initiative, but of the spirit, requires our constant attention to the signs of the spirit, of discernment, of obedience to his revelations and recommendations. There is no charismatic mission without spirituality to support it at all times: a community, family spirituality.
- In principle, there should be no established hierarchies, nor ranks amongst those blessed with the charism. Lay people should not be considered as "second rate" individuals or as mere assistants to the religious. This means that institutions of religious life should not set themselves up as "the primary source" of government, economy, or leadership. At best, they should only do this to initiate and facilitate the process, as a kind of mentoring situation, giving rise then to a shared responsibility and leadership.
- What gives the right to participate in the shared mission is to have been blessed and graced with a unique calling from God to share in a special charism within the church, to live it with a special kind of spirituality and to act on it as a unique contribution to the mission of the church. Without a vocation, the

shared mission simply becomes a mere collaboration through friendship or fellow – feeling in various jobs; but it would not have the appearance of a charismatic calling to the mission, which comes from God.

- The charismatic vocation unfolds through a process of becoming aligned with Christ Jesus, both in the form religious life, as well as in the form of secular life. There is a spiritual, formative path which has to be shared, on the one hand, and separated out on the other. This requirement should not be neglected. Without formation, the mission loses its shape, spirituality also loses its shape. Therefore, amongst all concerned there should be structures of formation that encourage “joint or shared mission.”
- Shared mission is not discriminatory or exclusive. Beware of the danger of choosing your mission partners (lay or religious) excluding others for whatever reason. It is not we who call people to this vocation, but the Spirit of the Lord. We should welcome the brothers and sisters that God gives us. Shared mission respects the identity of the Christian life of each person; it does not blur the identity of the religious nor the lay person, neither the celibate nor those who are married. This calls for sensitive respect for the other person, who is different to us respect their routines, their procedures, the intimacy of the communities they belong to.
- Shared mission has a charismatic profile which has to be cared for and fostered. Its purpose is not to work, willy nilly, on just anything, but its charismatic

expertise must contribute to the mission of the Church, and to the life of spirituality.

- The shared charismatic mission will become increasingly like a “network” or “networks”, that will convert into reality and make tangible the dreams of the Spirit through the founding individuals and spiritual families.

This vision of ‘shared mission’ has more implications than we suspected. It is taking us beyond the barriers set forth above, beyond the “states of Christian life”. The states of Christian life, for example, the religious state, on the clerical state, were once considered to be completely closed, watertight compartments. Now we speak rather of “forms of Christian life” or “stable forms of Christian life”<sup>87</sup>. The form with the greatest stability is also subject to transformational processes.

This charismatic correlation of life forms loved by the Spirit, is transforming us all. And every transformation requires an openness of mind and heart, a complete “metanoia” or change of mind. To make this possible, I propose the following steps:

- Banish from our minds several misunderstandings about identifying “shared mission” with “shared work”, although the mission does involve work, the mission is,

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<sup>87</sup> Cf. Jose Cristo Rey Garcia, Paredes, *Fundamental Theology of the Forms of Christian Life (historical perspective)*. Vol. 1 Claretian Publications, Manila, 2012; Id, *Fundamental Theology of Forms of Christian Life “Towards a new Vision”*. Vol II, Claretian Publications, Manila, 2012.

above all, a commitment to cooperate with the Holy Spirit, this commitment is, at one and the same time, passivity and activity, contemplation and action, cost-free and profitable. Or the confusion of identifying shared mission with a voluntary commitment to help religious institutions free of charge, which either rely on it or dispense with it at their discretion.

- Understand that we religious are not the owners of a charism. Therefore, anything that has anything to do with the charism should be discussed together as a family. This awareness will reconfigure institutions such as General Chapters, major Assemblies, our systems of formation, economic structures constitutions and directories.
- Move from the belief that shared mission is optional, to the conviction that it is a necessity. Therefore, this means entering a phase off true internal, charismatic ecumenism, subject to the procedures of intellectual dialogue and dialogue about life, which is required of all ecumenism.
- Shared mission is born spontaneously when there is awareness that we are a charismatic family and we avoid any kind of separation, confrontation, discrimination, in order to live together as brothers and sisters and members, thanks to the Spirit. From the communion of life comes the desire to share the mission which comes from God, and to agree on concrete projects and actions. The shared mission becomes, for the religious institutes, the normal way forward.

## CONCLUSION

An important conclusion of this conference, is that the ministry of the Church is intrinsically collaborative if it embodies the “mission Dei” in the world in both its originative and redemptive moments. What this means practically is that neither ordained nor other ecclesial ministries or forms of consecrated life can be what they are without the other. *Ministries as a collaborative and coordinating activity of the Church of Jesus Christ is a condition of it being a ministry ordered according to the gospel.*

He who surrenders himself to shared mission, loses nothing. He gains everything. He will grow beyond himself. This is how the Church is “the body of Christ” in “perennial growth” (Mutuae Relationes). This is how to build the “ecclesiology of missionary communion.” Forms of Christian life, ministries, charisms or charismatic powers will learn the art of the reciprocity, of mutual influence. The ordained minister does not suppress, nor extinguish, nor impose himself unilaterally, but becomes a point of mediation, synergy, bringing everyone together, so that nothing is lost. Similarly, everyone seeks to unite himself with the Body of Christ so as to be a “vine shoot” which dries up and burns in the fire of destruction.

If we remember that the category of communion (and participation) is key to the understanding of *Lumen Gentium*, and that the category of service (and mission) is key to understanding *Gaudium et Spes*, today we can say that the greatest novelty of the Council is to present a church of missionary communion. Ecclesial communion is missionary communion, which means it is a church that in shaping its

identity and mission, its being and purpose, must continually look at the world and its history. From "Christifideles Laici" John Paul II used the term "missionary communion" to describe the identity and mission of the Church as communion.

The shared mission is always open to new inclusions, whether gender, race, culture, or denomination... to place ourselves in the key area of "shared mission" is fitting for a "catholic" Church, in the true etymological sense of the word: the church "in accordance with all". Catholic Mission is not simply what arises from "our own perspective", from partiality, from a unilateral view.

This is where the mission of the Church connects with the shared mission of humanity. The lower levels correspond with the upper levels, the "mission Dei" connects with the "mission humanitatis".

This mission is not just a gift which the Christian community makes to humanity, but a gift that God makes to us all as we enter into a mutual relationship, in "mission inter gentes" and when we dream of the "trans-" still hard to describe but now coming into sight.



## **MUTUAL RELATION BETWEEN CONSECRATED PERSONS AND DIOCESAN BISHOPS: THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE**

Nichodemus Okafor, SMMM

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Church is the home of communion (Pope Francis, 2014, p. 30), for God willed to make men holy and save them, not as individuals without any bond or link between them, but rather to make them into a people (LG. 9). This bond in the Church is the action of the Holy Spirit who unifying her in communion and in the works of ministry, bestows upon her varied hierarchic and charismatic gifts (LG. 4; AG. 4). Hence, the people of God are not only an assembly of various peoples, but in itself is made up of different ranks. This diversity among its members is either by reason of their duties – some exercise the sacred ministry for the good of their brethren – or it is due to their condition and manner of life – many enter the religious state and, intending to sanctity by the narrower way, stimulate their brethren by their example (LG. 13).

Accordingly, both the hierarchy of the church and the religious based on their respective states and capacities are co-responsible in building up the body of the Church. Sequel to this, mutual collaboration or rather participation and co-responsibility were integral to Second Vatican Council's Ecclesiology of Communion. Corroborating this, St. John Paul II states that: "the building up of the Church and the fulfillment of its mission in the Church and in the world is the

work of the whole community of believers, it is co-responsibility” (*Christi Fideles Laici* (CFL) 21). However, this communion, at times faces tensions especially when the different collaborating states of life in the Church are apparently not finding their proper rhythm or balance. At such moments, Pope Benedict XVI reminds us that “the Church is a mystery of communion. There should be a renewed awareness of our being a church and of the pastoral co-responsibility which in the name of Christ, we are all called on to exercise” (Address in 2009). Therefore, it is always necessary to seek to build communion, to teach communion, to get the better of misunderstandings and divisions (Pope Francis, 2014, p. 30) through mutual relations among the agents collaborating in the mission of the Church.

Nonetheless, the focus of this work is to evaluate the mutual relation between consecrated persons and diocesan bishops in Nigeria. This is propelled by the directive by Pope Francis for a revisit of this relationship in the life of the Universal Church; since for Paul VI, “the Church in its mystical nature is a reality impregnated with divine presence, therefore, always capable of new and more profound explorations” (Address in 1963). Hence, this work will embrace explication of terms, the vision, mission, Second Vatican Council’s notion of this mutual relationship, duties of diocesan bishops to consecrated persons and vice versa, the reality of this mutual relationship in Nigeria, the likely factors helping or hindering the mutual relations, and possibly the way forward.

## **WHAT IS MUTUAL RELATION BETWEEN CONSECRATED PERSONS AND DIOCESAN BISHOPS?**

Just as the word 'mutual' stands for "feelings that two or more people have for each other equally, or actions that affect two or more people equally" and 'relation' means "the way in which two people, groups or countries behave towards each other or deal with each other" (Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary), mutual relation means an interaction or exchange in which the parties involved have common or equal interests or goals in the interaction. Such an interaction motivated by love in the case of man and woman leads to marriage. Hence, broadly, mutual relation between diocesan bishops and consecrated persons is about a healthy interaction or exchange between the bishops and consecrated persons in building up the Church –the body of Christ. However, in the strict sense, it is an "orderly and fruitful cooperation between bishops and religious" (*Mutuae Relationes* (MR) Part 1, Ch.1). When this mutual relationship is cordial and functional in the work of the Church in any diocese, the Church easily fulfills her mission while advancing towards her vision.

## **THE VISION OF THIS MUTUAL RELATION**

The vision of the mutual relation between diocesan bishops and consecrated persons is not extraneous from that of the universal church which is communion, for Christ prayed: "may they all be one" (Jn.17:21). Communion makes the Church by breaching an opening in the walls of subjectivity and gathering us into a deep communion of existence (Benedict XVI, 1996, p. 37). Hence, unity of the members as one body of Christ is the vision of the Church. Corroborating

this, MR states that “the elements, then, which differentiate the various members among themselves, the gifts, that is, the offices and the various duties, constitute substantially a kind of mutual complement and are actually ordered to the one communion and mission of the self-same Body” (Part 1 Ch.2; cf. LG 7; AA 3). This communion is the deepest vocation of the Church (CCC no.959).

### **THE MISSION OF THIS MUTUAL RELATION**

The mission of the Church is expressly contained in the great commission of Christ to his apostles, thus: “Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you” (Mt.28:19-20). Sequel to this, *Ad Gentes* states that “the Church on earth is by its very nature missionary since, according to the plan of the Father, it has its origin in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit” (AD 2). As such, the mission in this mutual relation is the evangelization of peoples for “*salus animalum suprema lex*” (salvation of souls is the supreme law). Thus, we recognize as fundamental the common vocation of all to union with God for the salvation of the world (MR Part 1 Ch. 1).

### **SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL ON THIS MUTUAL RELATION**

Given that the Lord himself “set up in His Church a variety of offices which aim at the good of the whole Body” (LG 18), the need for mutual relationship in order to ensure communion among the variety of offices cannot be over emphasized; little wonder terms like participation and co-responsibility were integral to the Second Vatican Council’s Ecclesiology of communion. However, our focus here is on the mutual

relation between diocesan bishops and consecrated persons, and we do this by considering the role of the diocesan bishop to consecrated persons and vice versa as enumerated by the Second Vatican Council. Thus:

### **THE ROLE OF BISHOPS TO CONSECRATED PERSONS**

Since the apostolic tradition is manifested and preserved in the whole world by those who were made bishops by the apostles and by their successors down to our own time (LG 20), “in the person of the bishops...the Lord Jesus Christ, supreme high Priest, is present in the midst of the faithful. Bishops in a resplendent and visible manner, take the place of Christ Himself, teacher, shepherd and priest, and act as His representatives” (MR Part 1, Ch.2; cf. LG 21,27,28; PO 1,2; CD 2). In this vein, no one in the Church other than a bishop carries out an organic function of fecundity (cf. LG, 18, 19), unity (cf. LG 23), and spiritual authority (cf. LG 22) which is so basic as it influences all ecclesial activity (MR Part 1, Ch.2). Accordingly, even though the exercise of manifold other tasks and initiatives is distributed diversely among the people of God, nevertheless, the Roman Pontiff and the Bishops have the ministry of discernment and harmony (cf. LG 21) which involves an abundance of special gifts of the Holy Spirit and the distinctive charism of ordering the various roles in intimate docility of mind to the one and only vivifying Spirit (MR Part 1, Ch.2; cf. LG 12, 24).

Sequel to this, MR summarizes the role of bishops to consecrated persons thus: “the bishops as members of the Episcopal College, in harmony with the will of the Supreme Pontiff, are united in this: namely, in wisely regulating the

practice of the evangelical counsels (cf. LG 45); in authentically approving Rules proposed to them (cf. LG 45) in such a way that a mission recognized as typically theirs is conferred on Institutes; that a commitment to found new churches is fostered in them, and that specific duties and mandates are entrusted to them; in seeing to it, by their concern, that Institutes “upheld by their supervisory and protective authority...may develop and flourish in accordance with the spirit of their founder” (LG 45); in determining the exemption of some institutes “from the jurisdiction of the local ordinaries for the sake of the general good” (LG 45) of the universal Church and to better “ensure that everything is suitably and harmoniously arranged within them, and the perfection of the religious life promoted” (CD 35, 3)” (MR Part 1, Ch.2).

### **THE ROLE OF CONSECRATED PERSONS TO BISHOPS**

LG states emphatically that the religious life is not a kind of middle way between the clerical and lay conditions of life, rather, 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 (43). It follows that the spiritual life of consecrated persons, i.e. those who bind themselves to the practice of the three evangelical counsels by vows or by other sacred ties of a similar nature... while not entering into the hierarchical structure of the Church, belongs undeniably to her life and holiness (LG 44), should be dedicated also to the welfare of the entire Church. Therefore, in order to be able to contribute to the building up of the Church, Consecrated persons ought

to be in communion with the bishops, the visible representatives of Christ, by playing these roles:

Religious priests are to be prudent cooperators with the bishops in as much as they share in the care of souls and in the practice of apostolic works under the authority of the bishops. The other members, too, of religious institutes, men and women, also belong in a special sense to the diocesan family and render valuable help to the sacred hierarchy, and should constantly increase the aid they give (cf. CD 34). Further, in order to ensure harmony in the works of the apostolate and to preserve the unity of diocesan discipline, consecrated persons should:

(1)... at all times treat the bishops, as the successors of the apostles, with loyal respect and reverence, and whenever legitimately called upon to do apostolic work by the bishop, act as his auxiliaries and subject to him, and comply promptly and faithfully with the requests or desires of the bishops in the ministry of salvation. (4)... be subject to the authority of the local ordinary in the following matters: public worship, without prejudice, however, to the diversity of rites; the care of souls; preaching to the people; the religious and moral education, catechetical instruction and liturgical formation of the faithful, especially of children. They are also subject to diocesan rules regarding the comportment proper to the clerical state and also the various activities relating to the exercise of their sacred apostolate (35:1, 4). Again, Conferences or councils of major superiors should establish suitable coordination and cooperation with

Episcopal conferences with regard to the exercise of the apostolate (PC 23).

## **THE REALITY OF THIS MUTUAL RELATIONSHIP IN NIGERIA**

Given the number of religious institutes existing or working in Nigeria, one can very readily say that the relationship has been very mutual and positive in Nigeria. A sojourn through the different dioceses would reveal that the consecrated persons occupy some key positions in some dioceses and are members of some diocesan curia. Even, the fact that some consecrated persons are elected to the episcopal office in some dioceses in Nigeria is an epiphany of this mutual relationship. Nevertheless, at times, this relationship becomes stressed tilting towards rupture; as such, let us consider some factors either helping or hindering this mutual relationship, especially with a secular diocesan bishop.

## **FACTORS HELPING THIS MUTUAL RELATIONSHIP ELECTION OF CONSECRATED PERSONS TO EPISCOPACY**

The fact that consecrated persons are elected to the episcopacy in Nigeria has helped a lot in this mutual relationship. This is because, the presence of religious bishops in the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) increases the awareness of the secular bishops about the consecrated life and thus a better appreciation of the role of the consecrated persons. In this way, the consecrated persons who at a point seem to be fizzling out of episcopacy in Nigeria to assume the 'silent majority', have been given the power of voice in the hierarchy of the Church in Nigeria. Accordingly, Gerald Musa describes a voice as "...the power

of expression, the privilege of having a say in the affairs of an organization, community, institution, or government. Therefore, to have a voice is to be able to participate, to be a stakeholder, to be involved in the affairs that directly or indirectly concern one” (CIWA Theology Week, 2014, pg. 291). Again, with this participation of consecrated persons in CBCN, the position of MR that “history itself can testify to the fact that the diversity of vocations, and particularly the coexistence and collaboration of secular and religious clergy are not detrimental to dioceses but rather enrich them with new spiritual treasures and increase notably their apostolic vitality” (Part 2 Ch. VI), becomes corroborated.

### **SHORTAGE OF PERSONNEL**

It is the case that some diocesan bishops lack some proper personnel or suffer shortage of priests or pastoral agents in the efficient discharge of the missionary/pastoral work of the diocese. Hence, such bishops readily engage the services of consecrated persons to supply for the pastoral needs of the diocese, or even go the extra mile of founding a religious congregation. Again, the need to accomplish the ‘Great Commission’ of Christ to go into the whole world and proclaim the good news, which every bishop strives to attain, often leaves them in need of personnel to be able to reach the remotest part of the diocese. At such times, the consecrated persons who embrace or profess a simple life style are the way out. This helps them accord more value and maintain a more wholesome relationship with the consecrated persons who render selfless services in their dioceses.

## **THE LOVE FOR DYNAMISM**

In conventional expression, it is said that 'monotony kills interest', while 'variety is the spice of life'. In this purview, a diocese that functions with only the secular clergy may apparently become monotonous in its operation; but, the presence of consecrated persons enlivens the diocese physically, spiritually, vocationally and pastorally or even administratively. At the physical dimension, the presence of different consecrated persons in the diocesan life brings variety and diversity in the outlook or even the thought pattern of that diocese. At the spiritual dimension, the presence of consecrated persons with their different charisms/spiritualities brings to bear different styles or patterns of prayer life which different calibres of the laity in the diocese can identify with to improve their spiritual life. For instance, the presence of contemplatives in a monastery encourages people to take off some time to go for a quiet encounter with God in the monastery.

Further, vocationally, the presence of different institutes of consecrated persons in the diocese opens more avenues of serving God to the people, and so more people take to vocations. Next, given the different charisms of the different consecrated persons, the pastoral and even administrative life of the diocese will be greatly improved or enhanced. In sum, the presence of consecrated persons in a diocese brings dynamism in the diocesan life like rainbow of colours, and the love for this dynamism serves to increase mutual trust, apostolic solidarity and fraternal harmony, and ultimately mutual relationship.

## **PASTORAL/SPIRITUAL NEEDS**

The pastoral/spiritual needs of the diocese most times determine who is needed for what work, since the Episcopal ministry is in fact the guiding principle of the pastoral dynamism of the entire people of God (MR Part 1 ch.VI). Hence, as the Nigerian bishops are making tremendous progress in their pastoral works, they are increasingly sniffing out new ways or paths in pastoral work and hence new needs for collaborators. These new paths they discover most often can only be better trodden by consecrated persons with specific charism or apostolate. For instance, despite the existence of retreat/pastoral centres in some dioceses, it is discovered that the faithful often travel great distances to access monasteries to pray or have a quiet time, and those who cannot afford the fare are disenfranchised from such journey of faith. Therefore, to arrest this situation, the bishops invite different institutes of contemplative life to establish monasteries in the diocese, because it has become a pastoral/spiritual need. Equally, other pastoral/spiritual needs that require specific charisms to be executed or discharged, dispose the bishops to welcome the consecrated persons with requisite charisms with very open arms.

## **THE NEED TO INCREASE VOCATIONAL LIFE**

As earlier highlighted in this work, the need to encourage people to embrace the different vocations in the Church and to deepen their spirituality, are often the driving force of a mutual relationship between the bishops and consecrated persons. The different institutes of consecrated life have their respective charisms and spiritualities which could attract the faithful in different areas to be closer to God. Being mindful

that in sociology, people learn more by observation, the bishops would want the faithful to have at their disposal people who live out the different charisms and spiritualities as a way of life, so the faithful can readily copy from lived examples what they hear in homilies or catechesis. This goes to corroborate the position of *Vita Consecrata* that “it is important that Bishops, priests and deacons, convinced of the evangelical superiority of this kind of life, should strive to discover and encourage the seeds of vocation through preaching, discernment and wise spiritual guidance” (no. 105). Sequel to this, some faithfuls often aspire to embrace the vocations and deepen their spirituality in imitation of the life of consecrated persons around them.

### **FACTORS HINDERING THIS MUTUAL RELATIONSHIP**

Some factors tend to slow or lower the ebb of the mutual relation between the bishops and consecrated persons, like:

### **INCREMENT IN THE NUMBER OF SECULAR CLERGY**

While thanking God for the increment in his gift of vocations, it is observed that the increment in the number of secular clergy in the dioceses at times seems to induce an attitude that tends to paint a picture that consecrated persons are redundant in such dioceses. This should not be. Also, often, some bishops tend to be in a tight corner on how to even engage all their priests, not to talk of absorbing the religious priests. Given this situation, the un-ordained consecrated persons are often more welcome or absorbed. This is a real challenge on mutual relationship in that, while the bishop may be in a fix on how to absorb the religious priests because of the number of his priests, the religious priests may feel that

the bishop is not very receptive or appreciative of the consecrated persons.

### **THE ISSUE OF CONTRACT**

The issue of contract between the bishop and an institute of consecrated life working in and for his diocese is often hard to come by in Nigeria. As expected, this often generates some form of ill-feelings among the consecrated persons as it tends to incline them view their fate as uncertain, and a people that can be relieved of whatever in the diocese and dismissed summarily at the slightest misunderstanding. In fact, in such situation, they feel very vulnerable, i.e. just perching, and this does not help the relationship that exists between them and the bishop. It is important that such agreement is made or written so that every party knows what to expect from the other.

Equally, this failure to sign an agreement or contract most times is very problematic at the time of Episcopal succession in the diocese, i.e. when a new bishop emerges and takes over as the Chief Shepherd of the diocese from the former bishop. In this case, both the new bishop and the consecrated persons are often in dilemma what to expect from the other because there is no existing template for the relationship. In a bid to forestall all these, MR states thus: "Whenever a work of the apostolate is entrusted to any religious institute by a local ordinary in accordance with the prescriptions of the law, a written agreement shall be made between the local ordinary and the competent superior of the institute which will, among other things, set down precisely all that concerns the work to

be done, the members of the institute assigned to it and the finances” (Part II, Ch.VII).

### **UNDUE INVOLVEMENT IN THE INTERNAL ADMINISTRATION OF A RELIGIOUS INSTITUTE**

The bishop, as the Chief Shepherd of the diocese, has a full and ordinary right to oversee whatever goes on in the life of the Church in his diocese (cf. CD 12) and so, is the custodian of the religious vocations that abound in his diocese mindful of the spirit of each institute. However, at times, it seems to be the case that a bishop could meddle so much in the internal organization and administration of a religious institute to the point of perhaps denying them their supposed autonomy. For instance, a bishop trying to determine for an institute who becomes the superior or a councilor, such a situation may generate breakdown in mutual relationship between the bishop and the members of that institute. Sequel to this, MR notes that: “Institutes have an internal organization all their own which has its proper field of competency and a right to autonomy, even though in the Church this autonomy can never become independence” (Part 1, ch.III, no.13; cf. CD 35, 3 and 4).

Also, this tendency is often very apparent either in choosing someone for a post or an office, or in trying to change or withdraw someone from a post or an office. It could be that the proper Superior wants to withdraw the person and the bishop does not want it or vice versa. This, if not properly handled breeds bad blood in the relationship between the bishop and the institute. However, to avoid this situation, MR notes that: “Any religious member of an institute may for a grave cause be removed from an office entrusted to him

either at the wish of the authority who entrusted him with the office, who should inform the religious superior, or by the superior, who should inform the authority who entrusted the office; this by equal right, the consent of the other party being required in neither case. Neither party is required to reveal to the other the reasons for his action, much less to justify them..." (Part II, ch. VII; cf. ES I, 92). Nonetheless, the bishops owe it as a sacred duty to ensure that the institutes upheld by their supervisory and protective authority... may develop and flourish in accordance with the spirit of their founders (cf. LG 45).

### **MATERIALISM AND RELIGIOUS POVERTY**

No one is immune from the whirl wind of materialism that is currently besieging the world, not even the religious with their vow of poverty nor the bishops. To that effect, there is always that need for all parties to constantly strive to overcome this marauding influence of materialism that consciously or unconsciously seems to be determining the approach or disposition towards pastoral work or apostolate in this era. For instance, jargons like "juicy or dry apostolate" or "juicy or dry area" seem to be the new designations of the different pastoral works/apostolate or areas of apostolate. This harp on the mutual relationship between the bishop and consecrated persons, especially, when perhaps the consecrated persons feel or have the disposition that the bishop has carefully reserved only the "dry apostolate" or "dry areas" for them to work; more so if the bishop does not palpably or even morally support them to thrive in such situations.

Very importantly, the vow of poverty has often been misconstrued or misinterpreted as emphasizing a life devoid of material possessions apparently and latently, since religious life involves simplicity of life; while others interpret it as a life of detachment i.e. poverty in spirit and not external poverty. The divide to which one belongs in this interpretation most times determines one's attitude towards the religious or consecrated persons. Be that as it may, let it be clearly stated that "the vow of poverty is not in fact about external poverty, it is not necessarily the absence of possessions. It is rather not being possessed by anything, be it money or other worldly belongings. It is being free from what is mine..." (Njoku, 2014, P.37). Hence, the consecrated persons are not called to a life of destitution, rather to always purify their intentions and insist on the renewal of the witness of poverty and of service to the most needy (cf. Nwagwu, 2005, p. 152); and the bishop, as the Chief Shepherd, has to help the flock to pasture, i.e. help the religious institutes to flourish or blossom (cf. LG 45).

## **CONCLUSION**

Mutual relationship can in no way be undermined in the Church that emphasizes communion, as its deepest vocation (cf. CCC 959), and collaboration, more so, between the bishops and consecrated persons, who are very key missionary agents of the Church. Precisely, as the heads of the Church in every diocese, the bishops ought to have a wholesome interaction or relationship with every other agent of mission in the diocese, more so the consecrated persons, since no one else has the power to exercise any function, whether of teaching, sanctifying or governing, except by participation and in communion with them (cf. LG 18, 22, 27).

Again, the need for this mutual relationship between the bishops and consecrated persons is heightened on the one hand by the fact that the bishops, given the very indivisibility of their pastoral ministry, are also entrusted with the duty of caring for religious charisms; therefore, by fostering religious life and protecting it in conformity with its own definite characteristics, bishops fulfill a real pastoral duty (cf. LG 21; MR Part I, Ch. II). The fulfillment of this responsibility will ever remain elusive unless the bishop is able to cultivate a mutual relationship with the consecrated persons. On the other hand, since every institute exists for the Church and must enrich her with its distinctive characteristics, according to a particular spirit and a specific mission (cf. PC 14, CD 35, 2), they (men and women religious) belong in a special sense to the diocesan family and render valuable help to the hierarchy (CD 34). To that degree, the consecrated persons ought to cultivate a good working relationship with the bishops in order to feel themselves truly a part of the diocesan family (cf. Nwagwu, 2005, p. 159).

Further, St. Thomas Aquinas notes: "There is no parity between the religious and the episcopal state for two reasons. First, because perfection of life is a pre-requisite of the episcopal state, as appears from our Lord asking Peter if he loved him more than the others, before committing the episcopal office to him, where as perfection is not a pre-requisite for the religious state, since the latter is the way to perfection ... The reason for this difference is because, according to Dionysius, perfection pertains actively to bishop as the perfecter, but to the monk passively, as the one who is perfected; and one needs to be perfect in order to bring others

to perfection, but not in order to be brought to perfection. Secondly, because he who enters the religious state subjects himself to others for the sake of a spiritual profit, and anyone may lawfully do this... On the other hand, he who enters the Episcopal state is raised up in order to watch over others..." (Summa Theologica, 2014). Nevertheless, the relationship ought not to be such between a major and a minor, for can. 208 emphasize equality in dignity and diversity in function of all Christ's Faithful. Accordingly, it is in mutual relationship that the 'perfecter' can bring others to perfection without denigration of anyone's status.

In all, since each person participates "*suo modo*" (in their own way) *secundum propriam cuiusque condicionem* (according to one's proper condition) in the common mission of Christ and the mission of the Church (Nwagwu, 2005, pp. 4-5), mutual relationship between the participating parties, in this case bishops and consecrated persons, is not negotiable; it is *sine qua non* (unavoidable).

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## **MUTUAL RELATIONS BETWEEN CONSECRATED PERSONS AND THE FAMILY**

Simon Peter N. Okanumee, SMMM<sup>88</sup>

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the recent times, the Universal Church has suffered and is still suffering all manner of attacks and confrontations, both from within and without, especially against the clergy. Questions are being asked as to what could be the causes of the rising wave of attacks on the Church's leadership. From every indication, it is linked to lack of mutual relations between consecrated persons and the family.

To show in clear terms the conception some members of the clergy, particularly in Nigeria, have about the Church, E. E. Uzokwu quoted a Nigerian bishop as saying: "we are the Church, you are not the Church; the Church speaks, you listen; we talk, you do the listening; we give directives, you obey; you are there, we are here; we send you, you go."<sup>89</sup> This and many more are the many forms the Church has assumed in general and particularly the Church in Nigerian. And "the consequences of this 'power' ecclesiology are unhappy and in some cases disastrous for the life of the Church."<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Uzokwu E. E., *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches*, Onitsha: SNAAP Press, 1996, p. 121.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

To counter this unhealthy trend that is fast eating deep into the Church today, lay people have adopted various anti-clerical strategies ranging from indifference to disobedience, from disobedience to verbal attacks in form of character assassination; and the height of it all is physical attacks on the clergy. These and many more are the challenges the Church faces. Hence, we shall embark on a search to find out how mutual relations between the consecrated and the laity can be enthroned in the Church.

The purpose of this article is to proffer mutual relations (collaboration) as a solution to the crisis of disagreement and misunderstanding in local churches in general and particularly, local churches in Nigeria. For instance, “in Igbo, it is called *uka Fada*; in Yoruba, *Ijo Padi*; in Hausa, *Aduwan Fada*; *Oku Abasi* in Ibibio and Anang.”<sup>91</sup> There should be a paradigm shift from referring to the Catholic Church as “Rev. Fathers’ Church” to “the people’s Church.”<sup>92</sup> Consequently, this work is set to achieve two things: firstly, “it will bring about a change in the mentality that the Church is “*uka fada*” (the fathers’ Church) to “*uka ndi nke Chineke*” or “*uka umu Chineke*” (the Church of the people of God).

This change in understanding will enable the faithful to appreciate their dignity, place and roles in the fulfillment of

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<sup>91</sup> Collaborative Ministry in the Church Family, in Francis A. Adedara (ed.), “Church Leadership and the Christian Message: The Proceedings of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Conferences of the Catholic Theological Association of Nigeria, P. 87.

<sup>92</sup> Oshifa O. et al., “Declericalization of Mission: An African Vintage, posted on the internet, [www.clericalism.com](http://www.clericalism.com)

the mission of the Church and bridge the gap between the clergy and laity.<sup>93</sup> Secondly, this work will teach members of the clergy to learn and accept in practice to demythologize authority and to sacramentalize humanity. To know that power is given for service and not for domination: the symbol of that power, the 'crozier' or staff, is given to gather the flock and not to knock or scatter them<sup>94</sup>. Thus, this write-up is aimed at dethroning authoritarianism and enthroning mutual relations in our local churches.

### **CONSECRATED PERSONS AND THE FAMILY**

The Church of pre-Vatican II Council was known as "the Church of the pulpit, altar, confessional, and more specifically, the clergy."<sup>95</sup> However, in the wake of the Vatican II Council, there has been a broader and better understanding of the Church. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) understands the Church first of all as "people of God" before talking about the hierarchical structure. Consequently, the Vatican II Council advocates for mutual relations (collaboration) in the Church.

When you come to the Church, "each part contributes its own gifts to other parts and to the whole Church, so that the whole and each of the parts are strengthened by the common sharing of all things and by the common effort to attain to fullness in unity. Hence it is that the people of God is not only

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid. pp. 317-318.

<sup>94</sup> Mbachu H., *Inculturation Theology of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15: An Inspiration for the Igbo Church Today*, Frankfurt: A.M., 1995, p. 370.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. p. 101.

an assembly of various peoples, but in itself is made up of different ranks. This diversity among its members is either by reason of their duties – some exercise the sacred ministry for the good of their brethren – or it is due to their condition and manner of life – many enter the religious state...”<sup>96</sup>

From the foregoing, the Church has essentially two parts: the hierarchy and the laity. The hierarchy constitutes the Bishops and their successors as well as priests and deacons. On the other hand, “the term ‘laity’ is here understood to mean all the faithful, except those in Holy Orders and those who belong to a religious state approved by the Church.”<sup>97</sup> The faithful who by Baptism are incorporated into Christ, are placed in the people of God, and in their own way share the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ, and to the best of their ability carry on the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the World.<sup>98</sup>

By implication, there is another form of life in the Church existing in-between the hierarchy and the laity. It is known as the Consecrated or Religious Life and the Christian who pledges himself to this kind of life binds himself to the practice of the three evangelical counsels by vows or by other sacred ties of similar nature and he makes profession in the Church of the evangelical counsels.<sup>99</sup> The people who

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<sup>96</sup> Vatican II Council, “The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church,” (Lumen Gentium), n. 12.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. n. 31.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. n. 44.

embrace this life are called the consecrated persons or simply the religious.

Consecrated 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>100</sup>

Thus, “consecrated persons” includes both the hierarchy and the laity who by their vows are set apart. They profess the Evangelical Counsels in the Church and contribute in a special way in the sanctifying ministry and salvific mission of the Church. A consecrated person could be a bishop, a priest, a deacon or a lay person who professed the Evangelical Counsels in the Church.

The consecrated persons in the Church live the consecrated life “to the extent of their capacities and in keeping with the particular kind of religious life to which they are called, whether it be one of prayer or of active labour as well, they have the duty of working for the implanting and strengthening of the kingdom of Christ in souls and for spreading it to the four corners of the earth.”<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid. n. 43. ; Cf. Code of Canon Law: can 487 and 488.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. n. 44.

The term “family” in this context includes all those outside the Holy Orders who do not profess Evangelical Counsels in aspiring towards holiness in the world. It is a state of life sanctified by a special sacrament, namely, married and family life which has a special importance in the prophetic office. The lay faithful have their own proper vocation in the family: to be true witnesses of faith and love of Christ to one another and to their Children. The Christian family proclaims aloud the present power of the kingdom of God and the hope of the blessed life. Hence, by example and testimony, they convict the world of sin and give light to those who seek the truth.<sup>102</sup> These include men and women as well as youths and children in the Church.

For this reason, there should be mutual relations between the consecrated persons and the family. The laity should promptly accept in Christian obedience what is decided by the pastors who, as teachers and rulers of the Church, represent Christ; and the pastors, indeed, should recognize and promote the dignity and responsibility of the laity in the Church. They should willingly use their prudent advice and confidently assign duties to them in the service of the Church, leaving them freedom and scope for acting, indeed, they should give them the courage to undertake works on their own initiative. They should with paternal love consider attentively in Christ initial moves, suggestions and desires proposed by the laity.<sup>103</sup> This mutuality requires move from a hierarchical to communal Church.

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<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.* n. 35.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.* n. 37.

## **FROM A CLERICAL TO COMMUNAL CHURCH**

During pre-Vatican II era, the ecclesiology of the Church was that of 'clerical' not 'communal' structure where the whole offices and works were done by the clergy, leaving the laity passive. There is this story by Cardinal Aidan Gasquet about an inquirer who asked a priest what was the position of the laity in the Church. Priest answered: "The lay person has two positions. He kneels before the altar; that is one. And he sits below the pulpit; that is the other." The Cardinal adds that there is a third that the priest had forgotten: the layman also puts his hand in his purse.<sup>104</sup>

Despite the efforts of the Vatican II Council, it seems that the relationship between the hierarchy and the laity in the Church is as it was in the middle ages: that of commanding Lords and their commanded Serfs as in a feudalistic arrangement. Consequently, in spite of the revolutionary changes by Vatican II Council, the Church still operates with structures that merit its study to be called "hierarchology"<sup>105</sup> instead of "ecclesiology."<sup>106</sup>

Since then, there has always been the need for radical move from ecclesiology of "hierarchology" to an ecclesiology of "populology,"<sup>107</sup> from "power" ecclesiology to "partnership"

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<sup>104</sup> Yves Conger, *Lay People in the Church*, Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1985, xi.

<sup>105</sup> This is a coinage formulated by Uzokwu E. E. for "hierarchy-centered" Church.

<sup>106</sup> Uzokwu E. E., *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches*, p. 121.

<sup>107</sup> This is my own coinage for "people-centered" Church.

ecclesiology, hence, making the Church a society of equals. But we know this does not suppose to be so, because “whether they be members of the hierarchy or not, all Christians are first and foremost “the faithful” in the deepest meaning of this word, that is, “the believers”<sup>108</sup>.

This goes to say that although “the pope or a bishop or priest is not a layman, but he is one of the faithful, by the very fact that he is baptized and a Christian”<sup>109</sup>. Again, the mystery of communion has assumed various forms throughout the history of the Church, but today one thing is certain: the era of absolute monarchy is over, and authority must be exercised within a new sociological context.<sup>110</sup>

To this end, a Nigerian bishop addressed the National Bishops’ Conference of Nigerian in the following words: “It is regrettable that we are still a long way from reaping the benefits of the rediscovery which we have all made in principle, the fact that the whole Church is a single people of God, and that she is made up of the faithful as well as the clergy. A good number of us still nurse the idea that the Church is the clergy and the faithful are only our clients or beneficiaries.”<sup>111</sup> This wrong impression has given rise to, among other things, two negative trends in the relations between the consecrated and the laity.

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<sup>108</sup> Suenens L. J., *Coresponsibility in the Church*, New York: Herder and Herder, 1968, p. 30.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid. p. 31.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. p. 100.

<sup>111</sup> Ochiagha G., *An Echo From the Past (Anti-clericalism Around the Corner)*, Enugu: SNAAP Press, 1994, p. 30.

The first is the attitude of paternalism on the side of the consecrated persons. According to Leon-Joseph Cardinal Suenens, "paternalism is the pervasion of paternal love. It is the effort of a father to bind the child to himself, and hold him in a state of minority; to keep him as a possession rather than to aid him in arriving himself at the autonomy of a true adult. Paternalism is the very opposite of that profound expression of Louis Lavelle who holds that 'the greatest thing that we can do for others is not to communicate to them our riches, but to reveal to them their own.'"<sup>112</sup> Paternalism as a relational attitude is not complementing but controlling. It could be that the clergy are thinking that by allowing the laity space to take responsibility or allow them to participate actively in the salvific mission of the Church and in decision making in the local churches, then the laity will eventually challenge their authority as leaders and at worst it could lead to schism and separation from the Church.

Another negative attitude that is characteristic of the consecrated persons is authoritarianism. Consequently, "bishops, priests, deacons and other office holders in the Church should do their best to respect the basic distinction between '*potestas*' and '*auctoritas*' and realize that an excessive demonstration of power and position in the Church distorts the inner harmony of the Church."<sup>113</sup> In other words, abuse of power or the inability to make distinction between power and authority is the bane of consecrated persons. Church leaders who operated during feudalistic era were much concerned

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid. p. 128.

<sup>113</sup> Ochulor H., *The Function of Dialogue in the Process of Evangelization*, p.310.

with power and authority. It seems that this inherited pre-Vatican II feudal image of the Church constitutes even today the greatest obstacle to the emergence of dynamic local churches in Africa.<sup>114</sup>

In the words of Benezet Bujo, in this day and age “many bishops behave in a very authoritarian manner at the level of the diocese; but one may also query the attitude of many priests to their parishioners. Those outside the clerical ranks are condemned to playing a passive role, for any proposals they may offer concerning the administration of the parish are rarely listened to. The impression given is that the parish and ecclesial life generally, is the private property of the parish priests or at best, of all the professional religious personnel. Priests and bishops behave like persons who cannot be corrected ‘from below’ since their vices and mistakes are presented as “holiness” and offered to the people as virtues to be imitated. It is clear that episcopatism and sacerdotalism, with their reluctance to engage in fraternal dialogue, constitutes a kind of cancerous growth which slowly but surely chokes.”<sup>115</sup>

### **MUTUAL RELATIONS AS THE WAY FORWARD**

There could have been reasons why paternalism and authoritarianism were practiced or are being practiced in the Church. However, these human reasons, valuable as they may be, are not the profound reason which elicits collaboration within the Church. The Church is a

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid. p. 100.

<sup>115</sup> Bujo B., *African Theology in its Social Context*, Nairobi: Paulines Publ. Africa, 2003, p. 90.

communion, and this fundamental dogmatic truth must characterize the direction and the practice of modern pastoral concern.<sup>116</sup>

Collaboration is part and parcel of the Church's life and mission. Collaboration, by way of definition, is the identification, release and union of the gifts of all baptized persons. The belief that every baptized person is gifted and called to ministry is the basis for collaboration.<sup>117</sup> That is to say that collaboration is an integral part of the Church and its absence is dangerous. To this end, therefore, mutual relations in the Church can be fostered in three ways: Conception, Communication and Cooperation.

### **Mutual relations in Conception**

First of all, the clergy have to begin by changing their conception of the laity as rivals. Rather, they should see them as partners in salvific mission of the Church. In other words, "it is for him {the consecrated person} to approach, directly or indirectly, every baptized person, revealing to them their total apostolic vocation and helping them to find their fields of action while encouraging their effort. In a special way, his is the task of coordinating the efforts of all and drawing out all the potential of the life of the Christian laity within the people of God, so that each person contributes his own charisms for the building up of the Church.<sup>118</sup>" This is the basic foundation upon which mutual relations rest.

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid. p. 100.

<sup>117</sup> Sofield L. et al., *Collaborative Ministry*, p. 16.

<sup>118</sup> Suenens L. J., *Op. Cit.* p. 135.

### **Mutual relations in Communication**

Here the need for dialogue between the consecrated persons and the family in the Church is highlighted. By its nature, it pertains to the consecrated persons in the Church to listen carefully and with open hearts to the lay people who so often enter into dialogue with them. For lay people, each and every one of them, are endowed with their gifts and charisms and often have a greater experience of life of the world today.<sup>119</sup> When there is this kind of talking and listening, which is what dialogue is all about, then understanding and healthy relationship are nurtured. This will bring about peace and harmony which delivers progress and growth in the ministry. This will help minimize cases of disaffection and disharmony.

### **Mutual relations in Cooperation**

To collaborate with the laity is to incorporate them and cooperate with them in the Church's ministry. Ordinarily, "the laity are made to share in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ; they have therefore, in the Church and in the world, their own assignment in the mission of the whole people of God."<sup>120</sup> That is to say, it is not a privilege for the laity but their right to participate in the activities of the Church's mission and ministry, each according to his/her state. The clergy should stick to their role of "pastorship"; the true sense of pastorship as coordination. That is why these days, "it is the duty of the pastor to no longer take charge of everything and do everything themselves, but to discern the

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid. p. 217.

<sup>120</sup> Ochulor H., Op. Cit. p. 316.

many gifts in the community and coordinate them for the unity and growth of the community.”<sup>121</sup>

## **CRITICAL EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION**

Disagreement and misunderstanding are signs of reactions from the laity against the dominance of the clergy in the Church. This situation is serious and calls for redress: a change of attitude from a clergy-centered Church to the Church of the people of God.<sup>122</sup> Addressing his fellow bishops during the 1975 Fourth Plenary Assembly of the Symposium of the Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) in Rome, Bishop Christopher Mwoleka of Rulenge Diocese in Western Tanzania, had this to say: “The root of the trouble is that we have a fixed idea of the Church. At meetings like this, every body seems to agree that the Church, of course, means all the faithful. But at the back of our minds and in our imagination, almost instinctively, the Church is always the Church of the clergy.”<sup>123</sup>

However, for Vatican II Council, “in the Church there is diversity of ministry but unity of mission.”<sup>124</sup> In our time, there should be “mutual esteem for all forms of the Church’s apostolate and good coordination, preserving nevertheless

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<sup>121</sup> Oshifa O. et al., “Declericalization of Mission: An African Vintage;” posted on the internet, [www.clericalism.com](http://www.clericalism.com)

<sup>122</sup> Ochulor H., *The Function of Dialogue in the Process of Evangelization*, Owerri: Edu-Edy Publ., 2006, p. 311.

<sup>123</sup> C. Mwoleka, “The Two Forms of Evangelization Demanded by our Time: Small Christian Communities and Human Promotion;” in Acts of the Fourth Plenary Assembly of SECAM held in Rome, 1975, pp. 818-182.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

the character special to each, are in fact absolutely necessary for promoting that spirit of unity which will cause fraternal charity to shine out in the Church's whole apostolate, common aims to be reached and ruinous rivalries avoided."<sup>125</sup>

Sorry to say, our bishops and priests have no evident interest in changing the status quo in this Church, which is 'essentially an unequal society' made-up of those who 'occupy a rank in the different degrees of the hierarchy and the multitude of the faithful.'<sup>126</sup> Perhaps, "the reason is that those who occupy rank and possess the authority for promoting and directing the Church do not have a natural inclination to tell the multitude who they lead like a docile flock, that there is an alternative. The privileged clergy are the principal beneficiaries. However, they are also victims of circumstance."<sup>127</sup>

As a way forward, let the consecrated persons imitate and adopt the method of St. Augustine in dispelling the "hierarchimania" and "clericomania" mentalities of theirs. St Augustine puts it beautifully this way: "when I am frightened by what I am to you, then I am consoled by what I am with you. To you I am the Bishop, with you I am a Christian. The first is an office, the second a grace, the first a danger, the second salvation."<sup>128</sup> Let the clergy who are addicted to

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<sup>125</sup> Vatican II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People, 18 Nov. 1965, pr.3.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid. p. 120.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> St Augustine- Sermon 340, I: PL 38, 1438.

power and authority and who monopolize the ministry against the supposed collaboration take note of this. The Church should strike a balance in the relations of the consecrated and the laity, following the teachings of Second Vatican Council. Hence, the clergy should partner with the laity in the ministry and apostolate in the Church.

It is only in a situation of mutual relations between the clergy and the laity that the mission of the Church will be relevant in our time.<sup>129</sup> Thus, “to save the Church in Africa today, we have more than anything else, to declericalise her liturgy, her parish organization and ministry.”<sup>130</sup> All we need is collaboration not clericalism. Accordingly, “there is clericalism when priests feel they have monopoly of knowledge, attention and power in the Church, and ignore or downgrade the role and contribution of the Laity.”<sup>131</sup> The clergy and the people ought to collaborate with one another for a progressive apostolate in the Church. Without mutual relations, the labour of mission in the Church is lost.

Meanwhile, the new emphasis on the role of the laity in the Church does not mean stripping the clergy or even religious of their indispensable role in evangelization. It is not even a denial of the clergy’s ministerial power. The new stress is on the lay person in and as a part of the Church, not on the lay

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<sup>129</sup> Ochulor H., *Op. Cit.* p. 319.

<sup>130</sup> Orabator, *Church as Family: In its Social Context*, Nairobi: Paulines Publ. 2000, pp. 43-44.

<sup>131</sup> Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, “Church in Nigeria: Family of God on Mission,” *Linaementa of the First National Pastoral Congress* (Lagos: 1999), 70-71.

person against or outside the Church.<sup>132</sup> That is to say that hierarchy in the Church is not bad in itself, but going to the extreme is an abuse and it makes it negative then. When it is negative, “it instigates at best a paternalistic style of ministry- for the people; or at worst, an autocratic one- over the people.”<sup>133</sup>

Instead of paternalistic or autocratic attitudes of the clergy or the unruly and disobedient attitudes of the laity, we advocate solidarity. In its nature, “the attitude of solidarity is a ‘natural’ consequence of the fact that a human being exists and acts together with others. Solidarity is also the foundation of a community in which the common good conditions and liberates participation and participation serves the common good, supports it and implements it. Solidarity means the continuous readiness to accept and perform that part of a task which is imposed due to the participation as member of a specific community.”<sup>134</sup>

Against this backdrop, “there are, therefore, two indispensable social co-relatives, which are necessary elements in the organizational structure of the Church, namely, authority and obedience. Both priests and laity or those whose duty is to command, as well as those under obedience must strive to portray God as the ultimate source

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<sup>132</sup> Echema A., “Collaborative Ministry in the Church Family,” *ibid.* p. 80.

<sup>133</sup> Ochulor H., “The Function of Dialogue in the process of evangelization,” p.317.

<sup>134</sup> Uzoukwu, S. K., *Peace through Dialogue and Solidarity: The Basis of True Humanism*, p. 187.

of all authority and also as the one to whom all obedience is directed.”

Hence, the clergy ought to be mindful of the Lord’s injunction: “Never be a dictator over any group that is put in your charge, but be an example that the whole flock can follow” (1Pet. 5:3) and the laity must equally remember the Lord’s injunction that “Anyone who disobeys an authority is rebelling against God’s ordinance; and rebels must expect to receive the condemnation they deserve” (Rom 13: 2). With these in mind, there will be mutual relations between the consecrated persons and the family.



## **MUTUAL RELATIONS BETWEEN CONSECRATED PERSONS AND THE SICK**

PaulDenis Chibuke Okoli, SMMM.

### **Introduction**

The World Mission Sunday 2015 took place in the context of the Year of Consecrated Life, which provides a further stimulus for prayer and reflection. For if every baptised person is called to bear witness to the Lord Jesus by proclaiming the faith received as a gift, this is especially so for each consecrated man and woman. There is a clear connection between consecrated life and mission. The desire to follow Jesus closely, which led to the emergence of consecrated life in the Church; responds to his call to take up the cross and follow him to imitate his dedication to the Father and his service and love, to lose our life so as to gain it. Since Christ's entire existence had a missionary character, so too, all those who follow him closely must possess this missionary quality. Jesus in Mt 8:3 demonstrated his connectedness with the sick when he stretched out his hand to touch a man with dreaded skin disease and said to him I do want you to be clean. His response to the sick man's statement to him: "Sir, if you want to, you can make me clean" Mt 8:2 demonstrated his mutual relationship with humanity even in its dreaded state.

Mutual relation between the consecrated and the sick is not theory but a reality tied to their divine vocation and missionary mandate. Jesus' preferential love for the poor especially the sick is both an example and an invitation to the

consecrated to love and relate with the sick like Jesus, to promote the human dignity and to help them make their suffering salvific. This will demand from the consecrated an attitude of and a disposition of a servant like Jesus who came to do not his will but the will of him who sent him (Jn. 6:38). It will also demand from the consecrated a commitment to their evangelical vows after the pattern of Jesus who in humility walked the path of obedience all the way to death on the cross (Phil 2:8) so as to experience the unfathomable riches of his mystery (Eph. 3:8).

This paper therefore will explore the mutual relations between the consecrated persons and the sick; will define the relevant concepts, review issues confronting the sick, the goals of the mutual relations between the consecrated persons and the sick, the goals for the Consecrated to build mutual relation with the sick, motivating factor on the consecrated person that can enhance their mutual relationship with the sick and then the conclusion.

### **Definition of terms**

A mutual relation simply means shared relations. Both the consecrated person and the sick are branches of the vine which is Christ. By virtues of baptism they all share one mind, one spirit and one body in the Church which is the mystical Body of Christ, as children of God the Father and members of the church.

### ***Consecrated persons***

These are men and women responding closely to their divine vocation, freely and willingly took the public evangelical vows of poverty, chastity and obedience in a particular

institute. The consecrated men and women live in a permanent state of life recognized by the Church, entered freely in response to the call of Christ to the perfection of love and characterized by the making of public vows of poverty, chastity and obedience (Okoli, 2016). Lumen Gentium.43 defining the consecrated as person who dedicated himself wholly to God, his supreme love. In a new and special way he makes himself over to God, to serve and honour Him;" this unites the religious "to the Church and her mystery in a special way" and urges such a one to work with undivided dedication for the good of the entire Body (LG. 44). The state of life comes from both as a special gift for the entire Church (Lumen Gentium. 43).

### *The sick*

The sick is a person who suffers misfortune, or a person suffering from an illness, it includes: diseased person, sufferer, unfortunate, a person who suffers misfortune. By this token then the sick is beyond persons' with physical, emotional or psychological illness, all who were vulnerable in any form is sick.

### **Issues confronting the sick in the society.**

Having noted that the sick is not limited to those with diagnosable or observable illness but rather it cut across all who in one way or another is vulnerable. And these are persons Jesus recognising their loneliness and wretchedness asked followers to invite. The issues confronting the sick in the society may include among other things the following:

### *Loneliness*

This is a complex and usually unpleasant emotional response to isolation resulting from illness condition. The sick person experiences transient loneliness they cannot socialize with friends due to poor mobility, finance, emotional and mental concept of their condition. As a result of this they become immobilized often physical, emotionally and spiritually.

### *Discrimination*

Indubitably, discrimination is a fact of life for many groups of people among its victims are the sick. Discrimination is treatment or consideration of, or making a distinction by the society against some of her members on stereotyping held by the society. The vulnerable of the society are the victims of the societal discrimination. It is a debasing of the human person and human dignity.

### *Stigmatisation*

This operates in society, and it is internalized by individuals, which labels categorise and differentiates healthy persons from non-ill persons, worthwhile persons from non worthwhile persons, true citizens from debased citizens. It is often based bias standard. The victims are of course, the wounded of the society. The continued stigmatization of the vulnerable renders them more a victim of emotional and social prisoners of their condition.

### *Ignorance*

This is the greatest disease of mankind and is the root cause of all human ills. [Ignorance](#) is the condition of being [uninformed](#) or [uneducated](#), it is lacking knowledge or information. The vulnerable in the society are often victims of

ignorance at both ends. Hence, the sick remain the sick always, for the ignorance of the society and ignorance of the sick themselves lives them perpetually sick.

### **The goals for the Consecrated to build mutual relation with the sick**

Jesus seeing the crowd dejected was moved by compassion and sorry for them invited his disciple to give them something to eat. The invitation he continues to extend today the consecrated person who in a new and special way makes himself over to God, to serve and honour Him with undivided dedication for the good of the entire Body most move into action to salvage the plight of the sick to achieve among other things:

#### ***Promotion of their human dignity:***

Catholic Social Teaching differs slightly from Human Right because of its basis. It rooted Human Dignity in the firm foundations of the Catholic Church's traditions that human beings, was created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26-27), thought about the sanctity of creation as told in the story of our creation (Genesis) and God's incarnation (Gospels), human dignity must according to the Catholic Social Teaching, each and every person has value, are worthy of great respect and must be free from slavery, manipulation and exploitation (Catholic Social Teaching). Therefore, persons undergoing in any form: slavery, manipulation and exploitation are indeed vulnerable-sick. Consecrated person as the sacrament of Christ must by its life and seek ways of gaining freedom and integrity for individuals in such state.

### ***To enhance their sense of belonging***

Human belongingness is an emotional to be an accepted member of a group, be it family, friends, co-workers, a religion, or something else. There we are naturally driven toward establishing and sustaining belongingness. We are all created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26-27) and by virtue of baptism all Christians share in the common membership of the Church and children of God. But essentially, our common origin in God and common nature image and likeness of God sets a common seal and bond and this the consecrated are to strive to protect and promote in the world, so that the disadvantaged in society as the sick will still cherish their belongingness to the human society. This is for according to Lambert, Stillman, Hicks, Kamble, Baumeiter, Fincham, (2013), belongingness provides a sense of meaningful quality, rather than of meaningless quantity. The sense of belonging is indeed significant to a meaningful life

### ***To bring them to see meaning in their suffering***

The consecrated person by their own penitential life is to model to the sick in the society the ways of Christ who said, "I have not come to be served but to serve and give my life as a ransom for many". The consecrated person attitude to his/her own suffering counting it all joy" when they "meet various trials" (Jas 1.2), "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the name" (Acts 5.41). Thus, their humble acceptance of them and transforming them into the way of salvation for oneself and others, the consecrated will lead the sick in the society to live with and celebrate their sharing in passion of Christ via their live conditions, making it a source of joy and salvation for themselves and others.

***To foster their hope and confidence in man and God***

It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in princes. All nations surrounded me; in the name of the Lord I cut them off! They surrounded me, surrounded me on every side; in the name of the Lord I cut them off! They surrounded me like bees; they went out like a fire among thorns; in the name of the Lord I cut them off I was pushed hard, so that I was falling, but the Lord helped me (Psalm 118: 9-13). Such trust and confidence of the Psalmist is the sort of inner disposition and attitude the consecrated person is expected to have in living out his evangelical commitment in the world and as model same to the sick in the sick. So that living in a convinced manner, they will always find meaning in their life condition and through it contribute meaningfully to the human community.

**Motivating factor on the consecrated person that can enhance their mutual relationship with the sick**

Obviously, the consecrated person has vowed to follow Christ more closely and to be his sacrament to the world. However convincing their initial urge may, it needs constant fanning into flame. The likely motivating factors to end may include the following:

Call to mission: mission according to Pope Francis (2015) is a passion for Jesus and at the same time a passion for his people. When we pray before Jesus crucified, we see the depth of his love which gives us dignity and sustains us. At the same time, we realise that the love flowing from Jesus' pierced heart expands to embrace the People of God and all humanity. We realise once more that he wants to make use of

us to draw closer to his beloved people and all those who seek him with a sincere heart. The urge to respond to the mission brings the consecrated to see Jesus and to love and embrace him in the sick and in such a manner like Jesus, the consecrated person promote and sustains the dignity of the sick person.

Sharing in the hidden presence of Christ: Jesus came to share in our humanity especially in our vulnerability, the consecrated mutual relationship with the poor could be seen their eagerness to share the plight of the sick, expressing this mutual sharing Vatican II Fathers says: in all parts of the earth consecrated persons live the same events as the people of God in various geographical and cultural contexts. They share the joys and hopes and the sorrows and anguish of the men and women of today, especially of the poor and suffering, because nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in the hearts of Christ's disciples.

To imitate Jesus' preferential love for the poor: this could be realization that their choice of an absolute ideal, and an offering of self to God and the service of others, is a source of meaning which humanizes and is a gift of self to humanity. For this reason, persons consecrated to a single ideal, which does not pass away, are living signs of those transcendent values for which a person lives and even dies (1994 World Synod of Bishops). In this way they imitate and follow Christ to the point of sacrificing their life, rendering through their martyrdom a sign which is the supreme proof of love, which Christ recognised as doing the will of the father (Jn. 6:38)

Listening to the Spirit: this has two fold impact, listening to the Spirit draws the consecrated to be closer imitators of Christ whose trait they represent to the world and to make their life a gift to the world especially the sick through their presence and evangelical life and activities giving them hope and drawing them to the kingdom. The Vatican II expressing this fact holds: The consecrated life is a gift which the Father has given to the church by means of the Spirit so that, in faithfulness to the Gospel, the most characteristic traits of the life of his Son Jesus, the chaste, poor and obedient one (cf. Mt. 8:20; Phil. 2:8), and the unfathomable riches of his mystery (cf. Eph. 3:8), might be present in the world and might draw everyone toward the kingdom of God (Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 43, 44, 46).

Say yes the love those whom Jesus loved: Option for the poor is one truth that brought Jesus saying yes the coming into the world to save mankind. Hence, the consecrated can achieve a mutual relation with the sick when they learn to say yes to Jesus' preferential love for the poor. The preferential love for the poor has led many to make generous choices in life, yet not without an element of danger. Alluding to this (1994 World Synod of Bishops) observed that, there is certainly no incompatibility between the consecrated life and the Lord's option for the poor. Instead, such a choice has been a constant note of the apostolic charisms, often inspired by the words and example of the Lord, who was sent to "preach good news to the poor" (Lk. 4:18) and who invites others to practice the works of mercy toward the "little ones," as he himself did (cf. Mt. 25:40). In this option it is necessary, that the consecrated to open hearts, minds and the creativity of evangelical love to

the sick especially in the deplorable and hopeless condition to give them hope to unite their suffering to Jesus' passion so as to make their condition salvific.

## **Conclusion**

According to Marinker (1975) sickness is the external and public mode of unhealthy. It is a social role, a status, a negotiated position in the world, a bargain struck between the person henceforward called 'sick', and a society which is prepared to recognise and sustain him. To recognise and to sustain is a where the consecrated are to impacts more on the sick in the society. This is not only an invitation but also a mandate, for Jesus' entire ministry centered on caring for the needs of the sick and vulnerable. The story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10: 25-37, is lucid examples of Jesus' teaching about love for the sick and infirmed.

Therefore, the consecrated person is to anticipate like the Blessed Virgin Mary visitation to Elizabeth in Luke 1:39-37 in anticipation of her need. This is so because the needs hope, recognition and life and consecrated evangelical commitment as the sacrament of Christ are hands, feet and heart through which Christ can reach those whom he has loved. This is the mutual sharing which Christ initiated during his earthly ministry which the consecrated person must devotedly sustain as they strived daily to grow closely in Christ.

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## **CHALLENGES IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONSECRATED AND LAY PERSONS**

**BY**

**Winifred Gloria Eche DMMM**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Nigerian Church is a country richly blessed with many institutes of consecrated life, and for this precious gift, we thank God. These institutes arose, in many instances, to help the Church attend to its various needs. For example, when the late Bishop Anthony Gogo Nwedo needed religious Sisters to help him build up the old diocese of Umuahia, he went to the Vatican to request for Sisters but was told to “go and start your own.” Following that challenge, he founded the congregation of the Daughters of Mary Mother of Mercy. Other founders of institutes of consecrated life were equally inspired in various ways for the growth of the Church.

Religious Sisters work with bishops, priests, and lay people all over the world, but their relationship, especially with lay people, is often full of challenges. Why these challenges exist, as well as how to address them, will be the focus of this paper. To be kept in view is the beauty of human beings that lies in their ability to forge meaningful and productive relationships with each other, irrespective of their differences. As the Scripture states, in the beginning, the Creator, through the creative power of the Word, distinguished created things, “each according to its kind. The ordered world was born out of differences carrying with them also the promise of

relationships”.

## CONSECRATED LIFE AND CONSECRATED PERSONS

Generally, the word ‘consecration’ is a religious term and means an act by which a thing or person is separated or set apart for a sacred use, or dedicated to the service and worship of God. In the Christian understanding, consecration, according to Rich Deem, becomes “the act of setting oneself apart from the world to become dedicated as an instrument of righteousness for the purposes of God”.

The idea of consecrated life goes back to the early beginnings of God’s encounter with human beings in the economy of salvation when God called people to be holy and consecrated to Him and His purposes and to reflect His holiness in their lives as individuals and as a group. In the book of Exodus, the tribe of the Levites and the household of Aaron were specially chosen by God for a holy service. Only the members of this group were to serve in Israel as priests, and only they could consecrate themselves. This means that consecrated persons are those chosen or called by God for His service. God is the One who chooses and calls, and then the person called consecrates himself or herself to God.

In the Christian dispensation, broadly speaking, it has always been clearly understood that Baptism, which the Lord teaches is necessary for salvation (Jn 3. 3, 5; Mt 28.19), transforms the baptized and consecrates them to God. As the *Catechism* states, “the Christian faithful are those who, inasmuch as they have been incorporated into Christ through Baptism, have been constituted as the people of God; for this reason, since

they have become sharers in Christ's priestly, prophetic, and royal office in their own manner, they are called to exercise the mission which God has entrusted to the Church to fulfill in the world, in accord with the condition proper to each one."

For those persons who go a step further than the general consecration of all the baptized, consecration, usually done through prayers, rites, and ceremonies, specifically mean setting oneself apart for a particular way of living and expressing the Christian life. As Watchman Nee puts it in very simple terms, "Consecration is not how much we can give to God. It is being accepted by God and being granted the honour of serving Him . . . Consecration means that we say, Lord, You have given me the opportunity and the right to come before You and to serve You. It is saying, Lord, I am Yours. My ears were purchased by the blood; they belong to You. My hands were purchased by the blood; they belong to You. My feet were purchased by the blood; they belong to You. From now on I can no longer use them for myself."

Consecrated life in the above sense is thus a vocation defined as a special invitation from God to someone for a special purpose or mission; for instance, the priesthood or marriage. It is a call that is rooted in love. Love helps the consecrated person to accept and surrender to the demands of the invitation. Just as people fall in love with each other, the consecrated person falls in love with God through a strong desire to establish an intimate relationship with Him. By this desire, the person is enabled to ignore the attractions of this life in order to be united to God. In the words of Pope St John

Paul II, "The Consecrated Life, deeply rooted in the example and teaching of Christ the Lord, is a gift of God the Father to his Church through the Holy Spirit, by the profession of the evangelical counsels the characteristic features of Jesus the chaste, poor and obedient one."

Consecrated life takes various forms, such as those proper to monastic institutes dedicated entirely to contemplation, to religious institutes, to clerical institutes dedicated to various apostolic works, to lay institutes, and to secular institutes.<sup>1</sup> This means that "the state of consecrated life is neither clerical nor lay; it is compatible with both the clerical state and the lay state, and by its very existence in the Church, seeks to serve the consecration of the lives of all the faithful, clergy and laity alike".

Canon Law offers yet a stricter description of consecrated life. Explaining this perspective Kanu writes: "Consecrated persons are the members of religious institutes and Societies of Apostolic Life. The Code of Canon Law (1983) teaches that they are lay persons or clerics who assume the evangelical counsels by means of a sacred bond and become members of an institute of consecrated life according to the law of the Church. They totally dedicate themselves to God with the goal of pursuing perfection in charity by faithfully embracing the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience".<sup>1</sup> Simply put, consecrated persons are religious men and women who profess the evangelical counsels of obedience, poverty, and chastity.

## **LAY PERSONS**

The word, 'lay', stems from the Greek *laós* (λαός), meaning, 'people'.<sup>1</sup> The related word, 'laity', derives from the Middle English *laite*, which ultimately stemmed from the Greek *laikós* (λαϊκός), meaning, 'common' or '(one) of the people'. In the Catholic circle, the word 'laity' generally refers to the people who have not received the sacrament of Holy Orders, meaning, those not ordained as ministers or priests. From this point of view, believers can be divided into clerics and the laity, those who have received the sacrament of orders and those who have not. This distinction does not blur the nature of consecrated life which straddles both clerical and religious life.

There are however some lay people and some clerics, who without ceasing to be such, commit to living the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience. In a way, they live according to the way of life which Jesus himself followed while on earth. They will not be able to live the virtues with the same perfection but they seek to make Christ present through their way of life. These believers consecrate themselves to God in a special way, which sets them apart from those lay people and clerics who do not. The laity who do not consecrate themselves are in this sense simply the laity, and the clerics who do not consecrate themselves are known as the secular clergy. All believers are consecrated

to God by reason of their baptism and confirmation, but not all the faithful receive this new and special consecration.

From the above citation, the term, 'lay faithful', can be understood to mean "all the faithful except those in Holy Orders and those who belong to a religious state sanctioned by the Church."<sup>1</sup> This statement appears to exclude the religious from the 'lay faithful' bracket.

### **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONSECRATED AND LAY PERSONS**

In the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, the Holy Father, John Paul II states that "the different ways of life which, in accordance with the plan of the Lord Jesus, make up the life of the Church have mutual relationships which merit consideration. By virtue of their rebirth in Christ, all the faithful share a common dignity; all are called to holiness; all cooperate in the building up of the one Body of Christ, each in accordance with the proper vocation and gift which he or she has received from the Spirit (cf. *Rom 12:3*-)." <sup>1</sup> The *Catechism* teaches that the Church is one, and for three reasons, namely, its source who is God the Father; its founder, God the Son; and its soul, God the Holy Spirit. In the oneness of the Church, the highest example and source of this mystery is the unity that exists in the Trinity of God the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup> This union is what is expected of the members of the Church at its different levels.

The above oneness also implies communion. The Trinity, though one, has their functions. Similarly, the various missions of priests, the religious, and laity lie in the mandate

given to the apostles by Christ. This mandate as found in the gospel (Mk 16:15) impels the Church as a single unit to 'go out to the whole world and proclaim the good news to all creation.' Every Christian thus has this mission to accomplish, albeit in various ways, and this is one of the major reasons why the Church exists. To underline the importance of this mission, Pope Benedict XVI states that "in this community where Jesus Christ the first-born among many brethren (Rom 8:29), reconciled all people with God the Father (Eph. 2:14-18) and bestowed the Holy Spirit (Jn 20:22), the Church for her part becomes the bearer of the Good News, that every person is a child of God. She is called to transmit this message to all humanity by proclaiming the salvation won for us by Christ, by celebrating our communion with God and by living in fraternal solidarity."

It is therefore, within this Trinitarian communion that the religious relationship with the laity is founded. The religious in the case of monastic or contemplative Institutes, take the form of a relationship that is primarily spiritual by sharing the fruits of their spiritual journey with the laity.<sup>1</sup> For those Institutes involved in works of the apostolate these relationships also translate into forms of pastoral cooperation and collaboration as they relate to other members of the faithful at the level of everyday life.<sup>1</sup> It is with this understanding that many Institutes have come to the conclusion that *their charism can be shared with the laity*,<sup>1</sup> and so are invited to share more intensely in the spirituality and mission of these Institutes.

It is on the basis of this understanding that John Paul II holds that:

These new experiences of communion and cooperation should be encouraged for various reasons. They can in fact give rise to the spread of a fruitful spirituality beyond the confines of the Institute, which will then be in a position to ensure the continuity in the Church of the services typical of the Institute. Another positive consequence will be to facilitate more intense cooperation between consecrated persons and the laity in view of the Institute's mission.... in order to transform the world according to God's design. The participation of the laity often brings unexpected and rich insights into certain aspects of the charism, leading to a more spiritual interpretation of it and helping to draw from it directions for new activities in the apostolate.... consecrated persons should remember that before all else they must be expert guides in the spiritual life, and in this perspective they should cultivate "the most precious gift: the spirit". For their part, the laity should offer Religious families the invaluable contribution of their "being in the world" and their specific service.

Christ gave the Church the gift of unity; we pray that this unity will be sustained and that it will continue to increase

until the end of time. This is why Jesus prayed to the Father before His Passion “that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be one in us . . . so that the world may know that you have sent me. The desire to recover the unity of all Christians is a gift of Christ and a call of the Holy Spirit”.<sup>1</sup> Based on this unity, Christians of whatever calling work in communion with one another. For this reason, the Church also declares that “demands for communion have offered consecrated persons the chance to rediscover the mutual relationship with the other vocations in the people of God. In the Church they are called, in a special way, to reveal that participation in the Trinitarian communion can change human relations creating a new kind of solidarity. By professing to live *for God and of God*, consecrated persons do, in fact, undertake to preach the power of the peacemaking action of grace that overcomes the disruptive dynamisms present in the human heart”.

Thus, consecrated persons do not live and operate in isolation from the community; they interact with other members of the Christian community, “with a lively sense of fellowship, rejoicing in an equal dignity and common commitment to bring to fruition the immense treasure that each has inherited”.

However, although much improvement has been made in the area of the collaboration between consecrated and lay persons, more efforts are needed “in order to complete their common mission, sharing initiatives and getting involved in each other’s initiatives.”<sup>1</sup> It is based on these relationships of either spiritual, works of apostolate etc. that the mutual

relationship between religious and laity takes place.

## **CHALLENGES IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONSECRATED AND LAY PERSONS**

The demand for mutually supportive relationship and collaboration between consecrated persons and the laity is not new in the Church, as the history of congregations show, but formidable difficulties in this area still exist, including lack of commitment to the mission of Christ on the part of consecrated persons, male chauvinism, discriminatory structures, cultural values, theological orientations, psychological dispositions, ignorance, the gap between the rich and the poor, the culture of violence, exclusion, and division. An awareness of these roadblocks coupled with a desire to overcome them will be of immense help to both the laity and the consecrated persons. Let us look more closely at some of these.

### **Lack of Commitment to the Mission of Christ by Consecrated Persons**

Every disciple is called and consecrated to follow the example of Christ and go into the world and proclaim the good news. This task belongs more to the consecrated persons who “are called to follow Christ more closely and to make him the all of their lives. The task of *devoting themselves wholly to mission* is therefore included in their call; indeed, by the action of the Holy Spirit who is at the origin of every vocation and charism, consecrated life itself is a mission, as was the whole of Jesus' life.”<sup>1</sup>

The outward sign of the mission is in bearing witness to the kingdom. Mission itself implies sending to, being sent for a

purpose, and to deliver a message, meaning that communication is involved. If one does not know how to communicate the message, the message suffers, and if one decides to communicate a message different from what one is sent to deliver, what happens? This is a strong challenge to many consecrated persons.

In working with the lay faithful the consecrated persons are expected to show propriety, deliver the message faithfully, and live the life of witness. In the words of Pope St John Paul II, "The specific contribution of consecrated persons, both men and women, to evangelization is first of all the witness of a life given totally to God and to their brothers and sisters, in imitation of the Saviour who, out of love for humanity, made himself a servant . . . Consecrated persons make visible, in their consecration and total dedication, the loving and saving presence of Christ, the One consecrated by the Father, sent in mission."<sup>1</sup> However, this expectation is not always met, as some consecrated persons do it their own way, rather than according to the charisms of their congregations or institutes. In this way, they create serious problems for the mission of Christ entrusted to their care.

### **Male Chauvinism and Cultural Structures and Values**

Male chauvinism and cultural structures and values go together here since male chauvinism is a product of cultural structures and values and one of the major challenges that affect the relationship between especially female consecrated and male lay people. Generally, African men regard women as second-class citizens and believe that the best place for them is the 'kitchen'. Thus they find it very difficult to see the

female religious differently. This has brought about a tremendous misrepresentation of even women in consecrated life. For instance, imagine a female religious advising a lay man. Although what the religious say might be true, the man might find it coming from a woman very difficult to accept. I once had an experience of a man's wife coming to me to say: "My husband confessed that what 'Sister told me is the truth; but how can I, a man, listen to a woman? What shows that I am a man'?" The situation is that bad.

### **Lack of Unity and Mutual Respect Among Consecrated and Lay Persons**

Rivalry often exists amongst consecrated persons themselves and between them and lay people. The first type of rivalry often spills over to the lay faithful. For instance, in some places where women religious work, some Christian mothers specifically struggle either to run the same apostolate that the religious do or stop them from doing it. At public functions in the Church, some knights of the Church and politicians could be recognized, while religious women are made to take care of themselves at any corner. There seems to be generally inadequate respect for the religious. The clergy appear to have contributed greatly to this; they often fail to appreciate the works the consecrated do in the parish; they talk to them in ways that do not promote unity and give the lay faithful the impression that there is little or no difference between lay and consecrated persons. That gives lay persons more reasons to look down on the consecrated. Clearly, this conflicts with the position of Pope Paul VI who holds that it is important we promote the spirit of unity "in order that fraternal charity may be resplendent in the whole apostolate of the Church, common goals may be attained, and

destructive rivalries avoided. For this, there is a need for mutual esteem among all the forms of the apostolate in the Church and, with due respect for the particular character of each organization . . . since a particular activity in the Church requires harmony and apostolic cooperation on the part of both branches of the clergy, the Religious, and the laity”.

The level of unhealthy relationships that exist between some lay faithful and some consecrated persons is a big challenge to the accomplishment of the mission of Christ. This contributes immensely to lack of respect for consecrated persons in the eyes of the lay people. If a layman or woman is having an unwarranted relationship with a religious, will such a man or woman see such a religious as deserving of special respect, and how can the lay person respect what the religious are saying?

### **Ignorance**

Ignorance is a major obstacle that affects the relationship between lay and consecrated persons and hinders the progress of the Church’s missionary work. On the part of lay persons, many of them do not know much about the nature and role of religious life, that the religious represent Christ, that “consecrated life, deeply rooted in the example and teaching of Christ the Lord, is a gift of God the Father to his Church through the Holy Spirit. By the profession of the evangelical counsels the characteristic features of Jesus the chaste, poor and obedient one are made constantly "visible" in the midst of the world.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the emphasis should not be so much on what the consecrated people do, but on what they represent, that is the Christ-like presence. Many

people, including consecrated persons themselves, tend to miss this point. Most often, lay people compare the religious and priests, especially when it comes to their respective roles in a parish. This should not be so because they are not the same, and their roles are different.

Besides the lay faithful, many consecrated persons do not have adequate knowledge of the life they have embraced. "In fact, the lifestyle of many who profess evangelical counsels among us is at variance with what the Church lives, teaches and has stated in her documents".<sup>1</sup> The core of which is that "consecrated life is an ardent desire for God which makes one embrace the life of Jesus who is chaste, poor and obedient, for perfect love of God and neighbour. This distinguishes religious from those outside these professionals of perfect charity. Sometimes, one hardly sees much difference between many consecrated persons and other Christians. The only difference seems to be in the use of religious habits for those who are still faithful to the style and colour stipulated by their religious Institute."

Another aspect of this ignorance comes from the family and relatives of consecrated persons. Family members constantly say to the consecrated person that "this religious or that is doing this or that for their family and you are not helping us; why? Is your own different?" This sort of pressure mounts on consecrated persons due to the ignorance of all those involved. Although sometimes during professions, explanations are given concerning the obligations of consecrated life, the explanations hardly sink in the audience. This remains a very serious problem among lay and consecrated persons. Mary Jerome Obiorah sums up this

problem:

Relatives and friends of religious do not understand why their “Rev. Sister” or “Rev. Brother” who, according to their own judgment, is well placed in her or his religious Institute, or is in a highly lucrative apostolate like medical doctor in a hospital, professor in a university, or even a Head Teacher managing a big school of the Institute, cannot be useful to his or her biological family. Why can't this Rev. help train her or his younger ones or build a house in her or his father's compound? There are cases of those who have succumbed to this pressure and violated woefully their religious obligations. Others have gone to the point of approaching affluent individuals to help her or his people. One should note that some well organized religious Institutes in our country help parents of their members when there is need to assist them.

When the expectations of the lay faithful about the consecrated become too high, things are bound to go wrong.

### **Infidelity of the Consecrated Persons concerning the Evangelical Counsels**

Infidelity here could be with respect to material acquisitions, attachment to rich, powerful, or influential lay persons, sexual immorality, etc. It has been established by the Church

that “consecrated life is essentially the profession of the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience accepted and approved by the Church (Can. 573 §1), with the aim of following Christ very closely. These three are evangelical because they are derived from the Gospel, that is, the life and teaching of Jesus. Consecrated persons live these in imitation of Jesus who was chaste, poor and obedient”.

Unfortunately, many consecrated persons live lives according to the ways of the world. One characteristic trait of consecrated life has always been an intense spiritual life as opposed to secularism. But, then, many consecrated persons do not know much about the life. They are influenced by society, such that they lose the sense of the sacred which their life requires. In the African tradition, whatever that is set apart for the gods cannot be tampered with by humans. Such ought to be the case with consecrated persons. However, today, some consecrated persons have no serious regard for the gospel values. For example, the current trend among consecrated persons who took the vow of poverty, chastity, and obedience shows a mad pursuit of material things, personal comfort, and pleasure, the acquisition and use of expensive vehicles, expensive phones, and other electronic devices, big personal houses, and so on. In addition, some religious now prefer living alone and do not want to live in the community. And for greed and pleasure, many consecrated persons engage in unhealthy relationships with lay persons. Many lay people simply do not understand how this lifestyle squares with consecrated life by which the “religious offer the full dedication of their own wills as a sacrifice of themselves to God, and by this means they are

united more permanently and securely with God's saving will".

### **Attitudes of the Clergy Towards Consecrated Persons**

The attitude of some people in the clerical state towards consecrated persons, especially the female religious, poses a significant threat to the relationship between consecrated and lay persons. Unfortunately "many diocesan priests did not have the opportunity to study the theology of consecrated life in the course of their formation and further studies."<sup>1</sup> Even the way some priests present the image of religious women to seminarians appears to worsen the situation. Recently, at a silver jubilee thanksgiving Mass of a female religious, the priest who preached the homily left both the readings of the day and the role of the consecrated persons and told the people (seminarians, lay people, priests, and sisters as well) how the Church is made up of priests and laity. He went further quoting canons, forgetting that some Church documents have also differentiated consecrated persons from lay people. He talked about it as if there was a war between priests and consecrated persons, and, of course, the seminarians were very happy to listen to such a homily; it was an entertainment for them. The seminarians listening to him were future priests and many lay people in that Church would automatically see themselves as being on a par with religious women. In parishes where priests have this kind of mentality, they easily transfer it to the lay faithful who, consequently, may have little or no regard for the female religious and see nothing good about them. Some priests see them as rivals and will do everything possible to make them miserable, and they use the lay faithful to achieve this in

different ways. This level of bias against female consecrated persons makes it hard to have and sustain a balanced and respectful relationship amongst male and female consecrated persons and between them and lay people. Again, what Mary Jerome Obiorah writes is apt here:

Again, lack of knowledge of the theology of Consecrated life and its mission in the world has also engendered some undue disrespectful attitudes, open confrontation before the lay faithful and sometimes physical abuse by some close collaborators of the religious, particularly priests. There is a case of a priest who was just posted to a Parish. When he arrived, there was a sister managing the Parish Nursery/Primary School. Before the Pastor arrived, Sister was getting on very well with all, pupils, teachers, parents and the entire parishioners. It did not take more than one week on the Pastor's arrival and there were uncontrollable upheavals. The pastor began to make Sister and consecrated women, in general, the topic of his weekday and Sunday sermons. Of course, in this part of the world, people have great respect for priests and revere them as our traditional religion revere traditional priests; because they believe they are God's representatives.

### **Media Influence**

The kind of movies that are being produced in recent times by Nigerian actors and actresses, especially those that

denigrate religious life, has become very worrisome. It makes one wonder if at all some of the people who are involved in those movies are Catholics, whether they are not members of our parishes, and whether what they produce is true or false. These movies are made for people's consumption and lessons can be learned. What, therefore, is the true image of, especially religious women?

It is obvious that the media are bent on painting a dark image of the female religious. This can greatly affect the way lay people look at female consecrated persons, as well as their relationship with them, and lead to some forms of abuse directed at the religious. One woman once told me that she was afraid of 'Rev Sisters'. I asked her why. She said that they were husband-snatchers. Curiously, I asked her how. She told me that some of her friends had suffered it and she also watched it on *African Magic*. I took the opportunity to correct her impression, but I also knew she was right, except that she generalized it. Every Rev Sister for her is a husband-snatcher. She might not be the only woman thinking that way, and that was to be expected. To work well with such people, consecrated persons need to change their way of life.

### **SOME PROPOSALS**

In view of the challenges highlight in the foregoing discussion, serious actions need to be taken to address the problem and salvage the integrity and sanctity of religious life in Nigeria. In the following paragraphs, some of those actions will be proposed.

## **AWARENESS PROGRAMMES**

Ignorance was identified in this paper as a major factor that hinders effective collaboration between consecrated and lay persons. The problem here exists at all levels, including that of consecrated persons themselves, the clergy, and the lay faithful. Since many people are ignorant of the nature and role of consecrated persons in the Church, it is important that much attention is focussed on creating more awareness through workshops and catechesis for lay people. For the religious, theological courses on consecrated life, collaborative ministry and other relevant courses should be part of their curriculum, and where possible, they should be delivered by the religious, whether male or female, but not by diocesan priests. Ensuring the right caliber of formators in this regard is absolutely essential. Equally essential is on-going formation programmes. Such issues should be part of the programmes that those in-charge of on-going formation centers should add to the already existing ones.

For priests, awareness can be created during their retreats, recollection days, and workshops as part of their ongoing formation, with the collaborative ministry and consecrated life being part of the programmes. The outcomes of these can be documented, published, and circulated so that the laity can be nourished by such documents. For seminarians, courses on consecrated life and collaborative ministry ought to be in the curriculum. Besides, there should be no substitute for competent and balanced formators, starting from minor seminaries, through spiritual years, to major seminaries. The future of the Church depends so much on the kind of formators we have in formation houses. A priest who is biased against consecrated persons will never teach

seminarians to respect them. Attention to the above issues can lead to a better relationship between the clergy, religious, and laity, promote fraternity, and correct abuses.

## **COMMITMENT TO THE CALL**

The call to religious life and, indeed, to Christian life, is a call to holiness; but in some respects the call of consecrated persons is special. In baptism, Christians make a fundamental option to follow Jesus; this is our common Christian vocation. Persons living consecrated life also profess to be experts of this vocation of all Christ's disciples. With this, consecrated life is a visible and living sign of what human beings are called to be. They are called to be holy as God, whose image they bear. In the words of *Vita Consecrata*,

Consecrated persons, in fact, have the task of making present even among non-Christians Christ who is chaste, poor, obedient, prayerful and missionary. While remaining ever faithful to their charism they must know that they have a special share in the Church's missionary activity, in virtue of their interior consecration made to God. The desire so often expressed by Theresa of Lisieux, "to love you and make you loved", the ardent longing of Saint Francis Xavier that many, "meditating on what the Lord God will expect from them and from the talents he has given them, would be converted, using the right means and the spiritual exercises to know and feel within

themselves the divine will, and so, adapting themselves more to that will than to their own inclinations.

Although some consecrated persons have been carried away by the wave of materialism and globalized sexual decadence, there are still many who struggle to live the life and ought to be respected by both the clergy and the lay faithful.

### **COMMITMENT IN PRAYER**

Prayer is one of the weapons for keeping the Church united and protected. There is power in prayer. It has the ability to keep members of the Church together by bringing more love and understanding among them. A prayer-less person is an easy prey to the devil. Religious men and women ought to go into deeper union with God in prayer. This is not about reciting the breviary or going to the chapel to fulfill a religious expectation. The more one prays, the more converted the person becomes. This is so because God speaks to us in prayer. Some of the issues raised in this paper can be handled better if Christians of today go into dialogue with God in prayer. There is need to pray more and ask the Holy Spirit to help us to relate better as one family in the house of God.

### **CONCLUSION**

Obvious, the relationship between consecrated and lay persons in Nigeria has not been what it ought to be for some time now, and the situation in some cases seems to be getting worse. However, it also ought to be acknowledged that there are cases where the relationship is very encouraging. The thirst for God in Nigeria, both on the part of consecrated and

lay persons, is immense and can be targeted in the effort to deepen the faith of all the baptized in the country. The tensions and ugly incidents that often occur in the relationship between the two groups of the faithful should not be allowed to stifle or hamper the bigger project of bringing everyone to experience and acknowledge the love and mercy of God. For this reason, it is essential that all concerned initiate various programmes to safeguard the integrity and sanctity of consecrated life and foster its effectiveness both in bearing witness to the values of the gospel and in leading people to salvation.

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## **MENTORING AS A TOOL IN ENHANCING MUTUAL RELATIONS AMONG CONSECRATED PERSONS**

**Jerome Odineze**

### **Introduction**

The state of mutual relations among consecrated persons is in no doubt on the balance today. Competition, rivalry, economic hardship and the likes have become threats to this noble yet gradually dwindling virtue among consecrated persons. The African situation has a peculiar undertone that is encouraged by the increasing level of poverty in the continent and on the other side, the rising tide of the quest to make it in the world around us. Here in Nigeria, we have had cases of consecrated persons and pastors craving for the best things in life which have been renounced implicitly by the vow of their vocations. This has created serious rivalry amongst some and those who try to maintain healthy mutual relations have been confronted with the reality of this rivalry. How do we handle such cases among consecrated persons who have assumed the evangelical counsels by means of a sacred bond who are now been threatened by mundane bonds?

In this work, we shall be looking how mutual relations can be enhanced through mentoring which has produced successful sportsmen, artistes, business entrepreneurs, politicians, educationists, scientists and a host of others. This is partly because for young people to grow into these professional careers, there is the need for some form of guidance from those who are experienced in the various professional fields.

We shall try to see how mentoring can be applied in enhancing effective mutual relations among consecrated persons so as to keep them bound to the sacred calling which they took on from the beginning.

### **What is mentoring?**

The art of mentoring is of ancient Greek origin made common in the tale of Odysseus and his son Telemachus. The legend had it that Athena was the teacher and guardian of Telemachus when his father made a long journey away from home for the Trojan war. As such, the original mentor was described as 'the wise and trusted counselor' (Mclean, 2004). In modern times, the mentor has been adopted in different fields and has become different things to different people. This has made mentoring a term that has been notoriously difficult to define (Friedman & Philips, 2002) or as Sullivan (2004) would put it, "to offer a standard definition of the term is incompatible with the state of the art in the field" (p.15), while recognizing that the long tradition of one educator seeking advice from another still holds. Chiroma and Cloete (2015) see mentoring, as a very broad and complex concept that includes many components and is therefore difficult to define but has been compared with other relational processes such as coaching, counseling, advising and teaching.

From associating it to a higher spiritual case of empowerment where the triadic relationship between mentor, mentee and the Holy Spirit is experienced for the spiritual development of the mentee (Anderson & Reese 1999), mentoring has also been linked with wisdom and counseling (Sullivan, 2004). Other studies have described it based on the subject matter of the inquiry. Agunloye (2013), in a study on the impact of

mentoring program on faculty performance in institutions of higher education, defines mentoring as a process of consciously building a mutual relationship between two or more professional colleagues for the purpose of promoting personal and professional growth. This definition that involves two professional colleagues has been subscribed to by some authors who see mentoring as a complex and multi-dimensional process of guiding, teaching, influencing and supporting a beginning or new teacher where a mentor teacher leads, guides and advises another teacher more junior in experience in a work situation characterized by mutual trust and belief that lead to mutual benefits (Koki, 1997; Liang & Rhodes, 2007; Martin & Sifers, 2012).

In the school setting, an empirical research that was carried out in the USA on the Differences of Mentoring Experiences across Grade Span among Principals, Mentors, and Mentees (Frels et al, 2013) submitted that mentoring should not be viewed as an add-on component within induction programs but more of a foundational component for establishing a community spirit within schools and acknowledging the benefits to both mentees and mentors. It revealed mentoring as involving specific format, better matches, increased time for mentoring, observation opportunities, and better training for mentors. This reveals the need for mentoring as a foundational aspect in helping emerging adults grow in a new environment and which can be beneficial for both mentors and mentees or protégés as the case may be.

Braimoh (2008) writing on the lifelong learning through mentoring process and its operational dimensions in society, gives various dimensions of mentoring which included traditional mentoring, community and work-based mentoring, staff to staff, staff to student, student to student, organizational and leadership mentoring. From this, we can see that mentoring can take different forms as long as it involves a dyadic relationship that is meant for developing the individuals involved. This dyadic relationship becomes beneficial for the parties involved where the magic of reciprocity is allowed by the quality of the mentor that involves awareness of the fact that he or she is still a work-in-progress, still moving towards authenticity and deeper wisdom (McCreath, 2014). Anderson and Reese (1999) in describing spiritual formation as an education of the heart, gives spiritual mentoring as one of the basics in such formation. They see this form of mentoring as not just the traditional western forms of instruction, but something that transcends it to a mentorship of the heart, a relationship with a teacher of life who is able to convey or pass on what has been handed over. This is possible not just by doing but by being (McCreath, 2014).

Having been employed in different cultural milieu, mentoring played an active part in developmental relationships and became a vehicle for the transmission and preservation of knowledge and development of future leadership (Darwin, 2000). For a definition, we can define mentoring as “a method of teaching and learning that occurs amongst all types of individuals across all kinds of knowledge bases and settings. In the workplace mentoring

normally consists of teaching, giving feedback, coaching on the job, counseling through change, and structuring ongoing contact over a designated time period ([www.gclearning.com](http://www.gclearning.com)). After an analysis of various definitions of mentoring, Terblanché (2007) highlights three elements of mentoring namely:

1. A reference to individual people, one person interacting with another person (mentor and protégé);
2. The involvement of some kind of supportive action – i.e. guidance, support, advice, learning, coaching and counseling and;
3. Promoting professional and personal development.

### **Who is a mentor?**

Terblanché (2007) also gives the mentor and the mentee or protégé as the two main role players in the process of mentoring. Summarizing the meaning of a mentor, the writer highlighted the following qualities:

1. A person who guides another (the protégé) to avenues of success;
2. A person who will ask the question: “How can I help you so that you can become what you want to be?”
3. Someone who understands the role and will meet the protégé’s needs;
4. Someone knowledgeable and respected;
5. A person who listens and is a problem solver;
6. Someone who is able to take on the role as guide, guiding the protégé through the hurdles towards success;
7. Someone who is sensitive and understands the needs of the protégé and;

8. Someone with excellent interpersonal communication skills.

The mentor is someone who exposes the following specific characteristics:

1. One with people-orientated skills;
2. A good motivator – to inspire the protégé;
3. An effective teacher who is able to not only teach the “skills of the trade” but also manages the learning process of the protégé;
4. An achiever who sets career goals, continuously evaluates these goals and strives to reach them and;
5. Respects others and specifically shows regard for another’s well being.

Qualities essential in an effective mentor are: A desire to help, positive experiences, a good reputation to develop others, time and energy, up-to-date knowledge and a positive learning attitude. Others include effective managerial skills, a questioning outlook, active listening abilities, persistence, non-autocratic approach, honesty and patience.

### **Who is being mentored?**

The protégé is the person who is being mentored.

The protégé must:

1. Respect and trust the mentor to establish a caring relationship;
2. Understand that the relationship is mutual in terms of both persons gaining from the opportunity;
3. Be willing to enter into a mentoring relationship;
4. Listen to advice and respond appropriately and;
5. Be committed and willing to learn.

The protégé should expose the following characteristics:

1. An eagerness to learn new skills/knowledge and to develop existing skills and abilities;
2. The ability to work as a team player;
3. Must be willing to put time and effort into the relationship (patience);
4. Must be willing to travel from a “safe harbour” into the seas of uncertainty (i.e. take some risk);
5. Reflect a positive attitude (A bright and hopeful attitude can help a protégé to succeed);
6. Commitment and;
7. Self-confidence.

The above qualities and characteristics of mentors and protégés are the building blocks of successful mentoring relationships (Terblanché 2007). Taking a look at the above understanding of mentoring, there is no doubt that the case of mentoring was ongoing in different ways in our traditional African society and that such has been handed on in various ways to the present time. It wouldn't be out of place if consecrated persons applied this rich

### **Theoretical basis for mentoring young people**

Several psychological theories can be a springboard for the development of the idea of mentoring. For this work however, the researcher chose some aspects of developmental psychology that deal with some elements in the psycho-social developmental theory of Eric Erickson. This was further supported by some aspects of the social cognitive theory of Albert Bandura.

Erickson (1982) presents eight levels of major life crises which he believes every individual faces during the course of one's life. These crises or conflicts emerge and are dictated by both biological maturation and the social demands that developing people encounter. These crises must be well negotiated or fixation may arise. In cases of fixation, these crises will reoccur at a certain point later in the life of the individual. Of particular interest here are the crises of identity versus role confusion that occurs between the ages of 12 and 20, and the crises of intimacy versus isolation that occurs between the ages of 20 and 40 years or what can be called young adulthood.

This developmental stage has been given new looks with the modern concept of emerging adulthood in developmental psychology found in the work of Jensen Jeffrey Arnett. By emerging adulthood, Arnett (2000), who recognized its theoretical and empirical distinction from adolescence and young adulthood, distinguished this stage by relative independence from social roles and from normative expectations. Having left the dependency of childhood and adolescence, and having not yet entered the enduring responsibilities that are normative in adulthood, emerging adults (with a focus on ages 18-25) often explore a variety of possible life directions in love, work, and worldviews. He therefore sees emerging adulthood as "a time of life when many different directions remain possible, when little about the future has been decided for certain, when the scope of independent exploration of life's possibilities is greater for most people than it will be at any other period of the life course."

In the case of identity versus role confusion, Erickson (1982) sees this as the crossroad between childhood and maturity where the question, 'who am I?' occupies the mind of the adolescent and of which they must establish a basic social and occupational identities. If not done, the adolescents remain confused about the roles they should play as adults. During this period, the individual may occasionally fall back or select from potential selves in the society that present themselves at that point in time as role models.

Fleming (2004) observes that teens at this stage learn to define and invent themselves. Identities are tried out like new suits of clothes. Role models may be parents, teachers, coaches, film stars, athletes, or "outlaws." Owing to this, there is the need for society to present adequate and veritable models for these young people to emulate. Among the mechanisms given by Fleming as one of the ways of coping with this stage is positive role identity where the individual has a sense of really knowing who one is and in general, where one is headed in life. This he distinguished from the usual foreclosure, moratorium and identity diffusion which are other ways the individual may want to use to cope in this crisis (Fleming, 2004).

Furthermore, Erickson viewed the attainment of a stable identity as a prerequisite for establishing the next stage which is the crisis of intimacy versus isolation (Erickson, 1982). This stage is characterized by the desire to form strong friendships and to establish a strong sense of love with another individual. A feeling of loneliness or isolation might be the end result of a poor negotiation with this stage. The socio-

cultural theory of the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky that focuses on how the culture (the values, beliefs, customs and skills) of a social group is transmitted to the next generation buttresses the point of the need for a veritable social interaction that can enhance this identity formation among these emerging adults. According to Vygotsky (1978), social interaction which involves a cooperative dialogue with more knowledgeable members of society is necessary for children to acquire the ways of thinking and behaving that make up a community's culture. This identity formation of the emerging adults called seminarians was the crux of this work with a plan to see if mentoring in human formation can help in this matter.

The social cognitive theory of Albert Bandura gives backing to the idea of mentoring. His concepts of triadic reciprocal determinism and observational learning give credence to this fact. Shifting from the previous focus on learning through reinforcement proposed by behaviorists like Skinner (1953), Bandura opines that individuals can learn by mere observation of the behavior of a social model. This he proved through the famous Bobo doll experiment (Bandura et al, 1963). In response to criticisms that the social modeling does not lead to innovations since it does not build cognitive skills but encourages imitation that produces response mimicry, Bandura posits that cognitive development is possible in individuals. He holds that individuals are able to create cognitive symbols of their experiences and make meaning out of it. Using the concept of the triadic reciprocal determinism, he rejects the fact that human behavior has previously been explained in terms of one-sided determinism where behavior

is often seen as being shaped by either environmental influences or by internal disposition. For him, behavioral factors, cognition and other personal factors, and environmental influences all operate as interacting determinants that influence each other bi-directionally (Bandura, 1989).

On human nature, Bandura (1989) asserts that human nature is characterized by vast potentiality that can be fashioned by direct and vicarious experiences into a variety of forms within biological limits. He sees humans as having the unparalleled capability to become many things. The qualities that are cultivated and the life paths that realistically become open to them are partly determined by the nature of the cultural agencies to which their development is entrusted. Social systems that cultivate generalized competences, create opportunity structure, provide aidful resources, and allow room for self-directedness increase the chances that people will realize what they wish to become (Bandura, 1989). The idea of mentoring consecrated persons in order to enhance mutual relations can be drawn for the above theories of human behavior.

### **Mentoring among consecrated persons**

Mentoring among consecrated persons is simply making the right matches between experienced consecrated persons and less experienced consecrated persons in a formal way in which such matches are meant to enhance the mutual development of the parties that are involved in this dyadic relationship. In such a case, the protégé who is the less experienced consecrated person has a lot to learn from the

experience of the mentor in relation to living out the consecrated life. In whatever way we want to see it, young people learn from adults and this can either be good or bad. What we have to do as adults is to ensure that they learn the good and live it out. Mentoring here will then involve a formal process where the younger person who is a mentee or a protégé learns the values of the consecrated life from the older person who will be playing the role of a mentor. The younger persons will always learn something anyways. Mentoring will ensure they have good models to learn from.

There is no doubt that Jesus is to be the model of the consecrated person. The art of mentoring in this regard does not rule out this fact but rather enhances it through the help of persons who know the struggles and the wobbles, the joys and the pains, the nooks and the crannies of the consecrated life. The protégé emulates Jesus through the mentor who must be trained to accompany the protégé in living the life expected by Jesus. The mentor must have through years of experience, acquired the skills of mutual relations and will in turn pass it on to the protégé who must be willing to acquire them.

We might want to say that such accompaniment is found in the formation process of those of the consecrated life through spiritual direction and other schemes used by different formation houses to help accompany the young ones in formation. However, it has been discovered that factors like fear, lack of communication, confidentiality issues, and theology of the tunnel (an unfortunate situation where a person in formation keeps to himself or herself and pretends

all through till he or she is professed or ordained after which he or she begins to manifest some awkward behavioral patterns that could have been dealt with if only he or she opened up) have all been bottlenecks in accompanying people in formation. As such, we can say that spiritual direction for the seminarians is not enough. There is need for them to address existential human needs so as to ensure that they “utilize those aspects of our humanity that attract people to salvation. And ceaselessly try to cleanse from our humanity those dark, nasty, unpleasant traits that scare, shock, distract or hurt people.” (Dolan, 2000, p. 158-159)

This can only be possible when there is trust, friendship, openness, understanding and greater awareness on both parties on the need to develop the self. A good mentoring relationship can guarantee such with the right atmosphere created. As such we can say that proper mentoring can be used to enhance mutual relations among consecrated persons. This will be based on the principle of genuine friendship greased by love and not just mere tolerance. In most cases, consecrated persons who live together just tolerate one another. This is counter-witnessing to the mission entrusted to them by Christ. In situations where the cup of tolerance becomes full, scandalous actions are manifested because in the real sense there has been no love. Mentors can teach protégés how to love and not merely tolerate their fellow brothers and sisters in the community.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the theories we have above, we can see that there is a responsibility on older people to inculcate the right ideas in

the minds of the younger generation. If not done, the younger generation will always find a way out and in situations as such, it can be dangerous for them. One of the ways this can be achieved is through proper modeling for the young. And when it comes to consecrated persons, we can say this is necessary especially in terms of human formation that is meant to enhance mutual relations. There is some imbalance in the formation where human formation has been suffocated at the gains or quest for intellectual and spiritual formation. Dolan (2000) in acknowledging this imbalance and calling for a balance observed that "...we stress the spiritual and intellectual life. ... I am proud that we get high marks in these two areas. ... But this will not help much if the human qualities are not as refined and attractive. What good will the prayer and learning be for the priest whose personality repels people?" (p. 148)

As such, if we want to develop healthy mutual relations among members of the consecrated life, it must begin way long from the beginning through formal mentoring that can help eliminate fear in formation, confidentiality issues, lack of communication and the ugly theology of the tunnel that have become bottlenecks in the formation of young people. This will in turn help address lots of issues hinging on the deficient human formation received by consecrated persons. Proper and formal mentoring then can be a tool that can be used to develop young people whose search for identity can be exploited in the rightful ways. This will bring them to a better version of themselves and of the life they are called to live and in turn will enhance better mutual relations among consecrated persons.

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## **MUTUAL RELATIONS BETWEEN THE CONSECRATED PERSON AND THE AGED: DISTURBING LEAKS AND OBVIOUS LINKS**

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### **1. In the beginning**

Religious life is not all about values pertaining to a life hereafter; rather, it is more of a vocation to address the challenge and struggle to live openly, creatively and responsibly in the here and now of our earthly ambience. We are called to a mission to be at the heart of creation in what we now understand to be one world (about which the afterlife is one dimension), ensuring a luminal witness to those values which endure – into that fullness of life which our hearts earnestly seeks. Thus, the 1981 Vatican document, *Religious and Human Advancement*<sup>1</sup>, maintains that the religious are called to become signs of communion for the world. As it is only in communion, in a communitarian ambience can we appropriate and internalise our call to be in Trinitarian relatedness, proclaimed and instituted in the life and mission of Christ Jesus.

As such, at a time when the consecrated person is gradually been understood in terms of ‘function’, than what s/he is, and so caring so much to maintain a ‘wonderful’ facade outside only to go home to a ‘leaky’ roof; it has become very vital that we look at the obvious threat to the foundation of our common call: the relations in the community between the consecrated person and the aged.

## **2. Understanding the Consecrated Life**

Several passages in the Hebrew and Christian bibles have allusions to the consecrated life. Although consecration is the first basic experience of our service to God, we do not have many direct teachings in the bible concerning it.

On the basis of consecration, 2Cor. 5:14-15 clearly points out the constraining power of the God's love as the basis for God's children to live unto Him who died for us. A man lives unto the Lord because he is constrained by God's love. The word 'constrained' translated as 'pressed on from all sides', would mean tightly bound and wrapped up. As such, love has bound us up, and we cannot run away. When a person is in love, he or she experiences a sense of bondage. In same light, we are bound by God; what he has done, what he is doing and what he will do. As such, love is the basis of consecration. But, no one can be consecrated unless he or she is first touched by God's love; for only then can consecration spontaneously follow. Again, following from love being the basis of consecration, is the understanding that it is equally a right. It is the right God has over us, for in and through his son; he bought us over from damnation. Thus, St. Paul in 1Cor.6:19-20, especially, hints on the fact of our willingly giving our freedom to God courtesy of the ransom he paid with his life. Thus, consecration lives on the basis of the interplay between love and right: out of love for God, as a response to his love, we pledge dedication to him; from the fact of ransoming us, he has right to having us to himself.

However, being constrained by love or acknowledging God's right over us does not, as it were constitute consecration. The 'constraining' is only a step that brings to consecration. It is

an invitation to a realization, a separation from every other thing or person; a detachment to be attached, that constitutes consecration, a reception of holy service, of the ministry of serving God. This is the *apertural* understanding that creates a deeper appreciation of some biblical passages (Ex.28:1-2, 29:1, 4, 9-10; 19:5-6, Num.3:11-13,18:7, Lev. 8,Rev.1:5-6,Mk.10:21, Jn.15:16,Gal.2:20) that pertains to consecration. In these passages, the occurring issue remains that it is God who consecrates - calls and chooses. As such, our consecration is as a result of God's graciousness. This has implications.

First, consecrated life is an adventure. It is a journey along which we contemplate the beginnings of an event initiated by Christ (Jn. 15:16). It is a life of invitation to make our whole life a pilgrimage of loving transformation. It is thus, one of continuing 'exodus' from ourselves so that we centre our lives on Christ and his Gospel, on the will of God; laying aside our own 'wonderful' plans, in order to mean and say with St. Paul: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20).

Second, the consecrated life is a call to incarnate the Gospel, sharing in Christ's risks and hopes, to become *Christi-fied*. This is so much so that, a consecrated person becomes a historical mark of the action of the Most Blessed Trinity in history, waking up the world to God's love and beauty, making the life not only a gift to the Church but also a decisive element of her mission<sup>2</sup>. This is the background that appropriately situates the evangelical counsels as bridges to encountering God, to discovering the real values that fulfils the heart, enlightens the mind and inspires joy in the spirit.

The evangelical counsels give the consecrated life and living, a theological foundation and their natural implications. Such that, the consecrated life and person proclaims what the Father, through the Son and in the spirit, brings about by his love, goodness and beauty<sup>3</sup>. Hence, for the consecrated person chastity is not just renunciation, but more of a response to a total love for God and others. It becomes a vow of relatedness<sup>4</sup>. A life of complete openness of heart, and self, to all humanity; a sign of the beauty of fidelity. Poverty for the consecrated person becomes an audacious confession of and testimony to the fact that God is the human being's one and enduring treasure. A proclamation of stewardship of what we have, of the fact that we are made for God alone, and understanding with Blaise Pascal that, 'man infinitely exceeds man'. That is to say, our realities as persons do not and cannot in themselves have the capacity to completely fulfil us human beings. Then, obedience understood as the vow of partnership; opens the consecrated person towards discovering the realm of true freedom. It liberates us from the imprisonment which our ego, and our 'what I want' usually brings. It introduces and sustains us within the field of God dependence, delivering true freedom (Jn.8:31-32).

Therefore, understanding consecration as always one of God's initiative and consecrated life as an invitation to incarnate the Good news; community life and living as such is the most essential Gospel, the believable Good news we are called to preach. It only when we make living with others, a communion, *a family-ing*; can the consecrated life be a "sign of joy"<sup>5</sup>.

### **3. Consecrated persons and the aged: disturbing leaks and obvious links**

According to the sociologist Peter Berger<sup>6</sup>, every worldview or institution requires a social structure or foundation that renders it believable. Such a structure is called a “plausibility structure”<sup>7</sup>. This structure speaks not so much to cold logic as it does to our intuitive selves. For instance, although it may be logically possible that a certain religion is true even though its adherents are known for the evil behaviour, it is nonetheless certain that such behaviour tends to render the religion less plausible.

In these days when fragmentation justifies widespread sterile individualism and when the weakness of relationships breaks up and ruins the care of the human person, it has become important to humanize community life and living; especially by looking at the relations between aged and not-aged consecrated persons.

#### **3.1 Disturbing Leaks**

The perception of old age as a stage of decline, in which human and social inadequacy is taken as expected, is as it were, widespread today. Yet, this is a stereotype. It falls short of considering a situation that is in practice far more diversified. This is because aged people are not a homogenous group, and old age is felt in many different ways.

There is no doubt the fact that there are aged consecrated persons, who being able to capture the significance of old age in the context of human existence, and confronting it with

serenity and dignity sees in it a time of life which provides an aperture for growth and commitment. Also, there are some, unfortunately many, who seeing old age as traumatic an experience as to make them become and remain pessimistic; passively resign to rebellious, rejectionary and despairing attitudes. Locking themselves up, and thus self-marginalizing themselves, making relations difficult, rather quicken their own mental and physical decay.

Point is, certain barriers exist that makes mutual relations between aged and not-aged consecrated persons difficult. On the part of the aged consecrated persons, such leaks include:

### **1. Feeling being discriminated against**

In most religious communities aged members perceive their advance in age as one that disadvantages them, especially those of them that have deep inferiority complex. The presence of the younger ones creates a threat for them, and so at gatherings for example, they feel that any talk or word about the congregation and about the founder and what he wants; that does not come from them is not authentic. Often, this feeling of being discriminated against gets to the point that they became rebellious, criticising everything and everybody. This is itself as such, could hamper any meaningful interaction with them as they remain resolve in this misunderstanding.

### **2. Scrupulous disposition**

There is no doubt that the aged consecrated person represents a 'historical memory' of the younger generation of consecrated persons. Yet, most aged consecrated persons often tend to tenaciously have this disposition that everything

about the younger generation is evil. For such persons, everything outside of them is evil, and so the world had better be destroyed; and as dangerous as this manner of thinking can be, having such a person in a formation house can and do mean the overloading of the people formed with pessimistic view of life and living, a dampening of their youthful energy to mission. As a fruit of such disposition, most people begin the life in the community struggling for punctual pleasures to weather the 'all about suffering' definition they were indoctrinated the religious life is. Truth is, such scrupulous disposition not only signifies immature pastoral fatherhood or motherhood, it equally makes the community less of a family, and of course losing it as a "sign of joy"<sup>8</sup>.

### **3. Judgemental**

If the task of the consecrated life and living is to wake up the world<sup>9</sup>, the method would include by closeness and encounter. Closeness, here, meaning caring for people with meet, giving them opportunities to open up themselves; while encounter would mean giving them opportunities to get close to the consecrated life to encounter the richness of the Gospel. However, a noticeable air being judgemental is often associated with aged consecrated persons. This, can and do impel mutual relations with them. Sequel to scrupulosity in conscience, they tend to approach most matters with a *curative ethics*. There is already a judgement delivered before having the facts!

Of course, this is what the aged consecrated person MUST know: today's not-aged consecrated persons are brought up

in cultures which do not pretend to answer questions about the meaning of life. They are in search of reference points, for a faith, and for company in faith. They yearn not only for an explicit faith but also for an intense community of faith and strong mutual support<sup>10</sup>. They want the example and edification of the elder brothers and sisters. They sense that the failures of priests and religious which often fill the new media are not merely individual failures, but cultural failures, our failures as a group. They do not, and are not intending to, desire to become part of a suffocating tribe, but neither are do they want to be a collection of atoms, lovely marbles loosely contiguous in a box.

Like the pictures along the stairway in captioned Big Brother is watching, in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*<sup>11</sup>, some aged consecrated person judgemental attitudes stifles religious life of its communion character, making it a purgatory instead of a family. This goes a long way to not only kill effective communication, it quickens the death reciprocity, a sense of obligation, altruism and feeling of attachment, which are motivations for caring for the elderly<sup>12</sup>. However, on the part of other consecrated persons certain factors hinder effective relations with the aged.

### **1. Marginalization**

As a result of rampaging materialism, of a cultivation of material success and glamour and glossy image of today's perennial not-aged consecrated persons, there is the tendency of a throw away culture. There is hardly anyone who has time for aged persons. Aged consecrated persons have been subjected to loneliness, isolation. And as their interpersonal and social contacts are diminished, so their lives are

simultaneously impoverished. Their feeling of abandonment not only creates in them a sense of impotence as regards changing their situation and so gradually loose sense of belonging to the community, it largely points to negation of the filial responsibility<sup>13</sup> that constitutes the anthropological value of the consecrated life<sup>14</sup>.

## **2. No on-going education**

The greatest virus of our age is the reinforcing of the close affinity between education and professional activity. In such terrain, the growing aspirations of the aged are ignored, after all, their level of education and training are no longer geared towards the labour market, and so what is the need of educational programmes for them. Yet, it is by living in state of permanent formation that we are able to extend our horizons and understand the profound causes of events<sup>15</sup> if we must offer responsible, timely prophetic intervention. Aged consecrated persons are often left out in this! Aged consecrated persons must be given a chance to do something, to express their creativity.

## **3.2 Obvious Links...**

Community life is the most essential gospel, the believable Good news we are called to preach. Such that, how we live there tells how we have internalize the Good news we carry. It is not new that, modern man "listens more willingly to witness than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses"<sup>16</sup>.

Mutual relation between the aged and the consecrated persons constitute a vital threshold of consecrated life and

living. It enshrines the richness of our filial responsibility in care-giving. The fact that late life is commonly a period of transition and adjustment to looses<sup>17</sup> invites our disposition as missionaries. A missionary heart is a heart that has known the joys of Christ salvation and shares it as consolation, and given that our consecrated life matures towards pastoral fatherhood and motherhood, ageing in the consecrated life and living becomes a process to be cherished; and a stage to be desired.

The aged consecrated person must engage in dialogue with younger generations. This is because in such fraternal communion, the younger generation will be enriched by their experiences and wisdom, and simultaneously be inspired by them by their energy and enthusiasm to recapture and embellish their original idealism. For it is only in this way that the entire community can join in seeking and finding new horizons of living the Good news and responding more usefully to the need for witness and proclamation<sup>18</sup>. And how can this come to be if there is no recognition that aged consecrated persons can make possible contribution their charisms (Ps. 92:14) of:

### **1. Disinterestedness**

This encourages them to give especially themselves with any thought of a return. This enables an indifference that encourages and enhances altruism in the young.

### **2. Memory**

As representing 'historical memories' for the younger generations, they are the bearers of fundamental human values, they are enabled to rekindle a historical sense, rooting

the younger generations and providing them with the capacity to project themselves with hope towards the future that transcends the limits of the present; and so maintain a sense of identity (Ps.44:2)

### **3. Experience**

With their experience, they are enabled to dismantle the cultural barrier being imposed by science and technology that tends to make experience obsolete ( Lk.1:5-25,1Cor. 1:27-29, Rom. 4:18-20) and fuel relativism.

### **4. Interdependence**

This opens the aged to draw us out of the swallowing dungeon of individualism and self-seeking. Such that, taking us in their search for companionship to the social make up of the human being thereby repairing and restructuring the fragmented interpersonal and social relationships.

### **5. Simplicity and contemplation**

These provide a more complete vision of life to our distracted world. It ensures us home to the way of sense of responsibility, faith in God, friendship, disinterest in power, prudence, patience and the superiority of 'being' over 'having'.

Truth is, as medicine is moving away from curative to preventive approach, a healthy relations with aged consecrated persons importantly being a privileged dimension of the healing mission of the religious life prevents many "psychic wounds, cures others and has many positive psychosomatic values"<sup>19</sup>. The painful feelings of being no

longer of use to anyone, of isolation and loneliness, and the gradual experience of more and more discomfort from failing sense, sight, hearing and mobility not only cry out for the “good Samaritan”<sup>20</sup>; but also an invitation to rediscover in the aged consecrated persons the possibility of an inexhaustible portal wounded healers who, similar to the ‘elders’ of the early Church, are very willing to bring their life-experience and their generosity creatively into the life of the community.

#### **4. At the End**

At a time when rampaging materialism and lack of care charges to frustrate consecrated life and living with a culture of throw-away, it has become an emergency to reframe our religious life by re-appropriating our universal story as people called to ‘a sacred pilgrimage’<sup>21</sup> to mirror the Blessed Trinity to the world, and by transcending religious categories to realising that we are consecrated for communion and encounter. This means that living beyond the temptation to see people and things in terms of numbers and efficiency, we must be watchful and awake (Rom. 13:11-14) to remember that a healthy and mutual relations with the aged defines the weight of our filial responsibility. This is especially so to the extent we endeavour to communicate and deepen our insights on aging, the role of elders, their problems and potentialities. Also, it is pertinent to know that this must not mean a one-sided approach.

The younger generation need to be kept in focus to sustain the mutuality of the relations. Attitudes towards them that tend to see them as always ‘disposed’ to the profane, as harbouring the tendency to pervert as in George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*<sup>22</sup>, the purity of the original doctrine that led to

the revolution, dehydrates their zeal and dampen their enthusiasm. Truth is, to ensure mutual relations with aged persons in the religious life; we cannot offer the younger ones a life of unconnected individuals when they are hungry for intense community life. We cannot usher and keep them into a group whose spirit is static overly secular when they are itching to be a scourge upon the world with the counter-culture of the Gospel<sup>23</sup>.

So, the responsibility today for the religious life is to help the aged grasp the sense of old age, to appreciate its resources, and to overcome the temptation to reject it, and so succumb to self-isolation, resignation and a feeling of uselessness and despair.

We need a new definition of freedom as an enrichment arising from taking up responsibility for each other in community.

## Endnotes

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18. Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter to All Consecrated People on the occasion of the year of Consecrated Life, November 21, 2014, n.3.
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20. E.W. Marvin, *Planning for the Elderly* (Philadelphia, 1978); A. Fontana, *The Last Frontier: The Social Meaning of Growing Old* (London, 1977).
21. Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November, 2013), n.87
22. George Orwell, *Animal Farm*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1946).  
The book is a biting satire of totalitarianism, written in the wake of WWII. Although it tells a fairly simple story of barnyard animals trying to manage themselves after rebelling against their masters, the novella shows how easily good intentions can be subverted into manipulations and tyranny.
23. Albert Dilanni, *Religious Life as an Adventure*, 153-54.