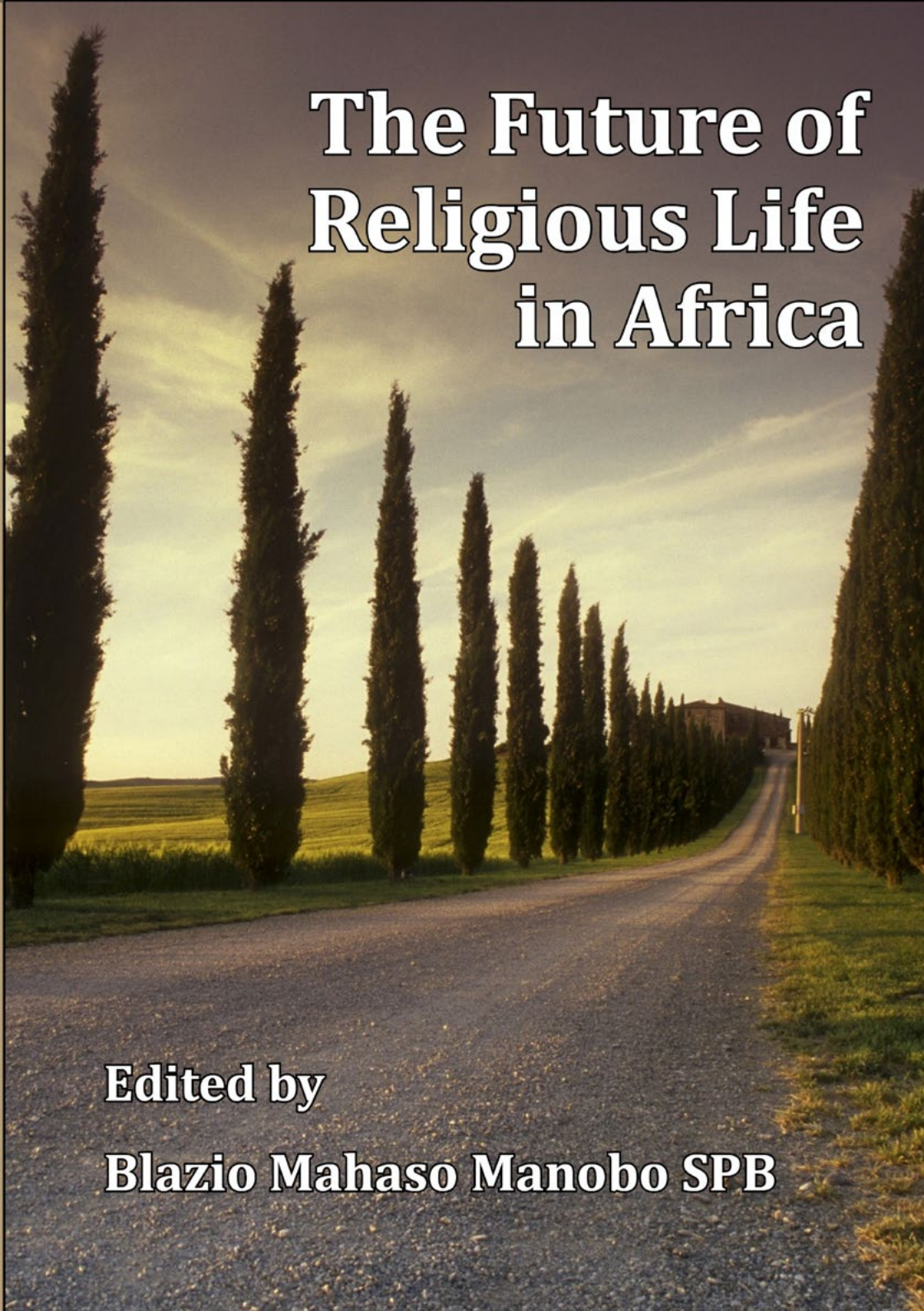


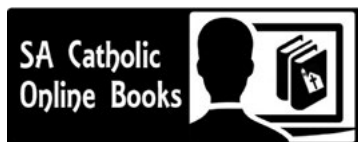


The Future of Religious Life in Africa

Edited by

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THE FUTURE OF RELIGIOUS LIFE IN AFRICA

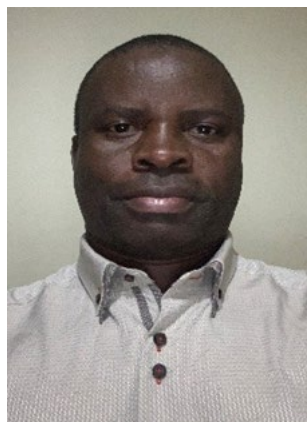
Trials and Vision

**Compiled by
Blazio Mahaso Manobo SPB**



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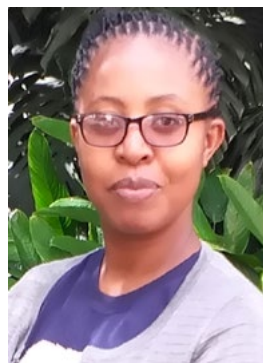


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1. UISG (International Union of Superiors General) is a worldwide, canonically approved organisation of Superiors General of Institutes of Catholic Women Religious

2. Association of Consecrated Women in Eastern and Central Africa, (ACWECA)

Acknowledgements

The need for contributions to literature on religious life in Africa was born out of the difficulties experienced by students of formation programmes trying to address modern challenges. Using existing literature on religious life, including ecclesial documents, this work sought to reflect religious life from a contextual situation in Africa. This is not the work of one person or group of people, but derives its content from across the African continent and also includes contributions from America. We would like to thank all the chapter authors who took their time to make this immense contribution to literature on religious life. They are the owners of this work.

Furthermore, we wish to acknowledge the support of the Conference of Major Religious Superiors of Zimbabwe. Without their motivation, this work would not have been achieved. We greatly appreciate the wise guidance of our reviewers Susan Duncan and Peter Walsh, and thank them for their important comments. May you all find grace and joy in your vocations.

Introduction

The Future of Religious Life in Africa: Trials and Visions is a reflection on the role of consecrated life today and in the future.

Religious life is undergoing great trials from several global influencing factors and the rise of liberal democracy. At the same time, the same globalisation is bringing new opportunities for consecrated life. The challenge of our generation is to provide a credible witness of our faith in Jesus Christ in the service of the mission of the Church.

Speaking in the context of the role of consecrated life in the Church, Pope Francis unequivocally acknowledged that prophecy of the kingdom is non-negotiable. Religious men and women are called to a prophetic life. This means, “Prophets receive from God the ability to scrutinize the times in which they live and to interpret events; they are like sentinels who keep watch in the night and sense the coming of the dawn” (Pope Francis. Apostolic letter to all consecrated people on the occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life. November 21, 2014, §2). The 21st century presents both challenges and opportunities for religious life in Africa. The question is: How can religious men and women live their consecrated life in Africa today against the changing circumstances of their apostolic work? According to Pope Francis, institutional charisms are long lasting while apostolic works usually change with contexts. This calls for inculturating and contextualising the charisms of institutes of religious life in order to remain relevant in the global changing world of today.

In his apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (1996, §27), Pope John Paul II retorts that “by their charisms, consecrated persons become signs of the Spirit pointing to a new future enlightened by faith and by Christian hope”.

He further invited Institutes of Consecrated Life to courageously propose anew the enterprising initiative, creativity and holiness of their founders and foundresses in response to the signs of the times emerging in today's world. It is in this spirit that the role of creatively redefining religious life in the 21st century becomes a matter of priority. Addressing a seminar on Women Religious of America, Sr Janet Ruffing RSM (Leadership Conference of Women Religious, August 1993) laments that the current research on religious life employs images of confusion and chaos, of diminishment and decline, of lack of focus, of invisibility.

Against this background, this book, *The Future of Consecrated Life in Africa Today: Trials and Vision*, tries to address various themes on religious life viewed from the modern perspective. Each theme addresses an aspect of religious life. The objective of this book is to proffer some reflections on our life as consecrated persons in Africa. May God bless you with wisdom and revelation as you reflect on your life as a Christian.

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CHAPTER 1

The Status of Consecrated Life in Africa

By
Blazio M Manobo SPB

Introduction

Consecrated life is a life of encounter with Jesus that takes place within the people of God and within the community.

Pope Francis has noted that it is unimaginable to conceive of an African Church without consecrated men and women. African encounter with consecrated life has roots in the missionary efforts of the 19th century even though there were earlier attempts prior to the missionary era. This effectively means that consecrated life has been in existence in Africa for more than a century, driven by the charisms of the founding fathers of the Church. As we assess the impact of consecrated life in Africa for the past century, various questions come to mind.

Are vocations to consecrated life increasing in Africa and with what significance, if any? Is this form of encounter with Christ still relevant in the 21st century? Has the classical understanding of evangelical vows changed? What has been the impact of globalisation on this form of encounter with Jesus Christ? Is there a new way of being sent apart from consecrated life? These are some of the questions calling for innovative approaches to consecrated life in Africa (*Mekkunnel, 2012*).

This chapter takes a historical-critical and hermeneutic approach to consecrated life in Africa. It does not seek to provide answers to the mystery of consecrated life. Rather, the chapter aims to raise critical questions that require ongoing theological reflections in order to keep the emblem of consecrated life in Africa alight. It is a call to re-imagine the consecrated apostolic life in Africa today. If the claim that Africa and Asia are the only continents that are currently experiencing an increase in vocations is anything to go by, then the Church in Africa has the duty to protect this sacred privilege and avoid the pitfalls of other continents (*Ngundo, 2017*).

Against this background, this chapter first provides the three models of consecrated life, then proceeds to present a bird's-eye view of the status of consecrated life in Africa and finally moves on to discuss the opportunities and challenges of consecrated life with a deliberate focus on Africa, before envisioning the future.

The Three Models of Consecrated Life

Theologians have deduced three models of consecrated life in the life of the Church since the beginning of the Christian faith. These include the classical model, the liberal model and the radical prophetic model.

The classical model is a formalised way of life characterised by its high regard for discipline among consecrated persons. This is manifested in strict observance of the 'Rule of Life'. Uniformity is taken as a testimony of one's vocation. In this model, members are expected to live ascetic lives. Over the years, this has been the model for consecrated life in the Church. The model is credited for producing great men and women of faith through its emphasis on discipline, prayer and commitment to the Church. Unfortunately the model, relevant as it is, finds criticism for being too formal and unresponsive to the demands of the modern 21st century consecrated person.

While the classical model still exists among some communities, it was largely replaced by the liberal model of consecrated life

which appears to be the opposite of the former model. The liberal model prioritises the needs and aspirations of the consecrated person above the demands for asceticism and discipline. This is a shift from a church-centred consecrated life to a person-centred approach to apostolic ministry. By taking a person-centred approach, the model does not deny nor intend to underestimate the significance of the Church from which consecrated life finds its meaning. Unfortunately, the model came with several challenges, chief among them being the loss of religious contemplation. The deep sense of religious consecration was lost, and consecrated life was reduced to its practical significance only.

The loss of religious significance has led to the development of the new radical prophetic model where there is an urgent call to return to the foundation of our faith. In this model, there is a push for a radical following of Christ and for putting him at the centre of consecrated lives. This model is gaining support among young people who have become fed up with the formality of the classical model and the laxity of the liberal model. The consecrated radical following of the Christ model embraces the contemplation and mysticism of the classical model with the quest for a prophetic presence among the oppressed, the poor and the underprivileged. However, it is important to note that these three models sometimes exist concurrently in many institutes of consecrated life. This often results in tensions, ambiguities and despair. However, it is from this background that the future of consecrated life should be envisioned.

The Vocation Status of Consecrated life in Africa

A vocation to consecrated life in the Catholic Church is “a special form of sharing in Christ’s prophetic office, which the Holy Spirit communicates to the whole People of God”.¹ It invites us to willingly embrace the temporary inevitabilities of modern life and face new circumstances and encounters as they emerge.

1. JOHN PAUL II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (25th March 1996, p 84).

In this vigilant pilgrimage, it preserves the search for the face of God as disciples sent by Jesus to a secularised world, penurious, vicious and multicultural (Arregui, 2011). *Lumen Gentium* puts it even clearer and states that consecrated life is a gift of holiness to the Church received from the Lord and preserved in all eras by His grace.² Every year, the Church receives new active vocations to consecrated life in all its forms while at the same time losing others through death and separations.

According to *Agenzia Fides*,³ 2018 World Mission Day statistics, the total number of Religious priests decreased by 1,004 units to a total 133,138 throughout the world compared to the previous year, 2017. Increases were registered in Africa (+ 198) and in Asia (+ 560), while America (- 769), Europe (- 972) and Oceania (- 21) recorded decreases. The same trend was recorded among women religious who decreased overall by 10,885 units to 659,445. However, despite the overall decrease, an increase was registered in Africa (+943) and Asia (+533), while America (-3,775), Europe (-8,370) and Oceania (-216) had significant decreases. In the same context, the members of male secular institutes recorded an overall decrease (-79), with marginal increases in Africa (+2) and Asia (+4) and decreases in America (-77) and Europe (-8). Members of female secular institutes decreased by 459 units to a total of 22,400 members with an increase only in Africa (+113), while America (-33), Asia (-35), Europe (-502) and Oceania (-2) recorded decreases (*Agenzia Fides*, 2018).

Table 1: The Status of Consecrated Persons in the Church by

2. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 43.

3. *Agenzia Fides* is the news agency of the Vatican. It is based in the Palazzo de Propaganda Fide in Vatican City and is part of the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples.

October 2018⁴

	Religious Priest	Religious Brothers	Religious Sisters	Secular Institutes
Africa	13,708 (+198)	8,731 (-50)	72,510 (+943)	1,219 (+115)
America	37,618 (-769)	14,818 (-503)	168,178 (-3,775)	5,590 (-110)
Asia	28,296 (+560)	12,320 (-373)	171,829 (+533)	1,912 (-31)
Europe	51,609 (972)	15,390 (-614)	239,373 (-8,370)	14,258 (-510)
Oceania	1,907 (-21)	1,366 (-64)	7,555 (-216)	39 (-2)
Total	133,138 (-1,004)	52,625 (-1,604)	659,445 (-10,885)	23,018 (-539)

Source: *Agenzia Fides*, 2018

Three critical issues for reflection emerge from this data. First, these statistics indicate an overall decrease in the number of vocations to consecrated life when compared to the previous year, 2017. However, Africa seems to register increases in almost all the categories except in the vocation to a consecrated brotherhood. This begs the question: how long is Africa going to sustain this momentum, given the current global influences? Does this suggest, the gospel of Christ is evoking deeper contemplation among young people within the African continent? Do these statistics provide answers to the deeper meanings and challenges of consecrated life? Here, I will concur with Arregui (2011) that the significance of being truly prophetic does not lie in numbers, given that God works best in weakness. Prophetic witness lies in the fact that Jesus continues to be present in our world today and consecrated life is a witness to this reality.

Second, the statistics show a common trend about the decrease in the vocation to Religious Brotherhood. The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, in the document *Identity and Mission of the Religious Brother in the Church* (2015), while acknowledging that the vocation of the Religious Brother is not always understood and appreciated, asserted that Religious Brothers, by participating in the saving

4. http://www.fides.org/en/stats/64944-VATICAN_CATHOLIC_CHURCH_STATISTICS_2018

mystery of Christ and the Church, are permanent reminders for all Christian people of the importance of the total gift of self to God. Religious Brothers also remind us that the mission of the Church, respecting the various vocations and ministries within it, is one and is shared by all. In trying to reflect on the future of Religious Brotherhood in the African Church, one is reminded of the historical missionary misinterpretation where people defined the vocation of a Religious Brother as an appendage to that of a priest.

Influenced by a dualistic notion of *secular* versus *sacred*, the calling to Religious Brotherhood was mistakenly conceived not to exist as a standalone vocation, but as a *secular* contribution to the *sacred* service of the priest. Consequently, the identity of the Religious Brothers was overshadowed by that of the priest. The challenge today is to envision the vocation and identity of Religious Brothers in Africa as an important, necessary, independent and vital ministry as described in the Church documents: Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, (1996) and *Identity and Mission of the Religious Brothers in the Church* (2015).

Third, the above statistics provide the basis upon which we can envision the future of consecrated life in Africa. Like all historical events, they are part of God's self-manifestation that helps us to have a glimpse of His design for humankind in the 21st century. The challenge before us is not about numbers (though they are very important), but the mission. Consecrated life during Missionary Christianity had a distinct identity and strategy that was rooted in the evangelisation of the continent. Today, post-colonial independent states, aided by the international world, have assumed total responsibility over their citizens under the banner of human security to protect their nationals against economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political threats. This, in turn, puts pressure on Religious Congregations to contextually redefine their identity in accordance with the signs of the times, while at the same time remaining faithful to their founding charisms.

The Challenge of Modernity

Consecrated life exists in this modern world where the influence of modernity and post-modernity is gaining traction. The rise in liberal democracy that is characterised by the autonomy of the subject, and the affirmation of the human person as free and self-determining presents a huge challenge to consecrated life (Martinelli, 2011).

As if that is not enough, the globalised post-modern culture of materialism, consumerism, individualism and secularism invites institutes and theologians to take a critical reflection on the future of consecrated life in Africa (Kallupurakkathu 2011). In today's world, consecrated apostolic life is no longer business as usual. The anthropological focus of yesteryear must give in to contextual theologies that call for a militant and prophetic approach. The challenge is not about justifying the need for consecrated life, but rather the modern form of apostolic consecrated life that should be adopted in fulfilling the Church's mission.

In 2014, the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life in the document *Keep Watch* acknowledged that:

Consecrated life is at a crossroads, but it cannot stay there forever. We are invited to make the transition — *an outgoing Church*, in one of the characteristic expressions of Pope Francis — into an opportune moment (*kairós*) demanding renunciation, asking us to leave behind what we know and undertake a long and difficult journey, like Abraham travelling to the land of Canaan (cf. *Gn 12:16*), or Moses towards a mysterious land linked to the patriarchs (cf. *Ex 3:7-8*), or Elijah to Zarephath of Sidon; each of them going to mysterious lands glimpsed only in faith (*Braz, 2014, 11*).

According to the post-synodal exhortation of Pope John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, consecrated life is fundamentally received as a precious and necessary gift from God, for his Church that today

appears as an essentially fragile possession⁵. Many religious institutes are waking up to realise that what they regarded as a special niche for an apostolic mission during their founding years no longer makes sense anymore. Even the parish, that used to be the sole centre for evangelisation, is now being slowly replaced by institutions like schools, hospitals, and vocation centres. Envisioning the future of consecrated life under such circumstances calls for the need to embrace diversity, innovation and contemplation. The good news is that, as traditional apostolic ministries mature with time, new challenges are emerging, thereby providing opportunities and stronger justification for more vocations to consecrated life. These opportunities are more pronounced in Africa as a continent where, despite the plethora of ills, which includes bad governance, poverty, ethnicity, corruption and conflicts, the number of new vocations to consecrated life is still increasing. The Gospel of John tells us that, 'it is the will of God that all people who believe in Him should not perish but have everlasting life' (*John 3:16*).

Modernity has not spared the quality of formation to consecrated life. Traditional Catholic formation to religious life was centred on the spiritual nourishment of the soul. And indeed, the same tradition managed to produce men and women of great faith whose teachings we still cherish as foundations for spiritual life. Today, our secular technology driven world invites us to incorporate secular subjects into the formation programme. This is not a challenge for those in formation only, but for formators as well. Often due to a shortage of formators and the cost of sending members for formation training, inexperienced and ill-prepared young religious are cast into formation programme as directors with little knowledge of the challenges of the 21st century. The formator becomes a victim of obedience. Yet it is evident that every religious institute is as good as the quality of its members and those in charge of formation should be men and women of integrity, knowledge and prayer.

Consecrated life in Africa cannot keep a blind eye to the dam-

5. John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* no. 4.

age caused to the Church against the practice of evangelical counsels. Speaking to the Catholic Bishops of America, Pope Francis lamented that God's faithful people and the Church's mission continue to suffer greatly as a result of abuses of power and conscience. The Pope affirmed that combating the culture of abuse, the loss of credibility, the resulting bewilderment and confusion, and the discrediting of the Church's mission urgently demands a renewed and decisive approach to resolving conflicts.⁶ This was an invitation for the Church not to hide its head in the sand but to face the challenges posed by the practice of the evangelical vows. Maybe the time has come to envision our vows in a new dynamic way without compromising the deeper meaning of this sacred heritage. As we contemplate the future of consecrated life in Africa, we must find out how our obedience can be our new way of being available, our chastity as our new way of loving and our poverty as our renunciation of space and time.

The future of consecrated life in Africa must seriously reflect on the new demands for community living. The religious community is the universe for brotherhood and sisterhood. If the Church in Africa understands itself as the Family of God (*Healey, 2012*), it then follows that religious communities of consecrated life are the embodiment of the family of God. Apparently, the family unit is encountering numerous challenges today. Often times, the demands of our prophetic ministry take us away from our religious communities for extended periods of time. In other instances, as the number of members of an institute decrease, individuals find themselves living alone in order to sustain institutions or run programmes. This conflict between the demands of our apostolates and the need for community life deserves some critical reflections if we are to remain faithful to our religious tradition, while at the same time being relevant to the contextual needs of our time. As apostolates become globalised, new reflections on the theology of community life become imminent.

Secularism is becoming one of the biggest challenges to consecrated life. The world has become a global village and the lib-

6. The Pope was speaking to the US Bishops in Rome on the 22-24 February 2019 on the problem of sexual scandals that have rocked the Church during the past decades.

eral influence from the developed world is putting pressure on Africa to modernise. In this process, good and bad influences are pressed upon the continent. Among the bad influences of globalisation is the danger of embracing secularism with its emphasis on individual rights without corresponding responsibilities. Young people joining consecrated life suddenly find themselves working in apostolates that present several moral challenges. These challenges include the need to respect individual freedoms in favour of the right to abortion, homosexuality and artificial family planning methods. To challenge the moral evils that have already found their way into national legislation appears a futile exercise. A number of African countries have already accepted same-sex marriages and homosexuality as basic individual rights. What then is the prophetic role of consecrated men and women in such a society that has lost the sense of God and His design for humankind?

Tied to the negative effects of globalisation is the rise in technological developments. Technology has revolutionised our society for better and worse. On the positive side, it has enabled us to carry out our apostolate faster, more easily and with quality. Today we can attend to the sick patients with precision, the multi-media can help our students grasp concepts more easily, and our social communication is enabling the gospel to reach the far corners of our country on time.

The technological revolution has enhanced our communion with each other in the manner of the Trinitarian communion. The Holy Trinity is a communion of the Three persons of the Father, the Son and The Holy Spirit. Hence, through technology, we can participate in this unity as one of the deepest desires a human person has: to live in the depths of love, friendship and communion, yet without dissolving one's identity in the crowd (Lynch and Borrás, 2012). However, technology is taking away the personal touch that used to characterise our communion with our sick patients, our students, our communities and with each other. Social media is replacing community recreations resulting in flooding of unnecessary and sometimes harmful infor-

mation. These challenges, which are going to remain with us for the foreseeable future, invite us to consider best possible ways to prayerfully harness the positive effects of technology within the precincts of our charisms.

Consecrated life cannot close its eyes to the modern challenge of the autonomy of the individual person. Traditionally consecrated persons lived under the guidance of the 'Rule of Life' of their institute and this was their 'second bible'. Today, while General Chapters provide the strategic focus of religious institutes and produce rules that govern the day-to-day operations of the institute, including issues of discipline, there is an emerging trend of recourse to secular justice for what used to be purely ecclesial matters. While this may appear scandalous at face value, it might well be a wake-up call for consecrated life to balance the experience of subjectivity in respect of choices and responsibilities and the demands of our common life. Hence, the need to prioritise the spiritual development of its members, while at the same time providing a just leadership in accordance with modern liberal democratic values that promote the dignity and rights of the individual person.

The individual consecrated person should appreciate that autonomy understood outside the ecclesial character of consecrated life is scandalous. Care should be taken to guard against adopting secular norms and values that do not support the mission and character of the Church for which it exists and in accordance with the call that: "the consecrated life has not only proved a help and support for the Church in the past, but is also a precious and necessary gift for the present and future of the People of God, since it is an intimate part of the Church's life, her holiness and her mission".⁷

Envisioning the Future

The process of envisioning the future begins with the return to the founding vision of our institutes. As Vatican II suggested, the

7. *Vita Consecrata*, no. 3.

renewal of religious life involves a return to the original inspiration of our religious families.

Pope Benedict XVI provided hope for the future when he declared, “Do not join the ranks of the prophets of doom who proclaim the end or meaninglessness of the consecrated life in the Church in our day; rather, clothe yourselves in Jesus Christ and put on the armour of light as St Paul urged (*Rom 13:11-14*) keeping awake and watchful”.⁸ In this regard, a number of opportunities are being proffered as a means of institutional continuity. These are derived from the spirit of the Second Vatican Council and the experiences of those institutes that are recording a decline in the number of consecrated members. In the spirit of envisioning the future, *Vita Consecrata* refers to the emergence of ‘new communities’, distinct from the traditional forms of consecrated life. The document provides the foundation for imagining the consecrated life of the future.

Vita Consecrata imagines the religious life of the future to be based on a strong bond between consecrated institutions and their lay association to keep alive the original charisms. *Vita Consecrata* provides the ideal profile of such communities:

The originality of the new communities often consists in the fact that it deals with groups composed of men and women, from clergy and lay, from married people and celibates, follows a particular style of life, sometimes inspired by one or another traditional form or adapted to meet the exigencies of the society of today. Even their commitment to evangelical life is expressed in a different way while it manifests, as in a general orientation, an intense aspiration to community life, to poverty and to prayer. Clergy and lay participate in the government, according to their competence, and the apostolic vision opens up to the framework of new evangelisation (*Vita Consecrata* no. 62).

This vision derives its logic from the early Christian commu-

8. BENEDICT XVI, Homily for the feast of the Presentation of the Lord - XVII World Day of Consecrated Life, Rome (2 February, 2013).

nities (*Acts 22:44-47*) where Christians lived together and shared everything in common. This model is not new to religious institutions as many congregations already have third orders. However, what may be peculiar to this arrangement is the possibility of these lay members of the institute forming communities with consecrated members and taking active responsibilities in furthering the charism of the institute. The goal of the lay association is to ensure each congregation's giftedness is not lost. This is critical when reflected in the light of the contribution of each institute's charism to the life of the Church. Charisms are means of following Christ who said, "I am the way, the truth and life" (*John 14:5*), and are special expressions of the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church that needs to be preserved and nurtured.

Tied to the call for reinvigorating lay associations, is the need to invite lay theologians of consecrated life to the debate in order to bring in fresh ideas to the disciple. The theologians of consecrated life do not necessarily need to be religious men or women. Lay theologians should be invited to contribute new knowledge to the discourse on consecrated life. It is the role of modern lay and consecrated theologians to try and situate the mission of consecrated life within the horizon of the global mission of the universal Church (*Ambassa, 2011*). This should not be taken to imply some form of dissatisfaction with traditional clerical theology of religious life, but an invitation for new experiences emerging from a paradigm of complexity and moved by the spirit of newness.

Consecrated persons are called to witness Christ in a complex society with composite challenges that call for new forms of ministry. As Pope Francis rightly says, "Instead of being just a church that welcomes and receives by keeping the doors open, let us try also to be a church that finds new roads, that is able to step outside itself and go to those who do not attend Mass, to those who have left or are indifferent. The ones who leave sometimes do it for reasons that, if properly understood and assessed, can lead to a return. But that takes audacity and courage".⁹ This call is both

9. A. Spadaro, Interview with Pope Francis, in *La Civiltà Cattolica* III, 2013, 449-477.

empowering as well as disorienting. Empowering in the sense that invites an institute of consecrated life to be really prophetic and think outside the box, and disorienting in the sense that it calls for some form of abandonment of traditional apostolates, which we had become accustomed to, and the take-up of new forms of apostolates, of which we have no experience at all.

In the spirit of disorienting positive paradigm, there is a need for new theological reflections on contextualising the evangelical counsels with the view to locating their appropriate theological significance within the 21st century. Consecrated vows have an apostolic dimension and there is need to pay attention to contexts, with the challenges they present, while at the same time adopting a militant, even counter-cultural approach that emphasises an understanding of religious life in terms of prophecy (*Robert, 2011*). The vows constitute a person's offering to the Church as a gift which is irreplaceable. Providing a modern theological and ecclesial description of their significance will help spruce up their sacred character. Our young religious would like to understand how the theology of the evangelical vows relates to a continent that is impoverished and the values that community life offers to people who are under pressure to uphold the autonomy of the individual person.

The future of consecrated life in the 21st century has greater prospects for prophetic ministry in the justice paradigm. There is rising awareness of and action for justice, peace and integrity of creation, direct involvement with, and for, those who are poor and marginalised, especially women, in their struggles for dignity and justice (*Kallapurakkathu, 2011*). While this ministry is not new to a continent that is coming out of a colonial history while at the same time suffering from neo-colonialism, the justice ministry is taking new shape that invites consecrated presence. The same applies to the need for ministry in the promotion of the integrity of creation. Humankind is being threatened with self-destruction due to our neglect of environmental preservation. Consecrated life will find a rich legacy in the promotion of God's creation. As Pope Francis says:

The vocation of being a “protector”, however, is not just something involving us Christians alone; it also has a prior dimension which is simply human, involving everyone. It means protecting all creation, the beauty of the created world, as the Book of Genesis tells us and as Saint Francis of Assisi showed us. It means respecting each of God’s creatures and respecting the environment in which we live ... To protect creation, to protect every man and every woman, to look upon them with tenderness and love, is to open up a horizon of hope; it is to let a shaft of light break through the heavy clouds; it is to bring the warmth of hope.¹⁰

Conclusion

This chapter has provided insights into the challenges of consecrated life in Africa without exhausting all of them. It raised questions on various areas of consideration that call for theological reflections. The chapter acknowledges that there are many challenges for consecrated life in the 21st century which do not have clear answers today. The most we can do is continuously ask questions for which theological reflections are called for. However, as John Paul II (1995: 13) puts it, “Christ our hope is alive; we shall live!” It is from this conviction that the chapter tried to envision a future of consecrated life that promises hope for humankind. Jesus is with us and, like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, he will walk with us on this journey and our eyes will be opened and our hearts burn within us (*Lk 24:13*). And as Ruffing (1994, p 7) puts it, “I remain convinced that whatever religious life will be in the coming millennium, it will rise up again from the dying embers of the present moment”. This means the flame of consecrated life in Africa will continue to shine bright despite the challenges. We are being invited to be prophetic men and women of faith, hope, love and prayer.

10. Pope Francis’ Homily during his inaugural in the Vatican on 15 June, 2015. Excerpts of the homily can be accessed at <https://www.cacatholic.org/policies-issues/human-dignity/care-creation/quotes-pope-francis-creation>

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CHAPTER 2

Envisioning Religious Life's Future as a Pioneer Community

By

Mark Clarke

Crossroads

Pope Francis stated in the book, *Open to God and Open to the World*, that “there are churches that are yielding new fruits. Perhaps they were once not so fruitful, now they are. That naturally obliges us to rethink the inculturation of charism. Charism is one thing, but, as St Ignatius says, it must be lived out according to places, times and individuals. Charism is not a bottle of distilled water. It must be lived with energy, and culturally reread”.¹¹

Pope Francis’ reflection communicates the experience of the Catholic Church living in a world at a crossroads. We are spiritually walking through a new threshold of change. It is transpiring because the world has been reframed by four intersecting factors: globalisation, environment, technology, and immigration (See Figure 1 below). They are not isolated factors; rather they are interconnected realities introducing new questions that seek new solutions. Religious life shares a societal space where spiri-

11 .Francis and Spadaro, A. 2018. *Open to God: Open to the World*, P44 Bloomsbury Continuum, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, Print 8.



Figure 1: Interconnected realities in today's world

tuality, connectivity, and community have new definitions. These themes are not new; rather they represent a paradigm shift that has been evolving for decades.

These realities are intertwined. Environmental catastrophes impact every geographical region. They take a myriad of forms including droughts, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, wildfires, hurricanes, and other natural events. The unintended consequences of these environmental tragedies have led to migration and increased economic challenges. Migration has created dislocation and mixing of cultures that create both blessings and tension. This actuality has led to heartache with people feeling the loss of their traditional identities. It impacts both the individuals migrating as well as the native population. Often it creates job tension with the native population feeling these migrants are taking their opportunities.

The experience of these interconnected issues invites a re-imagining of our relationships at all levels of society including the

spiritual dimension. Also, the evolution of the Internet and social media is redefining relationships, connectivity, institutions, and culture. Technological advances are developing at warp speed. While nations attempt to maintain their unique tribal culture, the world is becoming more interconnected. In the next decade, 500 billion new items will become connected to the internet, for example, cars, health care, and robots, as well as a myriad of other items.

The migration and immigration of people across continents have created social tension at the local, regional and global level. This migration of people with different cultures is creating pressure and opening wounds in local communities as they yearn to maintain their unique cultural identity. This transition is painstakingly difficult as we move from a mono-cultural to an inter-cultural world. For religious and Catholics, it invites exploring a spirituality that is inclusive. It is living the words of the Acts of the Apostles 2:4: “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim”.¹² This passage calls us to live at the crossroad of a historical, cultural shift.

The African continent is a daily reminder of these factors impacting an entire civilisation. In March 21, 2017, *Crux Magazine* states “there’s almost no issue of global relevance today which is not playing out in especially acute ways in Africa, and in which Catholic leaders are not protagonists – from climate change to war, from human trafficking to terrorism and religious violence, from the fight against poverty and HIV/AIDS to the struggle for justice in international relations, it’s all happening in Africa”.¹³ Africa is a continent that represents 38% of the world’s Christians and 17.3 % of the world’s Catholics. Africa is the home of 1500 different languages. Susan Owen, in the book, *The Church We Want*, is quoted as asks “How can the theologian explain and apply the teachings of the magisterium to our church situation

12. NAB, St Joseph Edition.

13. Allen, J. ‘Why an African Moment Is Unfolding in Catholicism’, *Crux Magazine*, 21 March, 2017, Print.

in Africa without sensitivity to, or a feel for, the cultural and socio-economic context in Africa".¹⁴

This reality highlights the importance of imagining the future of religious life as intercultural. With this expansion of diversity, society will be wrestling with a variety of cultural expressions and understanding of Church. It will demand a Church rooted in contemplative presence, compassion, and openness, as it strives to integrate this level of diversity. Father Karl Rahner, also quoted in the book *The Church we Want*, stated in 1979, "The (Catholic Church) must be inter-culturated throughout the world if it is to be a World Church... This then is the issue: either the church sees and recognises these essential differences of other cultures for she should become a World Church... ".¹⁵

Fr Joseph Mboya SJ, in his presentation to the Sisters of Notre Dame, stated "Inculturation is a movement towards full evangelisation. It seeks to dispose people to receive Jesus Christ in an integral manner. It touches them on the personal, cultural, economic and political levels so they can live a holy life in total union with God the Father through the action of the Spirit".¹⁶ The intercultural reality is a critical aspect of the pioneer community. The important question is how religious life shares its charism in a way that touches people's hearts. As Fr. Mboya notes, an experience of church and religious life should touch people from various perspectives.

Religious life in Africa is at a similar crossroads; it is severely challenged and impacted by tribal customs, crippling poverty, and corrupt governments and church leaders. Family customs and social norms create additional burdens on religious as they struggle with their identity after becoming religious men or women. Religious are living in two worldviews; the tradition and customs of their family, along with their new identity as consecrated religious men and women..

14. Agbonkhianmeghe, E. O., (Ed), *The Church We Want.*, p 3. Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2016, Print 5.

15. Ibid. Agbonkhianmeghe, p 190.

16. Mboya, Fr Joseph SJ. *Presentation to the Sisters of Notre Dame*, p 3. October 19, 2018.

Sister Joan Chittister, in her book *Radical Spirit*, quotes the Japanese poet Basho, who wrote: “I do not seek to follow in the footsteps of the men of old; I seek what they sought”. She goes on to say, “In that practice lies our respect for those who have gone before us. It is not that we must continue what they did, for ideas or customs may have long dimmed. But we must respect their vision, their efforts, their values, their ideals, their perseverance, their gift of yesterday that makes today possible”.¹⁷

These shifting sands of religious life will only increase in the coming decades. Congregations will continue to become smaller, with fewer wage earners and a greater priority in supporting their larger demographics of senior members. This transformation will continue to call forth redefinition of religious life for these times.

Religious congregations are invited to explore and reframe their charism for this historical moment. Their fundamental question is how will we define our lives, live our charism, and be on mission with this evolving future. It is calling religious communities to move from a static or stationary understanding of their commitment to a more organic and ever-renewing understanding of their lives and charism.

Religious life is entering an era of functioning from the perspective of a pioneer spirit. It is a pilgrimage that will demand courage and adaptability. The question is whether religious life will accept the journey, which is similar to the Jewish desert experience led by Moses as well as the first followers of Jesus in Acts. It is a journey that calls for risk, courage, and willingness to move forward with both the known and unknown.

The spiritual path is about integrating the spirit of the incarnation, which is a birthing of a new paradigm, and the paschal mystery which is a journey of transformation. This journey opens the congregation to accept a vulnerable path as the mystery of the future unfolds. It is a sacred time of exploring God’s call as they discover the meaning of their charism for these times.

17. Chittister, J. *Radical Spirit: 12 Ways to Live a Free and Authentic Life*, p 38. Convergent, 2017.

Pioneer Community

The future is challenging religious congregations to embrace the pioneer spirit of their ancestors. Below are the essential foundational elements of the pioneer community:

- smaller communities committed to living and sharing the spirit of the charism
- intergenerational and intercultural membership
- commitment to people on the margins, especially women and children
- simpler and more intentional community life enriched by faith sharing and contemplation
- networks of relationships that are passionate and committed to the congregational charism
- technologically savvy.

Religious Life of tomorrow will be defined by the creative imagination to envision a congregation in uncharted waters. It demands the fortitude and rigour for a congregation to explore the timeless question “what if”. Future congregations will be grounded with an emphasis on collaboration, imagination, storytelling and embracing an interdisciplinary process. Religious leaders will be called to create an integrated visionary direction based on collaboration and outreach while still rooted in their charism. In the book, *Simple Habits for Complex Times*, Jennifer Garvey states, “in a complexed world the vision is the place at which the past and the future come together in a way that guides people’s action in the present”.¹⁸

The next decades for religious is an era of being spiritual leaders as they explore the creation of new ministerial and community prototypes. It is a radical call to holiness. Though intentionally small, religious congregations will choose to be influential in shaping and forming the Church. For religious congregations,

18. Garvey, J., ‘Simple Habits for Complex Times: Powerful Practices for Leaders’, *Simple Habits for Complex Times: Powerful Practices for Leaders*, Stanford Business Books, 2015, Print. p 88.

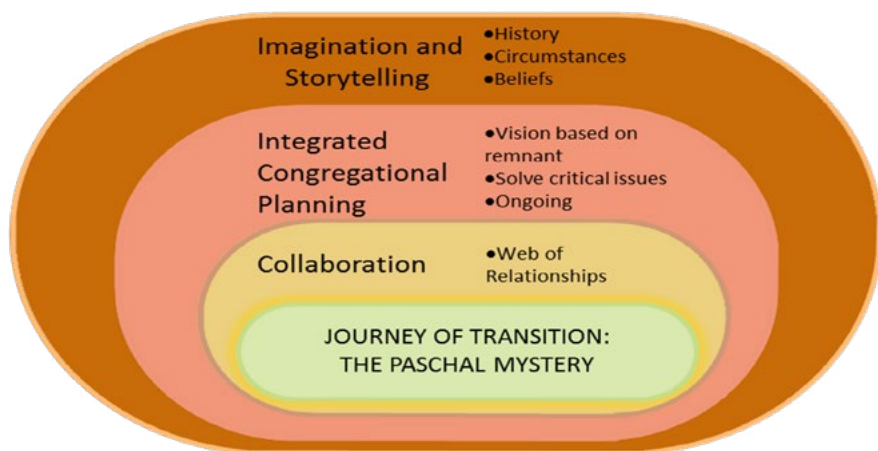


Figure 2. Four-step model of a pioneer community

an imperative is an unwavering faith in a courageous vision as its members live in faith and trust, and open their hearts to the grace of God.

At the heart of this process, is a deep-rooted commitment to ongoing discernment. The pioneer community's discernment process has five integrated characteristics (see Figure 2):

1. They are grounded in a genuine contemplative rhythm which flows from the paschal mystery. One of the significant elements is contemplating the richness of the sorrow and grief represented by Holy Saturday. The pioneer community's openness to embrace suffering and being vulnerable opens the door to transformation as they discover a resurrected future.
2. The transition from large to smaller communities is rooted in embracing a zeal for innovation and creative change. For this to happen, it means leveraging the web of relationships aligned with the charism. Through embracing the power and influence of the entire Charism Family, it brings together resources and shared values to create a future.
3. Their discernment is grounded in contemplative imagination and storytelling that creates greater receptiveness of God's call as it unfolds. Paul Ricoeur says, "We learn to become

the narrator of our own story without completely becoming the author of our life”.¹⁹ A religious community creates a passionate congregational narrative that has a purpose while remaining open to God.

4. Congregations establish an integrated discernment process that aligns the strategic, operational and human capacity organically and simultaneously.
5. They deepen collaboration with partners to maximise the congregation’s sharing of their mission and charism with a range of people in need.

Transition

For religious congregations, this is a sacred occasion of revitalisation. The transition is God’s call to renew their charism for a fluctuating historical period. It is a journey that will both affirm and shake the foundation of their current religious identity. This jarring will mean a detaching from the past to embrace a more organic and pioneering future. It is a period of moving from a static discernment process to one that unfolds over time. The pioneer spirit demands to release control to embrace the mystery of God’s revealing call.

Sister Joan Chittister (*in Valente, 2018*) powerfully depicts the journey saying, “the deep-down spiritual truth is that time is always and forever an invitation to growth. Whether the wisdom of the ages shapes us or not, it determines the nature of our civilisation, the depth of our culture, the spiritual filter through which we, in our own time, mould the character of the world around us”.²⁰

It is a sacred path that invites each generation to embark on sharing the gospel message in fresh ways. We are living at the crossroads where technology, globalisation, environment, and social media are redefining the purpose and meaning of society. It places religious congregations in a context of evaluating their charism in the light of this shift.

19. Ibid. Agbonkhianmeghe, 2016, p 180.

20. Valente, J. *How to Live: What the Rule of St Benedict Teaches Us About Happiness, Meaning, and Community*. Hampton Roads Publishing, (2018). Foreword.

Table 1: Depiction of the paschal journey that religious communities have been walking for the past three decades and the congregation's strategic questions.

Pascal Mystery	Religious Life Today Good Friday Letting Go	Transition Current Reality Holy Saturday	Pioneer Community Resurrection New Beginning
Community Life	Institutional and small houses with regular congregational meetings	The increase of smaller communities – based on fewer sisters	Critical strategic question: How do we desire to live as a community together?
Ministry	Sponsored and individual ministries	Working with those on the margins and redefining congregation's role in sponsored ministries	Critical strategic question: What does it mean to be on mission?
Formation	Congregational Novitiate and Formation Programmes	Both within their congregation and in collaboration with other religious communities	Critical Strategic Question: What does formation look like in a pioneer-era?

Visionary Direction	The community has both the financial and human resources to meet the needs of multiple directions	Transitioning to a <u>Pioneer Community</u> through grieving the loss of one paradigm while moving into the next as they balance the tension and worldviews of both Vatican II and John Paul II perspectives	How do we live our charism in a global and borderless world with social issues that transcend one nation?
Relationships	Sponsored Ministries Associates/ Oblates Advisory Groups	Increase collaborative connection with the larger Charism Family or increase collaborative connection with lay mission partners and like-minded organisations	Critical Strategic Question: How do we maximise the congregation's extensive web of relationships for the mission?

As noted earlier, the planning for a pioneer community demands integrated discernment:

- The goal is to balance the needs of both the older religious and newer members to develop a smaller pioneer community.
- It is creating a vision that focuses on newer members' aspirations for the future.
- It defines the capacity and resources needed to care for the health needs of sisters while moving toward a more pioneer vision of community.

- It facilitates the grieving of a successful past that implemented Vatican II and the redefining of religious life that is operative for today.

Table 2: The movement from the current religious life model (what is), to the emergent pioneer community.

From – Current Religious Life Model	Toward – Pioneer Community
Large Community	Smaller and more collaborative
Larger ageing membership with few younger members	Stronger intergenerational mix
Congregation or Province	Congregation/ Province/ Federation/Intercommunity focus
Individual charisma	Increase collaboration and co-operation beyond individual charisma

Emotional Impact

In Ronald Rolheiser's book, *Wrestling with God*, he states, "Globalisation has reshaped virtually all our communities regarding ethnicity, culture, and religion. We are like pioneers settling a new world nobody has lived in before".²¹

The pioneer community necessitates the development of its capacity to be creative and innovative in the exploration of new frontiers. One of the critical suppositions is that this world view demands being flexible and adaptable. The spiritual path involves two spiritual practices, contemplative silence and empathy. Pioneer communities are entering an emotional period of their history. The communal prayer experience is holding in tension both the grief process and engaging in the development of new

21. Rolheiser, R. *Wrestling with God: Finding Hope and Meaning in Our Daily Struggles to Be Human*, Image Books, 2018, Preface.

models. These new initiatives will experience both success and failure. The handling of these realities demands ongoing reflective prayer and integration of the new insights. Contemplation is the foundation for holding the individual aspirations with the communitarian call. It requires the members to commit to ongoing transformation, personal maturity and seeking the common good.

Contemplative silence is a central discipline for weaving the personal and collective aspirations of the heart. The integration of quiet reflection with empathetic dialogue allows for ways to deepen the meaning of the charism. This degree of preparation can illuminate new possibilities for serving others. An ongoing reflective and compassionate disposition strips away the barriers to create the space for risking the new. This path is both an individual and a collective walk. Empathy is a gift of presence that stands with others while accepting the richness of the congregation pilgrimage. Through contemplative stillness and empathy, the heart is uncluttered as God guides the congregation into the future

Contemplative Imagination:

Contemplative imagination opens an avenue for creating a new narrative that embodies the pioneer spirit. The communal call, as the religious community negotiates an evolving future, is to dream a new vision, believe it with passion, dare to risk its creation and in the end create the impossible. "Imagination in the Blakian sense is about the awakening to and the recognition of the sacredness of all the differences that is."²²

Contemplative imagination and communal planning are the methods to discern God's presence in their lives. As they enter this space, they encounter God offering abundant opportunities to grasp and act with fresh eyes. Religious congregations need a narrative that ignites a fiery passion and belief similar to their

22. O'Donohue, J. and Quinn, J. *Walking in Wonder: Eternal Wisdom for a Modern World*, Penguin Random House LLC, New York, 2018, p 21.

ancestors. It is the alleyway that the early religious trod, planting seeds that blossomed into institutions that solved society's more pressing challenges. This spiritual disposition invigorates the members to incorporate the active movement of spirit to impact the world. Through a listening heart, congregations gain the internal courage to risk a visionary direction based on their charism. This discernment demands the rigours of venturing into the risky unknown as the early founders and foundresses of religious communities.

The contemplative way is the ability to observe, imagine, listen and integrate. Given this reality, a plan is only a collective snapshot in time that remains organic.

- **Observe:** Observation is exploring the religious congregation's unique historical times and discovering subtle clues enabling it to respond to God's invitation. Dialogue with people of various perspectives creates a means for testing assumptions, biases and seeing possibilities. This examination opens a window into experiencing God's unfolding world presence. The gift of observation allows for greater scrutiny of mental frameworks to avoid groupthink. It develops a receptivity to receive God's summons for its future.
- **Imagine:** This is the ability to explore the world from a fresh perspective. When a congregation asks "what if" questions it opens the horizon to options. "Where the imagination is alive, the wonder is completely alive; the possibility is awake because imagination is the great friend of possibility."²³ For example, the computer was re-imagined based on the integration of a TV screen, typewriter keyboard, and a small motor. The integration of these components has truly transformed the world. This virtue allows the group to bring fresh eyes, and capacities to visualise the unknown.
- **Listen:** When a group listens with a receptive spirit to the unknown, it opens the window to enter the world of new meaning and purpose. Congregations blinded by their men-

23. O'Donohue, J. and Quinn, J. Ibid. p 21.

tal constructs and assumptions can inhibit their ability to see evolving societal change. An amenable heart allows religious to hear God's assignment and generate a transformative response.

- **Integration:** The integration of a congregation's observations, imagination and listening creates the magic for new actualities. It acknowledges new models for property utilisation, new ministries, collaborative connection and amazing possibilities. This level of integration is the new norm for the pioneer community.

Transformation:

Discernment in the pioneer community is the progression of being a transformative community. As Ilia Delio states, "the challenge is to experience ourselves as making the gospels real for our time. To come to a new understanding of God in our age, a God who is the God of evolution, is to know ourselves as privileged bearers of transcendence".²⁴

An integrated communal discernment process is an essential ingredient for the pioneer community. This style transports the congregation from a closed system with few options to the expansive opportunities of an open system. Spirituality is a good example of an open system with people having an array of options. These opportunities include books, online courses, small faith communities and daily reflective emails, to name a few. Technology is changing the landscape of imparting the Gospel and needs consideration as part of the future.

With this emerging reality, it is essential to establish an integrated discernment model. This framework simultaneously allows for integrating the strategic, operational and structural frameworks to develop and implement services. An integrated approach establishes a fluid and flexible ministerial approach. The framework will be successful to the degree there is ongoing

24. Delio, I. *The Unbearable Wholeness of Being: God, Evolution and the Power of Love*, Orbis Books, 2013, p 62.

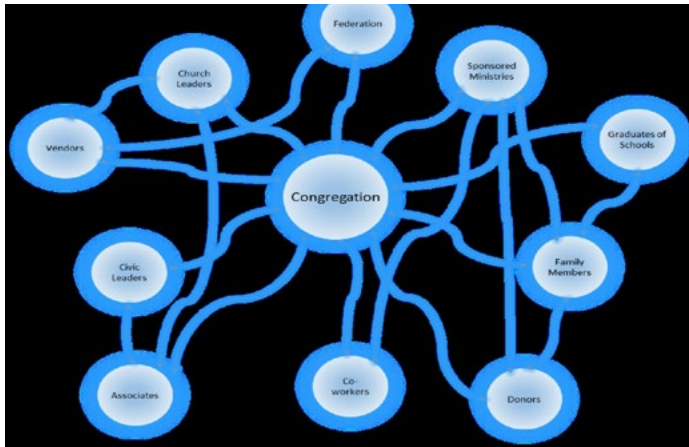


Figure 3: Congregational model of a social network or eco-system

learning and accountability. As Habakkuk 2:2 states “write down the vision, clearly upon the tablets, so that one can read it readily”.²⁵

Culture and ongoing transformation have led every discipline to adapt their processes to an organic approach to meet the pace of change. Thus, a more integrated planning approach is needed that allows congregations to remain rooted in their charism while being flexible enough to adapt. For example, we have moved in the past decade from email to texting to twitter. Each of these new communication tools has redefined connectivity. For a religious congregation to share its gift, it must adapt to these new realities and the speed of change.

One of the transitional challenges for a religious congregation is moving away from an isolated institutional model to exploring an eco-system. This is a social network that includes people who share the congregation charism and mission. These relationships expand the congregation’s ability to share their vision and charism with a wider audience. Figure 3 is a simple congregational model of a social network or eco-system.

25. Ibid. NAB

“Social networks have broken down communication barriers by simplifying the exchange of information among friends, co-workers and strangers alike, thus allowing the culture to spread and influence around us. Not only are those members who are born into a culture able to be part of it, but outsiders who are interested in it can also learn about it, join it and celebrate it.”²⁶

The concept of an eco-system rooted within our sacred texts:

- Acts Chapter 5: “When the spirit came upon the people, each one heard them speaking in his language.”²⁷
- In One Corinthians: “There are different spiritual gifts but the same spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone.”²⁸

The continual expansion of technology opens new avenues to connect more and more in every aspect of our lives. Also, it expands the ability to relate and align across non-traditional lines. A strong social network increases the congregation’s ability to connect and share the gospel. The collaborative social network model expands the concept of being the Church in the World.

Summary

In the future, a pioneer community success is dependent on being rooted in the charism and connecting with their web of connections. These relationships create capacity and fluidness to share the charism and meet diverse needs.

In Africa and beyond, the future of religious life is envisioning the future as a pioneer community. As we have explored throughout this chapter, there are five interconnected disciplines: engaging the heart, collective discernment, evolving world, a web of relationships and powerful narrative. Figure 4 depicts the intersection of these elements.

26. Dempsey, M. E. and Brafman, O. *Radical Inclusion: What the Post-9/11 World Should Have Taught Us about Leadership*, p 138. Missionday, 2018.

27. Ibid. NAB

28. Ibid. NAB

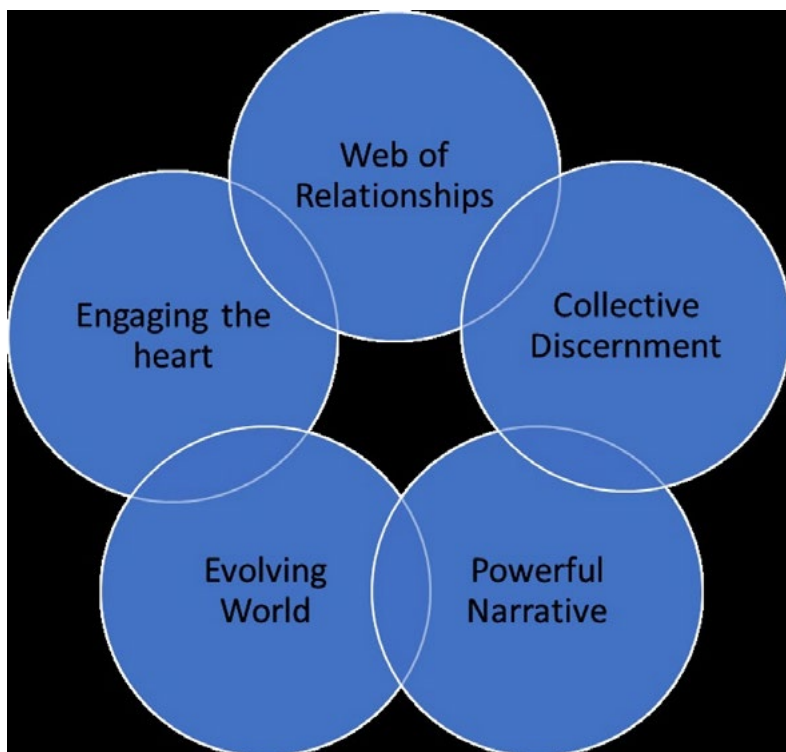


Figure 4: Five interconnected disciplines as foundation of a pioneer community

These five elements are woven together to establish a foundation as the pioneer community embraces its responsibility in an age of inconceivable change.

The engagement of the collective heart elicits the congregation's deepest desires. As they unleash their passionate energy for the future, they become receptive to God's transformative invitation. The members absorb what is stirring in their hearts and minds, thus opening the door to establishing a visionary direction. With the inclusion of the web of relationship, it releases a deeper level of insight and wisdom in the process. The total involvement of the charism family is imperative in all elements of the discernment process, exploration, forming the direction, and the implementation.

All collective discernment focuses on seeking the divine call for this historical moment. Communal Discernment, through an exploration of the internal and external realities shaping the congregation and society, unfastens the gate to new opportunities. All plans intertwine between the needs of the ageing sisters and the spirit of the younger members. For the viability of the congregation, it is vital to hold in tension the ageing needs and pioneer direction.

Religious life does not live in a vacuum. Thus, the exploration of the external world is essential to understanding the social context. It is crucial to realise any group that remains isolated as this jeopardises their future. The invitation is to remain rooted in the charism while embracing new questions and solutions to influence the world.

The web of relationships allows a pioneer community to reach out to a larger and more diverse audience. Also, it incorporates the wealth of skills and resources necessary to share the charism and implement the approved direction. This level of engagement exponentially increases ownership and passion for the strategic direction.

The community narrative is the public message to engage others in the mission. Also, it is the vehicle that describes how the congregation is collaboratively involved in society's emerging needs. It allows the congregation's web of connections to touch into and come from its passionate heart. "Storytelling strengthens cultures and more importantly preserves the culture for future generations." The Jewish people are said to be "a nation of storytellers because they have a rich tradition of passing along parables, fables, folktales and sacred tales that are handed down from generation to generation."²⁹ The congregation story unifies the members around shared values. This unification unleashes the passionate vitality and imagination to solve emerging issues.

29. Gallo, C. *The Storyteller's Secret: from TED Speakers to Business Legends, Why Some Ideas Catch on and Others Don't.*, St Martin's Press, 2016, Print. 230.

As Pope Francis stated: “This is the secret, dear friends, all of us are called to share in it. God expects something from you. God hopes in you. He comes to open doors of our lives, dreams, our ways of seeing things. God comes to break open everything that keeps you closed in. He is encouraging you to dream. He wants to make you see that, with you, the world can be different. For the fact is, unless you offer the best of yourself, the world will never be different”³⁰

Or as the nuclear physicist Edwin Teller says, “Survival of humanity must also include the survival of human dignity. I believe no endeavour that is worthwhile is simple in prospect. If it is right, it will be simple in retrospect. Belief in action will accomplish that which does not exist, but which in the future will be taken for granted”.³¹

These two quotes call the members to share their gifts. It is comparable to walking a path in the dark. There is a sliver of light that illuminates short distances yet, in trust, with each step one moves closer to the destination. Congregations are called to walk this road, risking all, to create a future that at some distant time will be taken for granted.

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CHAPTER 3

Consecrated Life, Waking Up The World

By

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Introduction

The Church in different parts of the world today faces monumental challenges. Some of these challenges are unspeakable and have marred the Church's image in some people's minds. Yet the Church is a force for much good in the society (*Kim, 2019*).

The United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Faith-Based Engagement estimates that FBOs (faith-based organizations, of which the Church is one) provide "30-40% of the world's basic health care" (*Karam, 2014, p 8; in Kim, 2019*). Office holders in the Church represent the human face of the Church. To a large extent, consecrated persons bear this human face of the Church. For instance, the average person's primary contact with the 'Church' or the 'mission' is through the services consecrated persons provide in schools, hospitals and clinics, as well as in social, development and pastoral programmes. In a way, consecrated persons can therefore be said to be the Church in action. This, of course, is without prejudice to the unique roles ordained sacramental ministers play, which are more restricted, though, in scope of operations. All the same, the grave challenges affecting the Church's image have equally affected the consecrated life in a manner unprecedented in history (*Uchem, 2016*).

For one thing, many religious congregations in the western world are struggling with diminishing numbers and an ageing population, with the possibility of complete closure (Uchem, 2016). Religious congregations in Africa, on the contrary, are bursting at their seams with their teeming numbers. In Nigeria, for example, some congregations can hardly provide sufficient accommodation for their members (Uchem, 2016). New congregations are still emerging and attending to the needs in their context. The present reality about consecrated life in the Church from a global perspective is one of simultaneous dying and rising. Furthermore, there are the challenges posed by modern day living in a fast-changing world. Against this backdrop, questions arise about the value and continued relevance of the consecrated life today. Could this then be the reason why Pope Francis declared the year (2015) as ‘the year of the consecrated life’ (November 21, 2014 to November 21, 2015), and urged the Church to focus on the consecrated life as a gift of God to the Church, and to celebrate it?

The special year of the consecrated life was designed to mark the 50th anniversaries of the publication of *Perfectae Caritatis* and *Lumen Gentium*; two documents of the Vatican II Council, which greatly influenced the renewal of the religious life. In view of the anniversary celebrations, the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life issued a series of letters published in booklet forms. One of those booklets was *Rejoice: A letter to consecrated men and women; the message of Pope Francis to consecrated men and women*. A review of *Rejoice* forms the substance of this book chapter. The rest of this book chapter will be devoted to reflecting on selected themes from the booklet highlighting these key words: consecration, witness, joy, prayer, community and prophetic action waking up the world.

Summary of *Rejoice*: Pope Francis’ message

Rejoice is essentially a compilation of reflections on the teachings of Pope Francis as addressed to different groups of consecrated people, such as congregational leaders, novices, general chapters and so on.

The overall message is as follows: Consecrated men and women are to take joy in the fact that they have been chosen and called by God. They are to: radiate this joy to the world around them; water the roots of this joy daily by spending quality time with this God who has called them in love; daily steep themselves in the word of God; let their hearts be warmed by God and in turn transmit that warmth to other people; incarnate the gospel in their lives; enliven their communities; make their communities a home they return to, a circle of friends, or like a real family. *Rejoice* urged consecrated men and women to go out of themselves to reach out to other people, to step out of their comfort zones and to maintain a culture of encounter.

From the foregoing excerpt, it is clear that Pope Francis has a positive and warm appreciation of consecrated men and women, and sees the consecrated life as a major resource for the Church's witness to the world. Hence, he gave them the charge: 'wake up the world'. Before attempting to unpack what 'waking up the world' could mean and involve, it will be in place to examine more closely the contents of the Letter by unraveling selected key points from the message. Since *Rejoice* is a reflection and not a treatise on the consecrated life, supplementary information from contemporary literature on the consecrated life has been deployed where necessary to explain key concepts so as to shed more light on the background to the papal appeal to, 'wake up the world'.

The concepts of consecration, liminality and values-radiation

Consecration

Consecration refers to a state of being in special relatedness to the divine, and a state of being set aside for purposes of sacred service (Consecration, n.d; Deem, 2011). In recent years the terms 'religious life' and 'the vowed life,' have been rebranded into 'the consecrated life'. What exactly 'the consecrated life' means is not

entirely clear to interested outsiders. Neither is it clear enough even to some persons in the consecrated life itself. It remains a life-long study! However, a modest attempt is made here at explaining it.

The question then is: what is the relationship between all three concepts, and how and where are they situated within the wider framework of the Church and society (the world)? One can say that the religious life is a state of life exclusively dedicated to God and to humanity through the public profession and living out of religious vows within the Church, often in community, and expressed through ministry (*Schneiders, 2013*). Thus the terms 'religious life' and 'the vowed life' can be used interchangeably, but not 'the consecrated life'. 'The consecrated life' is an all-embracing term that includes all other ecclesial life forms focused on mission and ministry, but not necessarily on community nor the vows (*O'Murchu, 1995; Schneiders, 2013*). *Rejoice* put it this way: "Consecrated life is a call to incarnate the Good News, to follow Christ, the crucified and risen one, to take on Jesus' way of living and acting as the Incarnate Word in relation to [God] and in relation to his brothers and sisters" (*Rejoice, 2014, p 19*).

In some countries, including Nigeria, there are indications that some high ranking persons in the Church do not know and do not understand the identity and role of the members of the consecrated life in the Church (*Uchem, 2008*). For instance, a long time ago in a certain area, where having more labour hands in the vineyard was desired, a certain Church prelate said of a religious brother that since he had come this far, he would simply ordain him straight away. In another instance, a priest theologian in a public lecture spoke repeatedly of 'the lay religious,' to the bafflement of a discerning audience that included people who knew the difference.

In yet another instance during a mixed group seminar, several Sisters spoke of being told that they were among the laity. This led them to conclude that this belief might be the reason why the religious are not mentioned at all in the prayers of the faithful nor

in the Eucharistic prayers of the Church; that it might also be why many people who make introductions or give vote of thanks at many parish and diocesan social functions would often acknowledge the presence of the clergy and laity, but overlook the religious sisters and brothers entirely despite their high visibility. In light of the call of Pope Francis to the whole Church to value and celebrate the consecrated life, what might be a way forward where this has been the practice?

On the question of the identity of persons in the consecrated life there is a paradox. For instance, all the baptized are consecrated and yet some are said to be 'consecrated persons'. What does that mean? A Vatican II Council document says it this way: "all Christian life is 'consecrated life' ...all Christians are consecrated to the mission of the Church through baptism and confirmation ...all Christians are called to live the evangelical counsels according to their state of life, whether in single or married lay life, or as priests and religious" (*Flannery, 1981: LG, 3*). Having affirmed the consecration of all, the Church then went on to resolve the paradox by highlighting the element of divine call as follows:

[Consecrated persons are] those who are conscious of having received a special call from God to make Jesus Christ and the following of him the central and immediate tasks of their lives in a form which has been recognized and ratified by the Church (*McGarry, 1996, p 6*).

Thus the elements of a divine call and the centrality of the consecration distinguish consecrated persons from other Christians.

The identity of the [consecrated persons] was further clarified and distinguished from that of the laity and clergy as seen in this statement: "the term laity is ... understood to mean all the faithful except those in Holy Orders and those who belong to a religious state approved by the Church" (*Flannery, 1981: LG, 31*). Furthermore, John Paul II (1996) had this to say: "The consecrated life by its nature is neither lay nor clerical. The ... 'consecration' of both men and women constitutes a state which in its profession of the

evangelical counsels is complete in itself ... for the individual and for the Church" (*John Paul II, 1996, p 60*). Thus the consecrated life is not an intermediary stage to the clerical state. It is a state of life complete in itself as in the case of religious brothers, for instance.

In the past, consecrated people tried to make sense of their lives and to clarify their sense of identity in all kinds of ways, including thinking in terms of having a special or superior vocation. Some tried to denigrate the marriage vocation and to pride themselves as being the bride of Christ. To some extent this mentality still operates. However, none of these compensatory moves succeeded in resolving the identity crisis some consecrated persons have sometimes faced in almost every generation. I am of the view that the significance of the consecrated life lies somewhere else beyond the reach of legalities.

Some sources have suggested that the meaning and value of the [consecrated life] can better be understood by taking a wider view and looking beyond Christianity. O'Murchu (1995) has pointed to the rudiments or equivalents of the vowed life in other world religions and indeed other cultures and epochs. His examples included: Buddhist monasticism; the Hindu monastic tradition; the Judaic Old Testament prophets and groups such as the Nazirites (*Amos 2:11-12*) and the Rechabites, who existed in the time of Jeremiah; the Tariqahs and the Sufi Islamic monastic groups; the communities of the beloved disciple; the Essenes; the Therapeutae; St Anthony of Egypt and other men and women in the desert movement.

From a cultural anthropological perspective, therefore, O'Murchu (1995) concluded that liminality was the common factor found in the manifestations of the vowed life across the faith traditions studied. Consequently, O'Murchu (1995) postulated that two concepts, liminality and values-radiation, more adequately captured the meaning and significance of the [consecrated life] in relation to the world.

Liminality

The term, liminality, comes from a Latin word 'limen,' which means threshold and connotes an in-between state that is both conscious in its expressions and unconscious in its origins. Every society has in place certain ritualisations which mark borderline experiences (O'Murchu, 1995, p 46). Examples would include experiences of camping, *iru mgbede* (seclusion of young girls) before marriage or *ipu na mkpu* or *I gba ukwu n'akpu* (seclusion of older women) prior to a special status-based rite of passage); or seclusion of young men before *I ima mmanwu* (initiation into the masquerade cult) in some south-east Nigerian communities. In all these instances the seclusion is temporary, and the outcome is ultimately in service of the society.

Values-radiation

Value-radiation, on the other hand, refers to the focusing on and transmission of "basic values to which people of every race and culture aspire ... [for instance] truth, honesty, love, integrity, goodness, union of opposites ... [and so on]". Anthropologists believe that "such values with universal impact are mediated through various rites and symbols and that liminality seems to be one of the most pervasive and profound forms of value-radiation that human beings have adopted (O'Murchu, 1995, p 46). Consecration is for service and from the perspective of liminality and values-radiation, therefore, the consecrated life is serving society's need to have people who live and do on their behalf that which each and all have been called and destined to be and do.

Consecrated life versus religious life: Shifting meanings and practices

Within the consecrated life, the following categories are to be found: societies of apostolic life, secular institutes and religious institutes. Societies of apostolic life are those consecrated to the mission of Christ but whose life is not characterised by the taking

of vows but rather by dedication to the apostolate and mission (O'Murchu, 1995; Schneiders, 2013). For example, Daughters of St Vincent de Paul (Daughters of Charity), the Vincentians, the Ursulines (O'Murchu, 1995), Missionaries of St Paul (MSPs), and others. Their lifestyle is adapted to the demands and requirements of mission contexts. Secular institutes are those that do not live in community and do not take vows but live the evangelical counsels voluntarily. Their main focus is to live the Christian life from the midst of the society so as to transform it from within just like yeast or like salt; for example, Sisters of the Christian Services and the *Opus Dei*.

Religious institutes, on the other hand, include most of the congregations known in Nigeria among the women: Daughters of Divine Love, Daughters of Mary Mother of Mercy, Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus, Immaculate Heart of Mary, Medical Missionaries of Mary, Missionary Sisters of the Holy Rosary; and among the men: Holy Ghost Brothers and Fathers, Marist Brothers, Brothers of St Stephen, the Carmelites, Redemptorists, and others. Their life is characterised by the public profession of the vows of consecrated celibacy, evangelical poverty and apostolic obedience as well as life in community. As Schneiders (2001) expressed it, those called to the religious life give themselves to Christ "to the exclusion of all other primary commitments through perpetual commitment of celibacy in community and mission" (p xxi). Simply put, the religious, whether male or female, are those who have voluntarily dedicated themselves to God and the service of God's people through the profession and living of the evangelical counsels in religious institutes recognised by the Church.

Shifting meanings and practices in the religious life

In the past, religious life was mostly expressed in terms of negation, distance, abstinence and separation. It was viewed as a state of holiness and perfection and elevated above marriage. The Religious saw themselves as a privileged class set apart. To some extent, this mentality still operates today. Then Vatican II Council

came along and proclaimed a universal call to holiness of all the baptized. All those things that were the exclusive preserves of the religious in times past (social services) were then taken over by other people; not just lay Christians but in some cases secular non-governmental organisations.

Many Religious lost their sense of identity. Some stayed and others left. Some wondered and questioned: 'What is the point of religious life when one knows that all are called to holiness and perfection, and all are called to mission and to witnessing and modeling Christ in the world?' When it happens that other people do these same works and pray, sometimes even more, how might religious identify themselves or give meaning to their life? What attitudes and what values can give the Religious reason for their existence?

In line with the concept of values-radiation highlighted earlier, Chittister (1995) in her book, *Fire in these Ashes*, presented 'quest for the sacred,' quest for union with God to which all are called, as the central preoccupation of the religious life. While all are called to seek God in contemplation as in activity, the Religious are called to lead the way.

For this writer, an example from south-eastern Nigerian cultural dance troupes aptly conveys the image of 'leading a dance' (*Uchem, 2009*) which can be used appropriately to explain a contemporary theology of the religious life. There are usually a few 'lead-dancers' who come out into the arena and perform a kind of overture to the audience. They then go back, rejoin the group; and the whole troupe files out and performs the steps together. The lead dancers may not necessarily be the best dancers nor the best behaved in the whole lot. They are simply pre-selected and they happily render this service to the troupe and the audience. This image of 'the lead-dancers' very aptly captures the contemporary theology of the religious life.

The title of the Vatican II Council document, *Perfecta Caritatis*, that called for the renewal of the religious life is a necessary reminder that at the heart of the religious life is perfection of chari-

ty (love). This is different from the notion of the pursuit of perfection which was a mistaken and unrealistic pursuit that could only breed superficiality and make-believe type of holiness.

It has been noted that originally the religious vows were not the cornerstone of the religious life. Rather they were simply a commitment to devote one's entire life to the search for God, the quest for God. For Joan Chittister (1995), for example, the distinctions and the specifications of the religious vows of poverty, chastity and obedience were a later development (p 99). They were not originally "an essential part of the religious life" (p 99). This is in line with Sandra Schneiders (2003) who saw "the three pillars of Catholic religious life as: the quest for God, mission and ministry, and community" (pp 8-30).

More recently, however, a more positive understanding of the vows has been unfolding and even the terminologies are being more nuanced. For instance, the religious vow of poverty is now understood by some people as voluntary poverty which requires living simply for the sake of the poor. Consecrated celibacy is now understood by some as a broadening of the heart to love inclusively and universally. The religious vow of obedience is understood in some quarters as apostolic obedience or prophetic obedience. For Schneiders (2013), it involves mutual listening and action in response to a call to mission expressed as ministry in specific contexts. These explanations are in tune with the contents of the message of Pope Francis to consecrated people.

Consecrated life waking up the world: key elements

Moving on from an exploration of the contemporary meaning of the consecrated life, attention is now turned to other themes from *Rejoice*, namely: witnessing, prayer, community, being prophetic and waking up the world. Incidentally, these are key elements of the religious life, now rebranded as 'consecrated life.'

Witnessing

It appears that the kernel of Pope Francis' message in *Rejoice* is his call for witnessing. The Pope invited consecrated men and women to be "splendid witnesses, effective proclaimers, companions and neighbors for the women and men with whom we share a common history and who want to find a home in the Church" (*Rejoice*, 2014, p 6). In other words, the religious may need to go beyond the traditional ministry of preaching, teaching, nursing and so on; even to pay attention to how they are in ministries. They could even ask themselves: 'to whom are we witnessing?' 'Who do we serve?'

The Pope strongly urged consecrated persons to witness to the joy of the gospel and reminded all that this gospel is a person, namely Jesus. He said: "We are not called to accomplish epic feats or to proclaim high surrounding words but to give witness to the joy that arises from the certainty of knowing that we are loved ... and from the confidence that we are saved" (*Rejoice*, 2014, p 13). The Pope said "There is no holiness in sadness" (p 13). "We are called to wear God's smile ... Joy is contagious" (p 31). "It is this witness that I expect of you ... religious should be men and women able to wake up the world" (p 6).

The Pope spoke directly to consecrated persons: "Have the courage to go against the tide ... against the tide of this culture of efficiency, this culture of waste" (*Rejoice*, 2014, p 33). "Be witnesses of a different way of acting, of living! It is possible to live differently in this world. [...] It is this witness I expect from you. Religious should be men and women able to wake up the world" (*Rejoice*, 2014, pp 6, 35). This clearly indicates that the way to wake up the world is principally through counter-cultural witnessing to the good news.

Prayer

Pope Francis encouraged consecrated persons to cultivate a deep personal relationship with God through prayer or contemplation. "In calling you God says to you: you are important to me, I love

you, I am counting on you” (*Rejoice*, 2014, p 14). The Pope asked them to recall that initial experience of one’s call; “the joy of the moment in which Jesus looked at me” (p 15) [and to make]... a renewed personal encounter with Jesus today, at least to an openness to letting him encounter them” (p 15). “I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day” (p 16).

In the life of consecrated persons, prayer is both a resource and a challenge. Prayer is a resource when one is sufficiently anchored in God and is interiorly connected. In that case, they are more likely to be in tune with the Holy Spirit; to experience greater clarity, a deeper sense of peace; enabling them to make better decisions which are more likely to be in line with what God wants. That is probably why Pope Francis cautioned against being stifled and hemmed in by an institutional mentality and reminded consecrated persons to live in the realm of the spirit and in the ambience of prophecy.

Prayer is also a challenge because we are engaging in relationship with somebody or something we do not know and do not see. Since quest for God is central to the consecrated life, it is worth considering the whole question of knowing God and experiencing God. God is more than humans can imagine. However, through fidelity to the practice of contemplative prayer over a long period of time, consecrated persons will grow in a personal firsthand knowledge of God. The fruit will then overflow in the quality of their presence in community and in ministry.

Community

Rejoice also spoke about community as a theological space or forum that supports the quest for God, which consecrated life is all about. “Fidelity in discipleship occurs through, and is demonstrated by, the experience of community, a theological reality in which we are called to support each other in our joyful ‘yes’ to the Gospel” (*Rejoice*, 2014 p 26). *Rejoice* further connects prayer and renewed community life. “It is the Word of God that inspires faith and nourishes and revitalizes it. And it is the Word of God

that touches hearts, converting them to God and to [God]'s logic which is so different from our own. It is the Word of God that continually renews our communities" (p 26).

The importance of community and its significance to consecrated life cannot be over-emphasised. *Rejoice* said "community is the first and most believable gospel that we can preach" (*Rejoice, 2014, p 31*). Consecrated persons are those called primarily 'to be with' Jesus and subsequently 'to be sent', just like the earliest disciples whom Jesus called personally to "come and see" (*John 1: 39*). Thus the call to community with Jesus and with each other is equally a call to mission and ministry. Ministerial activities provide the external framework for their participation in God's mission which has been entrusted to the Church. I believe that community is built and not received ready-made. Relationships are at the heart of community, and the ability to communicate well and properly is of primary importance in relationships.

Community is built through commitment; dedication; improved communication skills, especially listening; listening to what the Spirit is saying within one's heart; familiarity with the good news in the scriptures, the constitutions, past chapter documents and the life of the founder/foundress, though with up-to-date interpretation; taking account of the cultural and ethnic diversities within the congregation and rising to the challenges entailed; giving due attention to the values of hospitality, graciousness, fairness, courtesy, celebration and simplicity of life (*Uchem, 2009, pp 266-268*).

Thus, successful community life requires an ability to adapt, tolerate, appreciate, respect and accept one another. It also entails acknowledging individual talents and gifts and calling them into service of God's people wherever they may be found.

It is necessary to see the ministry one is engaged in as a community/congregational ministry rather than one's own private ministry where no one may trespass, so to say. In ministry, consecrated persons are reminded to be "facilitators and not controllers of grace" (*Rejoice, 2014, p 31*). Of utmost importance is

fidelity to the charism of the community/congregation; following in the footsteps of their founder/foundress. In this connection, the Pope pointed out a malaise that envelops consecrated life as an institution and diagnosed it as 'apathy' and 'joylessness' as the root. He invites consecrated persons "to make an exodus from oneself" (p 15) and to embark on "a pilgrimage of loving transformation" (p 16).

True witnessing in each ministry is essential to responding sincerely to the Pope's appeal to wake up the world. For one thing, young people can be attracted to the consecrated life these days not just because of the expertise of vocation promoters, but especially because they see consecrated persons as holy and happy people. Hence the Pope said: "Do not be afraid to show the joy of having answered the Lord's call, of having responded to his choice of love and of bearing witness to his Gospel ... And joy, true joy, is contagious; it is infectious... it impels one forward ... Faced with this contagious witness of joy, serenity, fruitfulness, the testimony of tenderness and love, humble charity without arrogance, many people [will] feel the need to 'come and see'" (*Rejoice*, p 34).

Being prophetic

Very close to the role of witnessing inherent to the consecrated life is the call to be prophetic. *Rejoice* called consecrated persons to be prophetic. It linked prayer with the prophetic call in this way.

Contemplation expands into prophetic aptitude. The prophet is one whose eye is opened, and who hears and speaks the words of God; [...] a person of three times: the promise of the past, the contemplation of the present, the courage to point out the path toward the future (*Rejoice*, 2014, p 26).

The question is: What exactly does it mean to be prophetic? Although *Rejoice* did not give much idea on what it means and how to go about it, one can say that to be prophetic does not

mean being able to foretell the future or the fortunes of people, like who will win in a country's general elections. Rather, being prophetic is to take on a role similar to that of the prophets in ancient Israel who spoke truth to power and engaged the powers that be, often from the vantage point of the most vulnerable in the society. Most of the prophets suffered persecution for their prophetic stance.

Therefore, to be prophetic today is to engage in actions for social justice. As Catholic social teachings put it:

Action on behalf of social justice promotes social change in institutions, policies, and systems. Social justice is central to being Catholic. It is not new, nor is it optional. It is an essential ... dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, of, in other words, the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation (*Justice in the world*, 1971, p 6).

Social justice is one of five ways of participating in *Missio Dei*, in line with the Church's mandate received from Christ. The other ways are: proclamation, dialogue, inculturation and social communications. DAs different from charity (*caritas* in Latin) which aims at relieving people's immediate needs, social justice aims at tackling the roots of injustice instead of just addressing the symptoms. It deals with the cause of the unjust situation which renders people unable to meet their personal needs. The activities involved in promoting social justice include: education and awareness-raising, empowerment, accompaniment, solidarity, advocacy and resistance/protest. For want of space and time these will not be elaborated upon further here.

Playing a prophetic role requires critical thinking, noticing injustices, speaking up, speaking out, raising dust and rocking the boat without fear of losing popularity or privileges, as well as readiness to take the punishment that is bound to follow taking up a prophetic stance. Here the challenge from Pope Francis was very strong: "Have the courage to go against the tide ..." (*Rejoice*, 2014, p 33). Thus consecrated persons, by virtue of their call, are

supposed to be the conscience of the society and the conscience of the Church as well.

The Second Synod for Africa (2009), had this to say: “The Church expects much from the witness of religious communities, characterized by racial, regional and ethnic differences. With their common life they proclaim that God does not make distinctions between people and that we are all his children, family members, living in harmony in diversity and peace.” (P8) For Wirba (2015), the basis of the prophetic witness which the Church and the society seriously demand from persons in consecrated life today lies not in the usual apostolates or works, but rather in a disposition of total dedication to God.

In this author’s view, this is part of what it means to ‘wake up the world,’ which is the very appeal of Pope Francis to consecrated men and women. Therefore, to be prophetic is to recognize two sides to the proclamation of the good news of Christ: announcing the good news on the one side, and denouncing injustice and oppression of others, on the other side. It also entails admitting that the Christian cross equally has two faces: one on which the image of the crucified is etched and the other plain side on which to mount the ardent follower of Christ. So the question is: For what are African consecrated men and women prepared to speak out collectively to wake up the African Church, and to wake up the African nations? For what justice issues are African consecrated men and women prepared to suffer and to be crucified?

Waking up the world

In order to better understand and implement the Pope’s call to wake up the world, it is important to review varied meanings of the world and how these have influenced (or failed to shape) available models of the consecrated life. Then the question has to be asked: What does it mean to wake up the world? And which world? These are important questions because religious life (now consecrated life) was and is still being defined by some people in terms of flight from the world: “*ndi jugoro ihe nke uwa a;*” in

Igbo language, those who have rejected the things of this world. Whereas the religious have been 'cultured' to shun the world, Pope Francis in his message has urged the consecrated persons to embrace the world. So how would they do it? We are called to undertake an exodus out of our own selves. Hear him: "We must go out through that door to seek and meet the people! Have the courage to go against the tide of this culture of efficiency, this culture of waste. Encountering and welcoming everyone ..." (*Rejoice*, 2014, p .33).

Understanding the changing concept of the world and the philosophical concept of dualism is crucial to appreciating the unfolding meaning of the religious life (consecrated life) as reflected in *Rejoice*, the Pope's letter on the consecrated life. There are at least three ways of understanding the concept of the world. The first is the physical world, the natural world, the universe or the planet earth. The second is the human society, while the third is a perspective or a worldview (*Schneiders*, 2013). The world as nature/the earth and the world as the human society are often used interchangeably without much thought. Yet the former is physical whereas the latter is social and sociological. The world as perspective or worldview, on the other hand, could be taken to mean: an established way of seeing reality and of doing things; convention (*Omenani* in Igbo language); culture, customs and traditions; including mentalities people are born into or raised up in and therefore often held sacrosanct and unquestioned, no matter how out of sync with a sense of justice and good taste.

Dualism is a philosophical concept which refers to a certain way of perceiving reality in terms of paired opposites such as bad and good, negative and positive, black and white; male and female, and so on. In this way of thinking, both entities cannot be considered good at the same time and there is no room for any grey areas nor middle ground. Consequently, the physical world (the earth) was considered as negative, temporal/ephemeral, inferior and mundane and was contrasted with heaven (meaning the sky considered as positive and more spiritual than the earth). In the sense of the human society, the world was perceived as evil,

dangerous and to be avoided. In this dualistic frame of thought, other realities were similarly contrasted: darkness versus light, devil versus angel, female versus male, black versus white, sinner versus saint, body versus soul, matter versus spirit, and so on. This conceptual framework originated in the pre-scientific era when the world/the universe was imagined as an inverted bowl (the sky/ heaven) over a flat saucer (a flat earth). Accordingly, relations among beings in this universe were ranked hierarchically and as pyramidal.

Following humanity's discovery and the eventual acceptance of the image of the earth as spherical, rotating on its axis and at the same time revolving in its orbit in space, there is now a growing alternative understanding that heaven (the sky) and earth belong to the same universe that God "created and saw that it was very good" (*Gen 1: 31*). Moreover, God made humans in the divine image (*Gen 1: 27*) and God loved the world (the human society) so much as to give the only begotten Son for its salvation (*John 3: 16-18*).

Thus, the world is good and not evil, and a holistic view of the human person is that of an integrated entity of body, mind, soul and spirit. More specifically then, the human person comprises of the social, physical, intellectual/imaginative, emotional/psychological and spiritual dimensions; certainly a far cry from the body/soul dualism. The theological concepts of heaven and hell are psycho-spiritual states rather than physical/geographical spatial locations. Yet among Christian thinkers and preachers of the word, dualisms remain active.

Only a few people who have been privileged to relearn the central truths of the Christian faith reframed in dialogue with the new universe story (the new cosmology) have been led to a deeper faith in Holy Mystery. Others who are not so fortunate and have only known the faith of their childhood, which is riddled with dualisms which no longer make any sense to them, have abandoned the faith altogether as all sham. (Is it possible that such failure of religious leaders of thought to integrate new scientific concepts

into the process of transmitting the faith to the next generation might be responsible for many abandoning the Christian faith?)

In light of the above explanations of the new cosmology, that is, the new understanding of the earth as spherical with its attendant human consciousness pressing for greater inclusion and less discriminations against certain persons, it can now be said that the dualistic frame of reference for explaining all reality has expired. A holistic view of the world and of life as a whole is more relevant than dualism. Systems thinking better explains the nature and workings of the world than dualism. Systems thinking refers to the understanding that the whole is greater than the sum of its constituent parts; and that everything in the universe originated from the same source, and is interconnected in such a way that anything happening to one part equally affects all the other parts. Systems thinking further implies that together people achieve much more than they do when they operate as solitary individuals. Consider the implications of systems thinking as a case for religious and diocesan clergy collaborating better than is currently the situation.

Thus, in contrast to the old model of the consecrated life as ‘flight from the world’, Pope Francis has urged consecrated men and women to embrace the world. “Leave the nest,” the Pope admonished consecrated people, “to live the life of the men and women of our times, to hand ourselves over to God and to our neighbour” (*Rejoice, 2014, p 34*). He went on further to explain: “The ghost to [resist] is the image of religious life understood as an escape and consolation in face of an ‘external’ difficult and complex world” (*p 34*). “To accept this teaching is to renew our existence in accordance with the gospel, not in a radical way understood as a model of perfection and often separation, but by adhering wholeheartedly to the saving encounter that transforms our life” (*pp 5, 6*). Thus, consecrated men and women must wake up themselves first before they can think of waking up the world as the Holy Father appealed.

Conclusion

Prophetic action has been highlighted as central to a new understanding of the role of the consecrated life in the Church, in particular, and in the world at large. The prophetic dimension of the consecrated life is essentially witnessing to the good news that is the person of Jesus. Pope Francis (*Rejoice*, 2014, p 35) issued a very strong appeal to consecrated persons: "The Church must be attractive. Wake up the world! Be witnesses of a different way of acting [and] of living!" Consecrated persons are to wake up their own corner of the world. Building on Pope Francis' message, some ideas for doing this were indicated. In order to embrace the world and show it the smiling face of God, as Pope Francis suggested that consecrated persons do, alternative ways of understanding the world were further offered. Going forward, dualistic thinking is to be set aside and a more holistic understanding of the world is to be espoused.

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CHAPTER 4

Consecration of Religious Life as a Covenant

By

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Introduction

Consecration is not just an act of giving away one's life; it is also to sanctify (or make sacred or holy) possessions, time, and spiritual gifts for the kingdom of God.

According to Catholic Encyclopaedia, Volume 4 (*Herbermann, 2018*), consecration, in general, is an act by which a thing is separated from a common and general use to a sacred use, or by which a person or thing is dedicated to the service and worship of God by prayers, rites, and ceremonies. Consecration is the sanctification that comes by giving willingly, for the right reasons, which Acts 4: 32 describes as “every man seeking the interest of his neighbour, and doing all things with an eye single to the glory of God”. Consecration means self-denial – I deny any right to be sexually satisfied or to have children of my own, or to leave the place to which my Saviour has called me (*John, 2012*). My life is his, purchased by his blood. Therefore, I affirm my responsibility to carry the cross as he did, in submission to the Father's will, for the joy set before him, loving to the end though unloved, rejected, and forsaken (John 13:1).

Consecration is cross-centred. To follow after Jesus Christ not only leads us under the shadow of the cross, but it also places the

cross on our backs. What did that cross mean for our Saviour? He died to the power of sin (Rom. 6:10). Devotion to Christ means that we must be mortifying or killing sin all our lives. We can do so because Jesus Christ broke its power. It does not have dominion over us. Consecration also means that we live unto righteousness (Rom. 6:11-13). Sacrifice is the principle through which the individual is able to practice the law of consecration. Bruce (2013) clarified that there are some of the principles of sacrifice and consecration to which the true saints must conform if they are ever to go where God and Christ are and have an inheritance to the faithful saints of ages past.

Sacrifice and consecration are inseparably intertwined. The law of consecration is that we consecrate our time, our talents, and our money and property to the cause of the congregation which is part of the Church; such are to be available to the extent they are needed to further the Lord's interests on earth (*Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life*, 2008). Religious congregations are the heirs and heiresses of great founders of people who practice a consecrated life, like Francis of Rome (1384), St Dominic (1221), Teresa of Avila, Bishop Joseph Shanahan (1891), St John of God (1550), St John Baptist De La Salle (1651), and many other founders. These men and women upset the Church of their times by demonstrating the uncompromising nature of the Gospel, and by moving the Church, an institution, into new situations and circumstances. This they did on the basis of their prophet charisms and simple lifestyle.

In line with Jacques (2016), one of the big challenges in living out the consecrated life in Africa and other parts of the world is that religious sometimes move towards the comfort zone, where everything is nicely balanced and moderated, and then forget their prophetic vocation in and for the Church. Many religious do excellent work in institutions, but very often we have to admit that they fulfil the roles society has assigned to them. People appreciate them for what they do and not for who they are (Ngozi, 2016). Society and the Church expect them not to move beyond their assigned duty, they are not to meddle in any other

ways with issues, of society or the Church, which often make or break human lives.

Jacques went on to say that the gospel foundation of consecrated life is to be looked for in the existential relationship woven between Jesus and some of his disciples during his journey on earth in the search for the perfect life, abandoning the world, leaving everything, and offering one's own life at the service of God. It is also for the advent of the Kingdom of God and the advance of one's brethren; and in the imitation from near to hand of the form of life that Jesus chose for himself. 'If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor; and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me' (*Mt. 10: 21*). This form, which has its origins in the Father, emerges as a call, an election and a mission. It has an essential Christological and pneumatological meaning (*Jacques, 2016*).

It seems like many religious congregations in Africa have 'crises of function', since many are not sure of their role in the Church (Ngozi, 2016). Many are not educated and therefore not qualified to do the work. Radical following is not just the work we do but how that work witnesses to Christ's presence in the world (John, 2006). Do Religious have a voice to challenge what is not going well in the Church today? Some religious congregations write and receive funding to do a project, but the money is used for other things, or shared with some Bishops, yet it is meant for the poor. Where then is the Religious prophetic voice to challenge. Pope Francis (2018) reminded Religious that throughout its long history, the consecrated life has always prophetically reacted against economic systems that debased people, especially the poorest in the current global financial crisis. He reminds them that consecrated persons are called to be truly faithful and creative in order not to weaken the prophetic call of the common life within the community and outside the community.

Religious should be the voice of Jesus in this present day, but if they keep quiet and join the world, then they are crucifying Christ a second time. Religious need to discover their true pro-

phetic nature and to be alert to the signs of the times if they are to serve as “therapy for the Church today” (*Pope Francis, 2018*).

The law of sacrifice is that we are willing to lose all that we have for the truth’s sake: our character and reputation; our honour and applause; our good name among men; our houses, lands, and families; all things, even our very lives if need be. A religion that does not require the sacrifice of all things never has power sufficient to produce the faith necessary to lead unto life and salvation (*Joseph, 2018*).

How Do Members of Religious Congregations find Meaning in Religious Life?

The members of religious congregations witness to community living. The most important function of religious life is community living. John (2006) indicated that life in community must be a clear sign that our Christian faith can create communities in which peace, justice, love and true sisterhood and brotherhood are not merely empty words, but lived realities. Our communities within the Church and people of God should serve as a visible and tangible anticipation of the final community which God intends for the whole of creation. The spirit of three Gods in one creates a community here on earth and it is supposed to be revealed in our communities where harmony and unity should reign. Due to our brokenness of human life, it is difficult to have perfect communities.

Cheryl (2017) asserted that a person discerning a call to religious life actually has two important questions before them: Am I called to religious life? And to what community or order am I being called? While religious communities have much in common – the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience; a formation programme; and living a life of service and prayer – they also are different.

Religious communities should take the lead and show an example of ideal communities, where every member is at home and happy irrespective of their race, culture and colour. People expect

to see a visible sign of communality in the life of religious. The function of religious communities is to be a counter witness or a contrast to society for our time. Canon Law, c. 602, affirms that the life of brothers and sisters is to be defined in such a way that it becomes a mutual support for all in fulfilling the vocation of each.

Tom (1991) explained that relying always on the Lord, religious must become independent of the world. We must be self-reliant (*Hannah, 2016*). Using the work God has given us, Hannah affirmed that we must work out our own economic and temporal problems. We must maintain our own health, sow our own gardens, store our own food, educate and train ourselves to handle the daily affairs of life. No one else can work out our salvation for us, either temporally or spiritually. It is only in loving one another that we can achieve these. One sees some religious who sit in the community and do nothing but criticise others negatively.

“A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another”. “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples if ye have love one to another” (*John 13:34–35; Luke 10:25–37, 14:12–14*).

It is sad to say that many members of religious communities fight like cats and dogs over material things, possession of power and unhealthy relationships within and outside their communities and congregations (*Ngozi, 2016*). The leaders in the community want to lord it over the rest. No one is superior to the other in religious life. According to Pope Francis (2018), those who exercise their ministry without patient listening and welcoming understanding put themselves in a situation where they have little authority when confronting their fellow brothers and sisters. He went on to say that the authority of the religious superior must be characterised by the spirit of service, in imitation of Christ who ‘came not to be served but to serve’ (*Mark 10:45*) – the behaviour inspired by Jesus, the servant, who washes the feet of his disciples so that they might have a part in his life and in his love. Pope Francis (2013) asks communities throughout the

world to offer a radiant and attractive witness of fraternal communion. Let everyone admire how you care for one another, and how you encourage and accompany one another.

Where do Consecrated Religious find Direction?

Following the poor, Jesus is ensuring his spirit of poverty.

According to John (1992), the vow of poverty creates a lot of uneasiness, not to mention guilt, among many religious of our time. None knows exactly how to define poverty or how to deal with it, especially when one sees many priests and religious buying land and building personal structures.

To apply the word “poverty” sounds counterfeit, as thousands of people are challenged with mass starvation, oppression, exploitation and misery, even in the religious congregations. “We are not poor” is a phrase often spoken by religious: we have plenty to eat, a roof over our head, a bed to sleep in; we are not worried about tomorrow except for those concerned to provide what we need. Religious sometimes do not consider themselves part of the poor though they vowed poverty. Will it not be possible then to change the vow of poverty to another thing, like detachment or accomplishment? (Ngozi, 2016). Even at that, are religious men and women really detached? Maybe they feel more accomplished. Jesus told the rich man, “Go, sell all you have and give the money to the poor” (Mk 10:21). Are religious really poor?

The life of poverty has a clear biblical foundation. It was part of Jesus’ own experiences and has always been part of the traditional structure of religious life. It seems to respond to the deepest and most sincere questions of the contemporary men and women, many of whom have come to realise that true freedom cannot be found in wealth and in possession. The Church is not poor but the world around the Church is poor. Religious, especially the priests, have the costliest gadgets in the world. They can argue that people gave them these as gifts, but they still possess them. A priest requested a gift of a car from a rich woman. The woman bought one of the most expensive cars for the priest.

When the bishop saw the car, he told the priest that he could not drive such a car among the people, who barely find daily food to eat. The bishop advised him to sell the car and get another that would serve his work as a shepherd of God's people. The priest was not happy. He started destroying the name of his bishop, saying that he was a jealous and wicked bishop who did not allow happiness. It all demonstrated that the happiness of the priest was based on material things and not on the life of witness to Christ.

Jesus was dedicated to his father and to his work only, not to worldly possessions. His security, the rock he stood upon, was the knowledge that he was the father's beloved son. This knowledge gave him the strength to risk being one of us. "Though he was rich, yet he became poor for our sake" (2 Corinthians 8:9). To be human then means, according to Jesus' attitude:

- to accept the givenness of life
- to accept the gratuitousness of creation
- to acknowledge our poverty before God
- to rejoice in it.

Poverty should help us discover the beauty of creation. It should help to understand that we exist because of God's unconditional love (Ngozi, 2014). This should fill us with peace and joy always. The spirit of poverty does not consist of pursuing misery but in setting everything in the beauty of creation. It means to live in the gladness of today. Jesus enjoyed the things of this world without getting caught up in it. He was a free man, both in body and in spirit. He seems to be very tough on the rich (Mk 10: 23- 27). One wonders how many consecrated religious are truly free in both body and in spirit.

What is the Purpose of Being a Consecrated?

The Puebla Conference (1979) listed four main concerns among religious:

1. The experiences of God.

2. The witness to community living.
3. The preferential option for the poor.
4. The integrating into the life of the local Church (726-738).

For many international and indigenous congregations, these have special importance. Today, all international congregations, and even indigenous ones, are moving towards a future where there will be no dominant nationality among them. This has a true witness value.

Martin (1994, pp 79-81) says “to know Christ and to love Him, that is our vocation but to succeed in this most necessary task of our life we will have to do both things: pray and serve our brothers and sisters”. Spencer (1978) reaffirmed the importance of developing unity today. This is the purpose of being consecrated. Many religious help poor people while living below the poverty standard especially those sent to study in various Universities. Some have deviated from the purpose by which they became religious to run after people who more or less destroy their purity while helping them materially. Consecrated can lose focus when their values are swallowed up by mere material needs.

The Values Consecrated Religious Hold?

The greatest value for religious should be the call to holiness. Within the Church, holiness is shown birth in the fruits of grace which the Spirit produces in the faithful once they are sanctified at the roots through baptism.

All Christians without exception are called to perfect holiness, achieved in a lifelong process of inner transformation or ‘conversion’ towards the saving and sanctifying God. Religious are to show the example of such holiness. Where are religious in the life of holiness? Apart from work to help the world, our main job should be prayer (Ngozi, 2016). Consecration is the giving of one’s time, talents, and means to care for those in need spiritually. The religious call is a challenging threefold invitation: to be with others in a specific ecclesial community while publicly pro-

fessing the evangelical counsels; to love God above all, seeking ever closer union with him; to serve the Lord of life apostolically. These give a sense of inner unity. It is the call to consecration within religious institutes.

Unfortunately, religious men and women are seen to value the work they do more than their life in Christ and true witness to the gospel values. Work brings happiness, self-esteem, and prosperity. It is the means of all accomplishment. God commanded all humankind to work (*Gen. 3:19*.) Attempts to obtain our temporal, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being by means of a dole violate the divine mandate that we should work for what we receive, but it should not be the centre of our focus. Prayer and a life of holiness should be at the forefront.

Analysis

The data instrument used was a qualitative phenomenological research design. Non-probability sampling techniques were used to select a sampled size of ten sisters, ten Brothers, ten Priests and five superiors from five congregations residing in Kenya. The tools for data collection include semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The writer conducted a workshop with a group of 30 sisters where they had group discussions on issues of consecration and their contributions are presented in a summary form. Interviews with participants were transcribed and presented in a narrative form.

What ways can community living help to create a witnessing power of the Holy Spirit where people can exclaim, see how much they love one another?

Participant A laughed and explained:

We are still far from this reality. I do not know what happens to the vows we proclaim during the profession; immediately the ceremony is over, everything is seen to evaporate out of many people. Maybe the training in the formation houses is not deeply rooted (2/09/2018).

The response from participant A shows that communities are really struggling in religious life. There is no spirit of internalisation during formation and after profession. Participant C (2018) said that religious need to see community as a home where brothers and sisters live together in peace, no matter the problems in the home. It looks like many religious see community as a battlefield for the survival of the fittest instead of a home.

The focus group (2018) came up with some suggestions that, if all were practiced, would lead to people seeing a positive change in religious life. These include:

Doing things together, openness, trust, caring, prayerful, forgiving one another, effective communication, sense of belonging, honest, appreciation and encouraging one another, equality, hospitable, sensitive to our uniqueness, valuing our life as God's witness to his kingdom (18/09/2018).

These responses make one wonder what is being taught in the formation houses. The focus group came up with the things that divide members in the community:

Jealousy, tribalism, superiority and inferiority complexes, competition, comparisons, gossip, different perception, materialism, power, individualism, discrimination, misuse of funds, hatred, lack of self-acceptance, suspicion, conflict with authority, favouritism, witchcraft, *illuminati*/devil worship, difference in spirituality, different cultures, different nationalities, technology, ministries, sickness, arrival syndrome (Focused, 18/09/2018).

Some of these points should be handled better in religious communities. There are surprising ones which are opposed to religious consecration, like witchcraft, *illuminati*/devil worship, tribalism, and culture. How can a consecrated person chase after the devil?

Ndilu (2017) asserts that witchcraft is common in many regions of Africa. In a 2014 study by the Association of Consecrated Women in Eastern and Central Africa and published by the Catholic University of Eastern Africa Press, 77% of 133 religious

respondents in Kenya said witchcraft is practised in their ethnic communities, and 53% believed it was on the rise. Among the 36 respondents who are sisters in Malawi, 75% said there is the presence of witchcraft in their communities and 75% said that the practice is on the rise. It is astounding how consecrated men and women would choose to worship the devil. Light and darkness can never meet. When the evil exits in communities, the tendency for all the enumerated problems above are bound to exist.

What is the Purpose of Being a Consecrated Person Today?

Participants argued that it still remains true that consecrated persons have hope for the Church through their prayers and witness through community living in an institute adorned with a particular charism discerned to be genuine by the Church's pastors. Thus, the call originates in God, who loves and consecrates the person. God's love evokes the generous total response of the person consecrated by him; it makes such a response possible. Not content to be merely 'dead to sin' (*Rom 6, 11*), 'but renouncing the world also', religious seek, through the public profession of the evangelical counsels, to 'live for God alone'. The pact of love between God and the consecrated person must be constantly nourished in prayer, that opens the presence of the God of love, and compassion which daily reaffirms that he is unquestionably 'first' in the life of the consecrated person.

In the present situation of religious life in Africa, what do you see as the values uphold as consecrated people?

Participants (2018) shared that consecrated religious men and women are brought together into the institute much like Christians are brought together into the Church by God who calls his people into unity. When they form a closely knit unit, they will be an effective sign of the love of Father and Son within the Trinity. Their communal life is to be so defined that, for all, it proves of mutual assistance to fulfill their calling (*c. 602*). Shared living

must aim towards being a support to one another; it is not enough that religious are together under the same roof. It is left to the particular charism of the institute to indicate how this assistance is to be effectively given so that solid human relationships build up within the community, and give strength and encouragement in the living out of one's vocation. Firmly rooted and based in God's pardoning love, the communal union of religion is to be an example of universal reconciliation in Christ (c. 602).

Participants affirmed that the consecrated should take seriously that consecration to Jesus Christ necessarily excludes us from engaging in many things that most people think good and necessary. He calls us to a deliberate life, a life of sacrifice, a life of consecration to him and rejection of the standards and fears of this world. Sadly enough, many priests and religious spend their precious time watching pornography on YouTube, making long conversations on phones, but giving little or no time to prayer and community life. We prefer to love others outside our communities and could not see eye to eye with those living with us, thereby forming unsafe communities where jealousy and hatred reign supreme. Sex is no longer an issue for most religious. Someone shared that some priests see their lifestyle as an opportunity to have as many sex partners as possible without commitment. They use the money contributed by poor people to 'enjoy a double life'. In this modern trend, I feel we have deviated from our life. We have lost the point.

Conclusion

Community life is really a sacrament of God's compassionate love if, and in so far as, it embodies the saving reality of universal reconciliation in Christ. Religious community life can very frequently embody the reality of God's pardon, precisely because it is often itself hard and burdened by conflict, and so calls for reconciliation. Once religious really grasp the fact that God is mercy, they are freed to forgive and become agents of reconciliation. In the words of Jean (2018), "It is when we discover that the Father

sent his only beloved Son not to judge us, not to condemn, but to heal, save and guide us on the paths of love and to forgive us because he loves us in the depths of our being that we can accept ourselves". There is hope. We are not imprisoned forever by egoism and darkness. It is possible to love. So it becomes possible to accept others and to forgive.

The Way Forward

The kingdom of God asks for a radical decision to leave all security behind and to put one's whole trust in the unconditional love of God. Our desire to possess, to dominate, to make ourselves secure, is very disastrous to our salvation and the salvation of others. The experience of God's unconditional love, which came into this world with Jesus, should provide us with security (*Matt 6: 25-34*). We need to go back to Jesus' lifestyle that provides the inspiration to leave everything and follow him in this way (*Mk 10:21*).

- There is a need to express the desire to be poor for the sake of Jesus and the Kingdom (*Lk 9:58*). This is a desire to live truly authentically and humanely, as Jesus lived; to have no power, no support, no security, except the commitment of one's heart.
- The religious community should be a place in which pardon is daily given and received, a clear sign to its members and to all that God reconciles people to himself and with each other, enabling human beings to become active agents of pardon and reconciliation (*Corinthians 5: 18-21*).
- Every community is under the authority of a regional leader (c. 608), who resides in the house (c. 629). "The authority which Leaders receive from God through the ministry of the Church is to be exercised by them in a spirit of service" (c. 618). The vow of obedience is effectively emptied of substance where there is no superior to whom one is accountable. Hence the Code envisages that every community shall have a Leader, a human and frail spiritual head who, how-

ever unworthily, “holds God’s place”; the institute supplies members with all they need to fulfil the purpose of their vocation (c. 670). On the other hand, all that a religious , by personal labour or on behalf of the institute, belongs to the institute. This also applies to pensions, grants and insurances, unless the institute’s own law decrees otherwise (c. 668, no. 3). These provisions regarding temporal goods and the practice of religious poverty aim at consolidating the sense of community.

- The first aim of a religious life is to be close to God through the life of prayer and sacrifice and to pray for the whole world.

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CHAPTER 5

Catechesis, Accompaniment and Religious Vocation

By

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Introduction

This article explores some of the insights from the world of young people that emerged from the recent *Synod on Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment* regarding the Church and vocations and tries to understand the implications of these insights for catechesis.

The Synod proposed to young the rediscovery of the vocation to holiness and happiness for a meaningful life. Religious life is one of the pathways through which this vocation can be answered, but if this path does not lead to the experience of profound joy, even in the midst of challenges, then the authenticity of the call is brought into question and reasons for the lack of joy need to be sought.

Vocation can be experienced in as many ways as there are people; however, at some point, it must be discerned and brought to maturity through a journey that requires wise guides and growth also in knowledge of the ways of God. In a rapidly changing society, it is necessary to review how children and young people are initiated into the faith and who guides them in the process of discernment of these life choices. Catechesis is understood as the process that enables the person to enter gradually more deeply into communion with Christ and be transformed by him, thus it

becomes a privileged way to discover the call to consecrated religious life. The General Directory for Catechesis speaks of God as the ‘Divine Pedagogue’³², the lifelong teacher whose voice we must learn to hear, as He calls us to the fullness of life. This chapter will explore how authentic catechesis lies at the heart of a deeply fulfilled religious life.

The Universal Vocation to Happiness

The 2018 Synod on *Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment* situated the church’s approach to young people clearly within the context of the fundamental vocation common to all – the call to happiness. In fact, the opening words of the Preparatory Document propose Jesus’ words from the Gospel of John: “These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you and your joy may be full” (*Jn. 15:11*). Joy and witness to the happiness characteristic of the person who has encountered Christ are themes which have characterised the papacy of our present Pope Francis and find echoes in the lives of saints like Francis de Sales, Philip Neri, John Bosco and many others across the centuries.

Adopting this wider understanding of vocation as a universal call to happiness reflects the understanding of the 2nd Vatican Council that used the term vocation in relation to the universal call to holiness and communion with Christ (*Working Document [WD], 87*). In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Rejoice and be Glad*, Pope Francis identified everyday life, in as far as it is lived as a response of love, as the locus for holiness (*pp 6-7, 14*).

In this understanding, the concept of vocation is lifted beyond the common perception of an invitation issued to only a few to pursue a very specific way of life either in the priesthood or consecrated life, effectively excluding the vast majority of people who will not find themselves within either of these lifestyles. The understanding of life as an invitation to a relationship that satisfies the deepest needs of the person can give hope to a generation that has access to almost limitless information, but little meaning.

32. General Directory for Catechesis, paragraphs 112,129,131,132,142,243.

One of the challenges facing young people in contemporary society is a loss of *telos* or purpose, which goes beyond the satisfaction of immediate ambitions and desires to the vision of a greater goal, worthy of a life's dedication. A recent document from the Congregation for Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life describes the contemporary situation: "This is a time of not only *dis-enchantment*, *dis-agreement* and *indifference*, but also *nonsense*. For many it is a time of confusion, they let themselves be overwhelmed by the search for the meaning of things, true spiritual castaways' (*Contemplate*, 4). The young people who participated in the online questionnaire and the pre-synodal meeting of March 2018 themselves recognised this problem. One young man observed, regarding facing important life decisions, "...I feel as if I am facing a wall when I seek a deep meaning for my life" (*WD*, p 106). The Document went on to note: "Many young people, when asked the question 'What is the meaning of your life?' do not know how to answer. They do not always make the connection between life and transcendence" (*WD*, p 106).

Herein lies one of the major contradictions faced by the contemporary Church; that despite the proposal of the call to happiness, young people, under the strong influence of the media in all its forms, are no longer equipped with the 'tools' to be able to access the spiritual dimension of their lives, within which lies the source of enduring joy. Rather, their lives tend to revolve around a thirst for new experiences and transitory pleasures which, although not necessarily negative in themselves, nonetheless often leave them with a sense of emptiness and dissatisfaction. A sense of vocation can liberate a person from the never-ending search for personal self-realisation to a recognition that it is only in the experience of true and self-giving love that true happiness is to be found. "Indeed, the fullness of joy can only be experienced when we discover we are loved and, consequently, when we are personally called to love others in turn, in the concrete circumstances in which we live (family, work, social and civic engagement)" (*WD*, p 90).

Religious Vocation and Catechesis

If it is true that young people lack the ‘tools’ needed to discern the common vocation to happiness, how much more is it the case for the specifically religious vocation; that sense of being called to a total giving of oneself which is both unique and yet shared; deeply personal but born and nurtured in the heart of the Church. Each person’s story is individually, marked by a series of events and experiences uniquely theirs, but similar in many other ways to those of countless men and women who feel an inexplicable fascination with the mystery of God, with the person of Christ, with the inspiration of the Spirit. Although not always explicit in the early stages of discernment, which may be characterised by a feeling of restlessness and even unease, the person slowly comes to know, ‘... the one whom my heart loves’ (Song of Songs, 3:1), a knowledge that becomes irresistible even though it may seem irrational to those who lack spiritual insight.

How though, are young people to access the ‘tools’ of discernment needed for them to be able to make sense of the call? It is here that the process of catechesis becomes all important. Formed largely by a secular education and greatly influenced by media in all its evolving forms, there is little that helps the young person develop the spiritual awareness necessary to be aware of vocation. In an article for *Communio*, as far back as 1983, the then Cardinal Ratzinger pointed out how the mass media both mirrors and feeds a new image of the world, noting that, “The representation of the world by the mass media makes a bigger impact today on consciousness than does personal experience of reality. All of this influences catechesis, for which the classical supports of a Christian society have been destroyed. Catechesis can no longer lean on a lived experience of the faith in a living Church...” (*Ratzinger, p 18*). Although the Church proposes inculturation of the faith, particularly in the African context, it has tended to understand this by looking to the model and values of the past societies more permeated by awareness of the spiritual. The Church has seemingly been unaware of the gradual erosion of the influ-

ence of this traditional society on young people, together with the growing authority of the modern or global world which the Internet now lays open at their feet.

Since the 2nd Vatican Council, the Church has been in a process of seeking the most appropriate methods for proclaiming the Good News to the new generations. Even in the years preceding the Council, a series of International Study Weeks under the direction of Johannes Hoffinger, sought a more relevant form of transmitting the Christian message to a rapidly evolving society. Ten years after the conclusion of the Council, Pope St Paul VI, convoked the third Synod of Bishops to discuss the theme of Evangelisation, essentially seeking to find ways for the transforming power of the Gospel to be made known to new generations. In his Apostolic Exhortation at the conclusion of the Synod, the Pope recognised catechesis as one of the important means of evangelisation. He identified especially the catechumenate as an urgent task for those who, "...touched by grace, discover little by little the face of Christ and feel the need of giving themselves to him" (*Paul VI, 44*).

So important did Pope St Paul VI consider catechesis that he made it the subject of the 4th Synod of Bishops, the proceedings of which were summed up by Pope St John Paul II in the Apostolic Exhortation, *Catechesis Today*. In this document, the Pope captured the essence of catechesis in terms of relationship: "...the definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ: only He can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity" (*p 5*).

The importance of appropriate and effective catechesis cannot be emphasised enough. It is the process that can provide the young generations with the 'tools' that, as noted above, they seem to lack. The General Directory for Catechesis states that the fundamental tasks of catechesis are to help the person: "...to know, to celebrate and to contemplate the mystery of Christ" (*Congregation for the Clergy, p 85*). Applied to the situation of young people

that emerged from the Synod, I would suggest that appropriate catechesis, that fosters these three actions of knowing, celebrating and contemplating proposed here, would provide access to an experience of meaning so much sought after by young people. There can be no meaningful experience of religious life without these three actions. Knowledge, understood in the biblical sense, implies the most intimate of relationships and, as such, is an endless process, brought to completion only in death. It satisfies the longings of both heart and mind and provides the motivation needed to bear the labour of the day. The celebration gives expression to the joy of this knowing and being known, while contemplation draws the person beyond themselves into the mystery of God himself. If religious life is not built on this foundation, then it is likely to deteriorate into an existence that is endured rather than fruitful.

The Divine Pedagogy

So far, this article has proposed the purpose and the tasks of catechesis and must now turn its attention to the much-debated question of method. The question is sometimes posed as to whether it is, in fact, possible to pass on faith? The question is not a redundant one. As Salamolard and Ory observe in *The Art of Being a Catechist*, “Faith is something so intimate and personal that we cannot ‘pass’ it on like an object bequeathed to one’s heirs” (p 36). They observe, however, that there has been evidence over the last two thousand years of a clear process of transmission of the faith. While God alone can elicit faith others, through the process of catechesis, can create favourable conditions within which the gift can be received.

The General Directory for Catechesis adopts an interesting perspective on the question of method in catechesis, asserting that the Church does not favour any method but, rather, discerns all methods in the light of *the pedagogy of God*. This expression, which has very significant implications for catechesis, has been studied more deeply in recent years. In his unpublished PhD the-

sis, Dr Petroc Willey, in seeking to attain a deeper understanding of the term, searches back into ancient Roman society where he finds similarities with the figure of the pedagogue of that period. The pedagogue in Roman households was often an educated slave who represented and acted on behalf of the father. While specific disciplines were imparted by a teacher, the pedagogue was concerned with the overall shaping of the character of the youth entrusted to him. His role "...was to generally supervise the child's behaviour and habits, disciplining the child as needed. The focus of the work of the pedagogue was, therefore, the formation of character through a personal relationship with the growing child, and integration of those studies learned at school with the virtues and qualities of character expected in the household" (*Wiley, p 52*).

Willey traces the development of this model as it has emerged in the more recent catechetical documents of the Catholic Church and he notes, "In the divine pedagogy, of course, it is the eternal Son who becomes poor and takes the place of the slave in order to raise free children of the Father" (*Wiley, p 52*). The General Directory for Catechesis (GDC) recognises the Church to be, "...a visible and actual continuation of the pedagogy of the Father and of the Son" (*Congregation for the Clergy, p 141*). Within this context, the Church can be seen to be the pedagogue continuing the work of Christ to develop in the catechumen those qualities and characteristics appropriate to the believer. In this task, the Directory refers to the importance of two 'fidelities': fidelity to God and to the person (*Congregation for the Clergy, p 145*).

Fidelity to God implies fidelity to his Revelation of himself in Christ and consequently to the deposit of faith that the Church is entrusted to transmit to every generation. Fidelity to the person, on the other hand, requires an understanding of the cultural reality within which the message is to be transmitted. For this second fidelity to be influential it is essential that the Church understand how young people grow and form their opinions and values; how they understand and live their Catholic faith. This was largely the scope of the recent Synod which has demonstrated how im-

mentally complex is the world of contemporary young people, a complexity from which Africa is not exempt.

Mentors

While the Church as a whole is seen to continue the role of the divine pedagogue, there is a need for this caring accompaniment to be expressed in a concrete way through people who are able to mentor the young in their journey of faith. The importance of mentorship is acknowledged strongly in Chapter IV of the second part of the WD, in the context of accompaniment, and again in Chapter II of part three, which proposes Paths of Pastoral and Missionary Conversion, and particularly how the message of Good News can penetrate “Deep into the Fabric of our Daily Lives” (p 144).

Referring back to the qualities of the pedagogue in ancient societies, what emerges as of primary importance is the character and the ability of the mentor to establish relationships of confidence with the young person so as to be able both to model and advise how best to live the lifestyle of a true believer. In the Church context in East Africa, the catechist is often expected to take on the role of mentor, but to do so, the catechist must be more than a teacher repeating a lesson with greater or lesser conviction, but rather a person of deep faith, with experience of the Lord, who can thus proclaim what has personally been seen and heard (1 Jn.:1 - 3).

For this reason, it becomes imperative that processes of faith formation or catechesis become more than a transmission of unchanging information to be memorised - a process diametrically opposite to the cultural experience that the young generations now grow within. Much more important is the return to the proclamation of the kerygma, of the person and mission of Jesus who, although a figure of history, through the Resurrection becomes a person who is relevant within every time period and society - such is the meaning of eternal. With its strong emphasis on preparation for the Sacraments, catechesis has tended to

be reduced to memorisation of key components, without paying enough attention to assisting the child to develop a real relationship of love and trust with Jesus. From an unpublished PhD study carried out in 2013/14 in the Western Deanery of the Archdiocese of Nairobi, it emerged that this weakness is most strongly felt when the young person leaves the family home to embark on secondary level education, often within the context of the boarding school. With only the memorised teachings from their childhood as preparation for sacraments, and often with very little support from the school, young people find themselves inadequately prepared for the challenges and temptations of adolescence and often lose faith in these years (*Gibson, 2017*).

This experience of being lost and without guidance that emerged both in the research as well as in the Working Document, indicates a serious scarcity of experienced mentors who are both steeped in the Gospel but are also not so far removed from the experience of the young people as to be unable to empathise with their experience. It is often assumed that young people prefer to resolve problems among themselves without reference to adults; the above-mentioned research, however, indicated otherwise. When questioned on who they mostly consulted in times of moral decision making it did, at first sight, seem that the majority of young people prefer to talk to a fellow youth who understands their situation; however, a closer analysis revealed that over half of the respondents favoured by young people are, in fact, adults, principally parents and priests. The reasons for choosing adults were that they had valuable experience and learning, as well as being able to show confidentiality and neutrality. "In the case of priests, the youth also appreciate that the priest will guide them according to God's will or commandments and will also support them with prayer" (*Gibson, 2017, p 35*).

Undoubtedly, peer mentorship is also of great importance. A strategy that is proving popular within the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) region is that of the Youth Small Christian Communities (YSCC). While the Small Christian Community (*jumuiya*) is a model of Church em-

braced by the Bishops of the AMECEA region, the YSCC is a variation of the model that facilitates Gospel sharing and peer accompaniment among young people as they seek to find relevant ways of living the Gospel within their own context, that they perceive to be different from that of adults. YSCCs can operate both within institutions of higher learning as well as parishes. Notwithstanding the challenges that face any human organisation, the experience of the YSCCs has generally been positive rather than negative, with the members becoming more positive and responsible for their role in the Church. In the words of Aloys Nyakundi (2017) who is strongly committed to the work of the YSCCs: "... the YSCCs encourage stronger interpersonal relationships, acceptance of the Word of God, review of life and reflection upon reality in the light of the Gospel. Thus the youth become agents of evangelisation, they promote the use of the Bible among the youth and open new pastoral paths to reach other youths" (p 88).

Accompaniment in Religious Formation

The accompaniment of wise mentors or formators is no less important in the religious life, as candidates need guides who know them individually and can model for them an authentic living out of the Gospel within the context of a specific charism and structure of the religious community. Catechesis is also critical in the formation process.

The GDC, in fact, sees catechesis to be a lifelong process that accompanies the person in the process of continuing conversion. Given the weakness identified above, of catechesis being almost exclusively at the service of preparation for the reception of the Sacraments, it is of the greatest importance that the lacunae resulting from this approach be addressed during the period of initial formation. Without ongoing reflection on the mystery of the Christ event and a deeper knowledge of, and relationship with, Christ, it is unlikely that the religious commitment can bear the fruit intended, either for the person or the mission. If the mind is not inspired and the heart is not moved by an intense experience

of vocation and response, religious life can deteriorate into little more than a narrow, petty routine of sterile observance instead of the magnificent flourishing of the person who is sent to minister to a wounded society, in love and for love.

Conclusion

This article has attempted to demonstrate the importance of catechesis for the discernment of the life project of the young person and for the fruitful living of religious life, especially in the light of the recent Synod on *Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment*. A competent and contextualised teaching of the faith can provide young people with the ‘tools’ that society no longer provides, but which are essential for them to be able to discern the working of God in their lives, continually inviting them to the “fullness of joy”. The preferred strategy, proposed for this process in our times, is that of wise accompaniment, modelled on the divine pedagogue, on the part of those who both believe and live their beliefs coherently and joyfully. In the words of Pope Francis, “The Lord asks everything of us, and in return, he offers us true life, the happiness for which we were created” (*Francis, p 1*).

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CHAPTER 6

Discernment To Religious Life

By

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Introduction

Many congregations in Africa do a lot of screening and discernment before they choose their candidates for training, but there seems not to be enough discernment before and when they become professed religious members. Ideally, discernment becomes a way of life so that every significant choice you make is in configuration with your spiritual path.

Discernment is a process of reflecting on what is going on inside you, the thoughts, feelings, impulses, urges, fears, likes and dislikes, in order to attempt to discover from what source they are coming and to relate it to your life with God and others (*Ngozi, 2016*).

Discerning a vocation to religious life is no easy task. In fact, it is a lifelong process. It requires constant communication with God. Whitehead (2003) said it is the decision we make each day of our lives to remain in conversation with God. Vocations undergo changes when we can no longer imagine that God is about something in our lives.

Understanding Discernment

Discernment is a spiritual practice that calls your whole being – mind, body, heart and soul – into the process of making life choices. To discern also implies the ability to detect something that

is not immediately obvious. It implies looking at something in a clear way, in a way that involves our mind, heart and soul (*Robert, 2018*). Discernment is how we grow in our relationship with God and relationship with ourselves. Discernment has to come from within you. God within us allows us to make choices in life that could enhance our happiness and our destiny in life. It brings confusion when candidates, who were prayerful and seemly close to God during the formation period, turn to the opposite after profession or ordination. Could there be some flaw in their desire to serve God?

Rochelle identified things to look for in discerning (1985, p 535):

- It is governed by love, for if it is not, it is worthless (1 Corinthians 13:1-3);
- It centres us onto Jesus the Christ and Lord (1 Cor. 12:3), and His good news;
- It directs us to Scripture, not away from it (Isaiah 8:19, 20);
- It builds up the Church and its members (Ephesians 4:11-12), giving it power, wisdom, character, boldness, and unity;
- It helps create in us a love of righteousness, a heightened sense of sin, and a turning away from known evil.

Teresa (2012) indicated that discernment is the art of listening to our inner selves and learning to recognise (discern) movements that rise within us through the Holy Spirit. The dictionary (2003) defines “discern” as “distinguishing with the eye or the mind.” The healthy eye can distinguish between the colours red and green. Healthy minds can distinguish between good and evil. A wise formator can detect the stirring of a genuine vocation hidden beneath the confused emotions of a young adult. To help another to discern, formators should have a sense of their story and gifts, as well as their limitations, a sense of relatedness to others, a knowledge of their own goals and desires, and above all, a deep sense of God active in their life to their present reality.

Teresa explained that many people consult a spiritual director to help them attain a degree of objectivity regarding their spiritu-

al lives. Doing our own will is usually what harms us. They seek out someone who is free from misconceptions about the things of the world. For in order to know ourselves, it helps a great deal to speak with someone who already knows the world for what it is.

Formation is not only necessary but crucial for those choosing their vocation in life (*Pope Francis, 2018*). A vocation is always a response to some action, mission or task. It is not simply taking on a role or recognising that God called. It is a response that requires a life dedicated to being a part of God's plan for creation. In our present circumstance, discernment can call one to a twofold attentiveness: an awareness of what is going on inside you and an awareness of what you are hearing from others around you. Personal prayer and reflection offer one the opportunity to get in touch with one's own bit of the truth. Being free and open to share one's truth is a special grace and the fruit of one's reflection. Listening openly to the fruits of others' reflection is integral to the process of discernment.

Formation entails many things. One of the tasks of the formator is to help the person discern the presence and action of God in their lives. A basic assumption is that God communicates to us as individuals. It is this self-revelation of God that is the basis of our own personal values, our direction in life and our uniqueness. In formation houses, the formators help to facilitate processes whereby the person can examine the origin and direction of God in their lives, which is often ambiguous and uncertain. We may think we know where God is leading us and how God communicates. But, as we grow, we change. This change necessitates a constant reassessment of the judgements, decisions and actions we may have taken in our life.

Vocation Discernment

Formators need to be able to identify the potential within a candidate in calling discernment, and invite this potential to be actualised. The call of Simon to be Peter is instructive! Jesus saw something in Peter that he did not see in himself! A good for-

mator needs to challenge, to probe and call forth the talents and gifts of the individual. Are these gifts in line with their vocation choice? Formators in discernment process need to help the candidates see and understand the consequences of their choices in life. Formators can help the candidates see how their life will change if they follow one path over another. Our vocation choice always affects our lifestyle and ministry.

The quality and understanding of the discernment at the early stage is very crucial. For these reasons, formators who are working with a person who is considering the possibility of religious life must bring up the subject of celibacy if it does not come up naturally. After all, the healthy living of the celibate life is the expectation for a religious! Formators need to ascertain whether or not the candidate has a good understanding of celibacy and is capable of living the celibate life. What is their background? Their sexual history? How long have they lived the celibate life? (Martins, 2008). The candidate's understanding of living in community, living in obedience, without financial gain, is very crucial. Are they willing to let go of their desire to raise a family, to have children? These questions point us to a final responsibility of the formator.

In vocation discernment, two things need to be discerned - the underlying motivations, values, feelings and thoughts that go into making a decision and the practical choice to do God's will in our lives. In the first, we discern whether or not the above-mentioned aspects of our personality are under the influence of the Spirit. When discerning, the Christian must keep in mind why he/she is doing it. Ask yourself, "If I raise this issue, how am I pointing people to Christ? How am I helping them grow in the Spirit? In what way am I loving them?" If there's no answer to those questions, it is time to focus on listening, because it may be your time to learn. The second involves understanding God's will for us in our lives.

The way of God calling forth members of the community to serve in certain ways is so deeply a part of our Christian and Catholic tradition that it seems to suggest that our "vocation"

or “call” **is** the reason why we do ministry. When priests, sisters or brothers are asked why they chose their particular vocation, their response is often: “Because God called me”. Yet, most people would readily admit that their “call” did not come in a form similar to those in scripture. In fact, each of our “calls”, like those of the prophets and disciples in scripture, is unique (*Pope Benedict XVI, 2011*).

Formation offers objectivity in our relationship with God. Good formators cannot only help candidates to understand God’s self-revelation but can also help them to understand how they relate to God. There are some specific responsibilities that formators have when dealing with a person who is in the midst of vocation discernment. When a person begins to define or rethink their vocation, the formator-candidate relationship is of invaluable assistance.

Formators assist a person in discernment by helping them form the right question. Frequently an individual is faced with two “selves” as they enter young adulthood. The first self is the true child of God, gradually emerging in a person’s life under the influence of grace. The other self is the egocentric self which can be very earnest, but which ultimately relates everything, even the divine will, to its own preferences. A formator can help facilitate the process whereby the first self grows and the other self decreases. One experiences a whole set of emotions during discernment. It becomes important that a formator helps you to discern good feelings from negative ones and to make the right choices for your life. This calls for the formator to possess knowledge of psychology on how to handle human behaviour and personality types.

In this way, the primary question becomes: “How is the Lord calling me to serve God and God’s people?”; rather than, “What do I want to do with my life?” As simple as this may seem, this question is often overlooked or pushed aside because our own personal desires overwhelm our mind. Candidates consider priesthood/religious life for many reasons. One primary task of

the formators is to sift out and sort out impulses, attractions, fantasies and desires. Formators help us separate what comes from God and what originates from other sources and could possibly lead us away from the will of God.

For example, most young men seem to consider priesthood because of the job security it offers. It alleviates them from poverty and gives them power over their parishioners. This is true because some of the priests demand expensive cars immediately after their ordination and ingratiate themselves to be given the rich parishes. The priesthood is one of the few professions where you are guaranteed three meals a day, a bed and a nice house to live in! They are the only group who do not have to worry about being laid off except when they misbehave! In a society where there is high unemployment, lack of job security and uncertainty about the future, candidates may see a certain amount of stability in the priesthood that is quite attractive. In line with this, some congregations are also rich and some young people would readily choose such congregations for the protection and material security they offer.

The stability religious life offers can be quite attractive to a candidate who has found it difficult to find meaningful employment or to even hold a job. Yet, any experienced candidate can tell you that one should not be motivated by the stability that priesthood or religious life may offer, since the Church does change. Therefore, we constantly need to be about the business of discovering God's will for us.

When you discern the will of God in your life, you gain the peace of Christ. Willard (2007) confirms that another key to discernment is a 'sense of peace' about something. That peace must take place not by itself, but within the rest of the framework of discernment, or it is not divine. Yet the absence of such peace is, by itself, mostly bad news. Such peace and security comes and grows with prayer. Peace is a gift God is more than happy to give. God wants us to have some sense of security about what we do. Since God is not a God of confusion, it will not do within God's

purposes for God's followers to be confused, or be confusing (p 28). "Discerning and acting on God's will does not mean you will never have difficult days or feel worthless sometimes. But choosing to live in alignment with God makes you more joyful, compassionate, and peaceful, even on bad days" (*Debra, 2002*).

Scripture in Discernment

Christians turn to the Bible in order to get the story right. The New Testament passes along the testimony of those who knew Jesus and His mission in person. For the early Church after the apostles, and for us today, believers turn to Scripture because they know the Spirit speaks there. It is Scripture that shows us the Spirit's primacies, and Scripture that shares with us the vision of the coming Kingdom. Through biblical discernment, you can discover wisdom and direction. Without it, you will fail to distinguish God's Purposes and Word from your own. This is true of what you think and do today, and it is also true of the past, including the most treasured of traditions (*Kenneth, 2010*).

This Scripture value of biblical discernment is not there to hold the Spirit in chains. It is to be used in the light of freedom in Christ, knowing that Scripture does not directly address most matters. Instead of demanding direct Scriptural permit for a practice, it's better to know that Scripture conveys practice or teaching of the Gospel, and is fully in keeping with the root and heart of Christian belief that it turns the focus onto Christ, not persons, ideas, ideologies, organisations, wondrous signs, or activities; that it is truthful, not rooted in a lie or distortion. The Spirit has every right to lead us into new things that look like folly. The Holy Spirit is sovereign. Discernment is about finding out the Holy Spirit and not someone else's idiocy (*Michael, 2018*).

The Scripture value is not a substitute for the Spirit. It works only because the Spirit works through Scripture. We rely on this truth when we read the Scriptures in earnest prayer. Without the Spirit's action, the Bible's pages would lay still, moving your life no more than a mere shadow. If the Spirit is working in us, the

Bible is aflame with truth and vision for every corner of our lives and for the whole world. The Spirit wants us to study, to trust, and to shape our lives according to what is in Scripture; to steep it into our souls, to live by the curves and the world vision of the Scriptures. Scripture shapes an authentic, Spirit-led experience and sets the bounds for it.

Analysis

The analysis explored the responses from participants on how different congregations discern and work with the spirit of God in their day-to-day living to select candidates for training and continual discernment after ordination or profession. It also discovered their method of a discernment applied before and after profession or ordination, to examine what kind of matters they have sought God's guidance on and how they have proposed the way forward. The qualitative, semi-structured interview design was used for twenty participants from ten congregations residing in Karen, Nairobi, who participated in this research. An analysis was carried out in a narrative form using research objective themes. Alphabets were used for female congregations while numbers were used for male congregations.

Congregations Discernment in Selecting Candidates.

All the participants indicated that they have principles that guide their discernment process from the four stages of vocation discernment: aspirant, candidate, novitiate, temporary professed/ordained. There is an application and interview process; we require detailed biographical information, medical history, education, family background and other information on the candidate. Some also conduct three in-depth interviews with the candidate (different sisters in formation conduct these). There is a psychological evaluation; this is helpful to provide an assessment of the mental health and stability of the candidate before entrance for

formation. The participants said, “We are open and flexible to welcoming the young woman for a visit or for apostolic opportunities to facilitate her discernment. We embrace the young woman to join us for prayer and other community activities”. In this way, they discern their vocation through observation.

Participant A Explained:

In our congregation, the girls must receive the sacraments of initiation, good habits, they have to take any course after primary school, or after secondary school or high school or university. They have to write an application letter. Before accepting the youths to religious training we send them a form with questions (*interview, 12/10/2018*).

Participants B and C explained:

In our congregation, there are laid down principles, but these principles are sometimes interpreted in the situation of each candidate and the reality of the delegation, considering the various situations we live in and the assessment of the vocation promoter. Some considerations include age, qualification, the health of mind and body, motivation to join (*12/10/2018*).

Participant E:

The candidates participate in six months of discernment programmes, when they go through various personality tests, behavioural tests, discernment workshops, background criminal checks, health assessment, and recommendation from the workplace, parish priest, and spiritual guide (*14/09/2018*).

Participant F indicated:

The discernment of formation continues from postulant stage, introduced to our history, liturgy, prayer, Scripture, Catholic social teachings, counselling, human development, and history of religious life. From postulancy, the candidate becomes a novice, where prayer is intensified, our constitution and Way of Life is introduced, the vows, our Charism,

and *Vita consecrata* is impacted. Intercultural living, community life, and Canon Law pertaining to religious life are taught (14/09/2018).

Their responses indicated that each congregation has its different ways of discernment in choosing new candidates. Participant G stipulated that the young woman should: be a Catholic, having received the three sacraments of initiation – Baptism, Communion and Confirmation; have a relationship with the Lord manifested through an active faith life/practice in the Catholic faith (e.g. involvement in her parish, Church community); be mature, with an ability to make a free decision about her life without coercion from parents, friends or others in her life; have a high school or college level education; and have the physical and mental health to participate in the apostolate.

Participant 2 explained:

We continue with the discernment process at different levels, such as in candidates, postulants, and novices, asking them if they freely choose to live a religious life; is s/he ready to continue to live in the congregation after knowing everything? Also, at every stage, they have to write an application letter in their own handwriting. We give them the time for retreat so that they may reflect on their lives (14/10/2018).

Participants 3 and 8:

We have a period of correspondence with the young person and s/he is invited to our community for some days of retreat. A follow-up is done by sending him/her material to read and reflect on, a visit is arranged to know his/her family. "Come and see," what is sometimes called live-in period by some congregations, which is organised usually for a minimum of three months. This will enable us to know them a bit more closely, and on their part, to get to know us more; what we do, how and why. A medical test is then carried out and after both parties feel satisfied, they write an application letter to join (14/10/2018).

Participant 9 said:

We recruit them by going to their home parish and visiting their schools; we meet in groups and individually; we do a follow up until they finish their secondary school. If they have the requirements we call them to our community for “come and see”, where they will stay with us for about two months, whereby they can participate in the community activities. They attend some workshops and the vocation promotor meets them individually. We send them home, and we visit their homes. We sleep in their homes and establish a good relationship with their families (14/10/2018).

This implies that family involvement is important in the discernment process of candidates.

Participant 10 expressed:

Interviews, seminars, “come and see” programme, academic qualifications, background and confidential report from the parish of the candidates, visiting candidates in their homes and an invitation for a one-year orientation in our community. This gives them room to discern their vocation.

Methods of Discernment After Profession/Ordination.

The Participants (2018) affirmed that after profession, the new members live in communities and continue with the process of formation through regular workshops relevant to religious life, retreats, formal education, and regular meetings with the formator, as well as receiving monthly spiritual direction and counselling when needed.

Participant 2 affirmed:

Three years of academic, human and spiritual formation, two years of novitiate programme including three months of community experience before profession. Five years of theology and priestly formation, including one-year probation before perpetual vows and priestly ordination. All

these are accompanied by times of intense prayers, spiritual directions, days of recollections, retreats and sincere looking at self and evaluations by candidates (12/10/2018).

Participants (2018) explained after profession or ordination they go to different communities; they share their own experiences and they are also sent for further studies according to the apostolate of the congregation. Meanwhile, they follow different workshops, short courses and, before the solemn profession, some of the congregation go for the second novitiate for the intensive course for about three months with the help of experts and also with the sisters of the congregation. However, they accepted that some of the people journeying with them are not trained well on how to discern or help the newly professed to discern daily the will of God in their lives. It is an area of challenge. Other congregations organised a month of retreat whereby the temporary professed discerns her final yes to God before profession. Other congregations also explained that discernment at that time could be tricky if the professed sister does not listen to the voice of God within.

On the part of the priests, they are sent to the parishes to work and that seems to end their discernment. Many priests think that they have arrived after ordination, not knowing that discernment is a continuous process. Participant 10 explained that the newly professed members are inserted into the life of the community, they are left on their own to live out what was taught in the formation houses. "Most of what was thought and done in the formation house is also lived by the brothers, so there is no dichotomy between what we learned and what we experience."

Participant A (2018) explained that:

(a) We have a vocational accompaniment programme. The vocation director accompanies the young woman in discernment by meeting with her regularly (e.g. monthly), providing opportunities to deepen her relationship with God by providing some Scripture or other issues for reflection (such as her family background, Church).

(b) We also provide apostolic experiences. These provide opportunities to interact with the sisters and “get a taste” of the mission. We invite the young woman to be involved in our apostolate of evangelisation (e.g. to participate in book displays, writing projects, media projects).

(c) We provide retreat experiences. These are another point of discernment so that the young woman learns about our spirituality and can experience tangibly whether the Lord is drawing her to the community through this life of prayer.

Formators Discerning Their Daily Activities with the Spirit.

Responses gathered from participants (2018) showed that they try to wake up early in the morning before the community schedule and meditate on the Word of God in order to create intimacy with Jesus and that is the best time for some to pray.

Some discern their daily activities in prayer, in reflection and confrontation with the Word of God. This does not mean that their actions are perfect, because, sometimes, human limitations act as an obstacle to full discernment. Sometimes, because one’s mind is set on some points, this could convince one that it is from God.

Some Religious Members are not fit for Religious Life

Participant 5, F, 10, (2018) explained that, after profession, many of the young members start to forget their discernment and start to live contrary to their vocation. They wondered why even the superiors do not advise them to leave the congregation.

Participant C and D:

When I am looking back on my congregation I think there are some members who should not be there. What made me think so is because I see they live as if there is someone

who forced them to be there, like it was not their choice (*Interview 20/09/2018*).

Participant 10:

Yes, because some they have even a hereditary sicknesses whereby sometimes they become like crazy people. Some members do not obey the superiors. They are always in one place no one can touch them. So, for me, they did not do discernment properly or they did not have the requirement for religious life.

Participant 18:

The Lord's ways are not our ways; it is not for me to judge anyone fit or unfit for the call. The Lord, who calls, must have his reasons for calling, which I might not be able to discern. Who knows, I might even be the one in the wrong place. God is always a God of surprises. He writes straight even on crooked lines.

Participant B, F, G, H, 4, 6, 8, indicated:

They seem not to be happy or convinced of what they are doing; they have failed community living and associate more with outsiders, not open and always would prefer doing their own things. They fight for positions of leadership and are interested more in material things, have no sense of missionary life and want to associate with people of their own country or tribe (*Interview, October 2018*).

Participants 1, 2, A, D (2018) said

Yes and they got discouraged, became angry with themselves and sad. It could be that these members have forgotten their discernment process and prayer life and the main reason for joining religious life.

Participant 9 shared

I sometimes ask myself did they know that this was a religious and missionary congregation. Why they were very good and kind hearted as students and what has made

them change? Could they be regretting or they were forced to become religious. Above all, I also think maybe they could have made a bad choice to become religious or their expectations are not being met? (*Interview, October 2018*).

This showed that discernment is a continuous process and lifelong activity. People are prone to change if they do not hold firm to their initial calling and faith.

Participant 6, (2018) shared:

I always prayed that I may be given the grace to be open to the experiences of the day and take them as the will of God. I take each word and what I see for what they are first, then later try to understand the context and why at the time and to me and not someone else. I try to be open to other people and have patience with myself in time of hardships or challenges. Some members are really difficult to live with (12/10/2018).

It takes personal conviction and faith for one to discern a vocation to religious life. The superiors and formators must be those trained and specialised in formation to truly journey with candidates in openness during formation. Christian community from where the candidates come should be involved in their discernment process. Formation programmes may be designed to create more awareness and self-discovery and sense of vocation and meaning in life (*Interview, October 2018*). This is in line with what Pope Francis (2018) explains in the *Laudato Si*.

The Way Forward

Participants came up with these suggestions:

It will be good for religious congregations to engage in proper discernment journey before candidates are accepted into a religious life. Many who are wounded need counselling. Everyday prayer for the guidance of the Spirit is very crucial in order to set goals and ask God to help.

It will be good to advise the superiors and the formators to leave the members free to choose their spiritual directors, and not to choose for them. In addition, the formator must not be the only spiritual director because some candidates may not share their experiences freely.

Conclusion

There is a need for openness and availability to ongoing discernment, even after final profession of vows. There is never a time we attain perfection here on earth. So we need to progress daily in our journey and persevere to the end. Formation experiences helps to discern God's communication to us because we relate to God as we relate to others. We bring our personality into this relationship, with all its faults and all its pathologies. Like in all our other relationships, at times we tend not to be objective. We may be possessive, domineering or even blind in our relationship with God. Our view of events that happen to us, and the difficulties in our relationships, often can be one-sided. This is a really important point for formators that they do not use their own discernment to judge another without allowing that person's own discerning will.

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CHAPTER 7

The Vocation of a Religious Brother

By

Tom Kearney

Introduction

This Chapter will explore the foundation of the vocation of religious brotherhood in the fascination of the relationship with Jesus and its impact on a person's life. It will discuss the nature and lifestyle of religious brotherhood and the understanding of the brothers' commitment through the profession of the religious vows of poverty, celibate chastity and obedience. This life commitment is the life of witness and involvement in the Mission of Jesus in our world today.

"As he (Jesus) was walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and his brother Andrew, casting a net into the sea; they were fishermen. He said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men". At once they left their nets and followed him. He walked along from there and saw two other brothers, James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother, John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately they left their boat and their father and followed him" (*Mt 4:18-22*).

This is the first action of Jesus' ministry, the calling of two sets of blood brothers. They were working together, sharing the

load, and supporting each other. Their way of working, living, and being together attracted his attention and he called them. Were they living the message he wanted to bring in his preaching? Is this the way all are expected to live, supporting each other, bringing out the best in each other, not taking advantage of each other, but loving each other? This is the way all are called to live on this earth and in this Universe. Religious Brothers bring this to the world - a “companionship of empowerment” (*O’Murchu, 2011*).

On a continent that continually refers to *Ubuntu* (I am because we are), it is surprising that the call to Religious Brotherhood is not better appreciated. So often there is a reference to Proverbs, such as, ‘it takes a village to raise a child’ and ‘if you want to go quickly, go alone; if you want to go far, go together’. These strongly reflect the desire to be together, which is the essence of the Brotherhood. The opportunity for Brotherhood presents itself every time you meet a fellow human being. The relationship starts with the meeting, the greeting, the shaking of hands and continues as you walk together. Brotherhood in its essence is living the Christian life together. The ancient author Tertullian is quoted as saying, “see how these Christians love one another”. This is the calling of the vocation of the Religious Brother and is his motivation for whatever he does.

Fascination with Jesus

When John the Baptist introduced Jesus to his two disciples they were intrigued and set out to follow him. He turned and asked them, “What are you looking for?” They replied, “Rabbi, where are you staying?” He answered them, “Come, and you will see”. So they went and saw where he was staying and spent the day with him (*Jn 1:38-39*). The relationship between the disciple and the master is at the foundation of the Christian vocation. What was the fascination with the person of Jesus?

Throughout his public ministry, Jesus often spoke about the Kingdom of God. But Jesus in no way acted like a king. He went out to his followers, his disciples, his brothers and sisters. Jesus

stated that he had come so that people “might have life and have it more abundantly” (Jn. 10:10). His first public speech in his hometown of Nazareth was all about setting people free, giving sight to the blind, and healing sick people (*Lk 4:18-19*). He founded a movement among people, not an institutional Church. The early Christians were referred to as followers of “the Way” (*Acts 9:2*).

Jesus preached an inclusive, non-vocationally distinct, Gospel. He invited all to his way of living as a brother. He was radical in all he did and said. He was prepared to die for what he believed in and did not compromise the Good News he brought from the Father. He practised what he preached at all times and no one ever accused him of being a hypocrite.

Jesus used a new language for his listeners. He placed radical demands on all who wished to be his disciples. You must deny yourself, take up your cross and come with me (*Mt 16:23*). You must always forgive (*Mt 18:23*). You must first reconcile before you offer your gift at the altar (*Mt 5:23-24*). Unless you are born again you cannot enter the kingdom (*Jn. 3:5*). Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst (*Mt 18:20*). Anyone who puts his hand to the plough and then turns back is not worthy of me (*Lk 9:62*). Such statements spell out the values and standards he was requiring of his followers. This radicalism is a challenge to the modern young man who finds his values compromised by the demands of modern society.

The scribes and Pharisees of the institutional religion of Jesus’ time, trapped people in a web of man-made traditions and practices. Jesus challenged them about the burdens they put on people and made no effort to assist them. Jesus challenged these religious authorities on numerous occasions (*Mk 2:1-12; Mk 2:23-28. Mk 3:1-6*). The law was made for people, not people for the law (*Jn 7:24*). So convinced was Jesus of his mission to bring freedom to all that he lay down his life for that very cause. Indeed, Jesus was very much against the institutionalised establishment of his time because it burdened and enslaved people. The institutional Church is a man-made arrangement to manage the human enter-

prise. By living out his charism, the Religious Brother attempts to live out the following of Jesus in the spirit of the love of God and the love of neighbour (*Mt 22:37*).

Discipleship of Jesus requires more than mere fulfilment of the external requirements of the Law. It is more than legalism. Discipleship is all to do with a change of heart, a change of attitude, a *metanoia* experience. Disciples of Jesus are meant to be like salt that flavours the life of people and, like a light that draws others to follow. Religious Brothers take up the challenge of living this discipleship.

Nature of Brotherhood

“Brother” is the name/title that has usually been given to the male lay religious in the Church since the beginning of consecrated life. The title does not belong to him exclusively, of course, but Brother represents a significant way of being in the ecclesial community where he is the *prophetic memory* of Jesus-Brother, who told his followers: “And you are all brothers” (*Mt 23:8*). The title of brother underlines the common dignity and fundamental equality of all believers. Brothers /sisters are sons/daughters in the Son of the same heavenly Father (*cf Mt 5:45*), called upon to form a universal brotherhood in Jesus, the firstborn of many brothers (*Congregation of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CICLSAL), 2015, para.1*).

Being a “Brother” is a lifestyle, a way of living. Religious Brothers are called by God to live as Jesus lived. The Brothers are gifted by the Holy Spirit to help and encourage them in living out, as faithfully as they can, the teaching and mission of Jesus. As Religious Brothers, they know that they help each other to be people of faith. The gifts of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Reconciliation, give them the strength to celebrate and share Brotherhood with so many.

From the first centuries of Christianity, consecrated life was composed predominantly of lay members, an expression of the yearning of men and women to live the Gospel with the radical-

ism proposed to all followers of Jesus. Even today, lay members of the consecrated life – men and women – form the greater majority (Statistical Yearbook, 2017, reveals that there are approximately 53,000 Religious Brothers and 660,000 Religious Sisters and 135,000 Religious Priests and Deacons and 460,000 Diocesan Priests and Deacons).

Consecrated life arises in the Church in response to this call of the Spirit to faithfully keep alive the memory of the love of Christ who loved His own to the end. This response is expressed in many forms, but at the deepest level, there is always the option of a radical gift of self for love of the Lord Jesus and, in Him, of every member of the human family.

The vocation and identity of the Religious Brother acquire meaning in this dynamic, which is both inclusive of and complementary to the various ministries, but which also needs and promotes prophetic signs (CICLSAL, 2015, para.12).

The significant prophetic role of Religious Brothers, as members of a consecrated life, is to live out this commitment in a public way, hence the importance of the fidelity to the call and the ability to live a way of life appropriate to this calling. This requires a good understanding and a personal interiority of the fundamental values and behaviour required by such a commitment.

Religious Brother and Vows of Consecration

Religious Brothers consecrate their lives by taking vows of poverty, celibate chastity, and obedience. As part of the local community, they are called to follow Jesus in their ordinariness. Their simple lifestyle should exemplify living the Gospel. They must not be promoters of materialism, nor of consumerism, nor poor stewardship of the world given at Creation.

As Jesus experienced *Kenosis* (self-emptying) by becoming a man, giving Himself for others, putting others before self, feeling with them, supporting them, acting on behalf of them, the Re-

ligious Brother, too, lives this *kenosis* through his profession of poverty, celibate chastity and obedience.

Understanding Poverty

Traditional Africa was an inclusive society. Community wealth enabled the community to care for the individuals. Ownership (possession of goods) was not personal, except for a few basic tools, clothes and dwellings. Mutual acceptance of peoples, respect, and hospitality were community characteristics. Nobody was poor. One lived not for self, but with and for others (*Shorter, 1999*).

On the other hand, having more possessions was not necessarily a sign of wealth. The wealth in which the African shared was the wealth of social prestige, the wealth of personal relationships, the wealth of culture and traditional wisdom, the fulfilling experience of community living and community sharing. This was the wisdom and experience, that made a man wealthy in the sight of his fellows; the capacity to inspire, manage and relate well (*Shorter, 1999*).

“The groups that Jesus preferentially reached out to had in common that they were all marginalized in the society to which they belonged. They were marginalized because their society believed that God had marginalized them. The attitudes of society towards them and the way society treated them, ensured that they were kept apart, at arm’s length” (*McVerry, 2008, p19*). Jesus affirmed their dignity by the way in which he himself related to them and brought them close.

Jesus invites the Religious Brother to “go, sell what you have, give to the poor and come follow me” (*Mt 19:21*). Religious Brothers vowed poverty, not to give up material goods, but to live simply, not possessed by greedy desire. They proclaim that the world’s resources are to be used responsibly by everybody and for everybody. They treat all of creation with care and respect. As Brothers, they try to bring this message of care for the world — transparency and accountability as co-creators, and also part of the universe.

Jesus took on the poverty of being a man and emptied himself for the sake of others. He lived out his preferential option for the poor. He proclaimed that human needs must be met, dignity be upheld, and degradation removed. The Beatitudes (*Mt 5:3-11*) are a summary of how the Christian should live.

Religious Brothers are called to both personal and communal poverty. Their personal poverty gives witness by their living simple lives. Like the local people where they live, they dress simply, eat simple foods, relate with the ordinary people. Their capacity to share, to use material goods with care, to be good stewards of the world that God has given, are the signs of brotherhood. These are all consistent with a vision of gospel poverty for mutual responsibility.

A Religious Brother declares: "My poverty is in the self-emptying I have embraced. I have no wife, no children. I have left my family. That is the poverty I have embraced for the sake of the kingdom". They respond to the personal challenge by giving time, personal attention, energy, and of their resources to the poor.

O'Murchu (2002) discussed poverty in terms of the important values of stewardship and mutual sustainability. Poverty is counter-cultural to consumerism, materialism and deprivation, which are destroying the world. Understanding the vow of poverty in terms of stewardship and mutual sustainability requires the Brother to respect and use the gifts of the world to sustain life, not to consume it. On a continent where the majority are poor, the careful and responsible use of money goes without saying. It challenges the corruption sparked by greed. As a matter of global awareness, the responsible use of resources for mutual sustainability is again beyond question.

However, poverty calls the Brother to a deeper spirituality that involves far more than simply prudent financial management. Poverty calls for the Religious Brother to 'let go' of possessiveness and to accept whatever gift from God for the sustainability of life. Poverty calls for a spirit of sharing and the use of goods in common, which is also an understanding of the community spirit in Africa.

Understanding Celibate Chastity

“The African family was not thought of as a ‘cell’ or ‘nucleus’ subject to fission and division. It was seen as a corporate community extended in space and time, reaching back to ancestors, and forward to the unborn” (*Shorter, 1998, p 5*). There was a pro-creative emphasis in the traditional social structures that situated people in the chain of life. Polygamy, widow inheritance, “ghost marriages” and other customs existed to ensure that there was the continuance of the line, and care for the individual. Celibacy is never the norm in any culture. Normally, humans mature and choose to live in a marriage relationship to procreate. Their sexual lives support their committed relationship and contribute to the continuation of the human race and society. In Africa, children are always seen as a blessing and the chain of life continues from God to the ancestors, to us and our children.

Yet, there was also a place for the consecrated person, who lives apart from society, who challenges society to look at the spiritual dimension of life and connectedness with God, the giver of all life. Celibate priests existed in African traditional religion, and even married priests were called to abstain from sexual relations for three days when they celebrated their rites. The life of the committed celibate reminds all of the importance of the relationship with God, the life-giving Ancestor, and the ideals of the total community, and the message of the restoration of right relationships.

The Vow of Celibacy and What It Means.

Religious Brothers vow celibate chastity, not just as a matter of personal discipline to abstain from sexual activity, but because they wish to live in a right and respectful relationship with all, as Jesus did. They also bring the message to others that the relationship with God is significant and sufficient, rather than a dependence on a sexual relationship for fulfilment.

In vowing celibate chastity the Brothers commit themselves to make an honest and sustained attempt to live without sexu-

al gratification in order to experience the unconditional love of God and express that same love to others (*Sipe, 1996*). Thus they understand celibacy as radical freedom for God and others. The professed celibate, who does not have a deep commitment to and relationship with God, and who is not a manifestation of God's unconditional love to others, therefore, rather than being 'celibate' is 'sterile', and is a countersign of the good news of God's life-giving presence in the world.

Understanding Obedience

Obedience (*"ob-audire"* on account of listening) is an acknowledgement of a commitment to a shared truth – binding a person to the elders and to the peer group, for the shared vision of the community, the good of the community.

In African traditional society, the life of the individual unfolds within the authority of the community. The various rites of passage underline the importance of obedience. In the Initiation Rite, there is a time of separation, a liminal (on the edge) period, and a time of incorporation. The liminal period is when the initiates learn about obedience; obedience to tradition, and implicit obedience to the elders. There is created a strong age group and peer obedience, the call of life to the age group. The stages involve these three forms of obedience; obedience to the community, obedience to the ancestors, and obedience to gods of the community. The only assurance in life comes from good listening and dialogue with the various members of the group.

The modern world places a high value on self-fulfilment and satisfaction, on doing it "your own way". Religious Brothers vow obedience, not just to submit to a higher authority, but also to listen to God, to the needs of the Church, to the needs of the Congregation, and to the needs of the individual. As Brothers, they wish to collaborate with, rather than have power over, others. Exercising their vow of obedience (listening for God) calls their community to regular prayer and reflective, discerning discussion on matters regarding the realities of life around them and how God

may be calling them to respond.

Finding the balance between personal responsibility and respect for authority is often a big challenge. Younger members may have been brought up in such a way that they are expected to listen to the elders, show respect for them, but need also to get some answers to their questions. If asking questions is seen as challenging the right and the authority of the superior, it may bring tension. However, the *ubuntu* philosophy, "I am because we are", which embraces the idea that no one can exist in isolation, means that an African person depends on connection, community and caring – simply put, an African cannot *be* without another, without listening to another. To seek answers and explanations is to seek meaning. Expecting another to obey blindly does not respect the dignity of that person.

Jesus spent much time in observing his community (and what was happening in it), and also in quiet prayer with the Father. The Brother vows obedience to follow Jesus and to listen to what the call is. To practice this he must take the time to listen carefully to the various dimensions of the call of life, to be in quiet and prayer, and in relationship to Jesus.

Religious Brothers and Mission

Mission is central to the identity of Religious Brothers and to the individual expressions of the charisms of their congregations. All are "in mission". Brothers are called, gifted and sent. More and more do congregation chapters call Religious Brothers to move to ministry with those on the margins of society, to engage with the poor at our doorstep. In this way, they give new and personal articulation to the expression of Jesus' mission at this time. Such experiences are an integral part of the ongoing formation as Brothers.

Religious Brothers are "missioned", sent, to show God's love and compassion to people. It is of our nature as humans, to be for others, and to show special support for the ones most in need. Brothers believe God is working through them so that they be-

come the loving Christ to the world.

When Religious Brothers choose to live a life consecrated through vows, they do so for the purpose of living as Jesus did, choosing the same lifestyle, and participating in the same mission.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
Because he has anointed me
To bring glad tidings to the poor.
He sent me to proclaim liberty to captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.” (*Lk 4:18-19*)

The Religious Brother is responding to a special call as he focuses his life work, as bearing a distinct witness, and as finding his apostolic identity in his service of his brothers and sisters. In this way, Brothers believe they are closely following the life of Jesus. It becomes their motivation. As Brothers, they walk beside, escort and support others to the fullness of life. This is the brotherly approach to all ministry; walk beside to support, encourage and empower.

Regardless of his ministry, the Religious Brother sees his day-in-day-out involvement, be it in teaching, social work, administration, or counselling, to name a few, as having a distinctly sacred and social dimension. In this way, by developing his God-given talents and leading others to develop theirs, he contributes in a vital manner to the evolution of the universe and takes a central role in that gradual revelation of the truth and beauty of creation.

The Brother realises that by helping others to find their place in this unfolding story he helps them to understand better the world around them and to contemplate the mystery of God’s presence in this world. He also realises that all of life’s disciplines and studies, not formal religious instruction alone, contribute to developing the potentialities of mind and spirit, and make possible, both for the individual and for society, the restoration of all things in Christ.

Each Brother is called to go even beyond the requirements of his assigned ministry. He does not content himself with a routine commitment to a “Monday to Friday” job. He looks to open himself to Christ in the poor around him. His involvement is how the Church can become a “Church of the poor, for the poor”. Every Brother is encouraged to have his own personal, regular ministry commitment with the marginalised. This may require some “out of hours” commitment on his part.

Vatican Council II (1962-65) and Religious Brotherhood

When Pope John XXIII summoned the Catholic Bishops to this Second Vatican Council, it was to review and restore the zeal in the lives of the Church members and to explore the relationship between the Church and the modern world. Vatican Council II marked a paradigm shift in many respects within the Church community. It introduced a spirit of dialogue to the community. The members of the Council reflected and discussed even the nature of the Church community itself. In the sphere of religion, for the first time in the history of Christianity, a Catholic Council spoke positively of other religions to which people look for answers to the unresolved riddles of life. These religions are considered to be reflecting a ray of truth that enlightens all men and women (*Lumen Gentium*, 1964).

Religious Brothers are part of the Pilgrim Church, the People of God, open, seeking, searching, in the modern world. Religious Brothers are to be part of the prophetic, charismatic dimension of the Church community. The personal discernment of the call to consecrated life involves an internalisation of the message and the values of the gospel. This internalisation will lead to a greater personal commitment to living out this message and these values in personal behaviour (*Lumen Gentium*, 1964).

In a very real sense, the Religious Brother must reflect the Church in his service to the people of God and he must remain determined to be open, sensitive to the times, and to the needs of

the times. In being so, he will find a way to bring the message of Jesus to all whom he encounters. Consecrated Religious Brotherhood can now be seen as a lifestyle, within the Catholic Church, distinguished by the profession of the evangelical counsels and the commitment to live the communal life of the religious congregation to which these religious brothers have committed themselves.

A New Consciousness Rising

Pope Francis, in leading the Church, is speaking with new energy, making new challenges to the members, restructuring the order of values. He changes the focus from the institution itself onto the members. He calls for a “Church of the poor for the poor”, and he wants the Church “to go out onto the streets, and to resist everything worldly, everything static, everything comfortable, everything to do with clericalism, everything that might make us closed in on ourselves” (*Pope Francis to the youth of Argentina, 25 July, 2013*).

To accept the Church of the poor is to become immersed in the lives of the people who are at the margins, spending time and energy with them, working for justice, showing compassion in the difficult times, and bringing HOPE to their lives. Grateful for the life given him, the Religious Brother blesses and glorifies God through his collaboration with the people. They fulfil their vocation of making the world a better place through their collaborative efforts to live compassionately and justly, respecting all creation. They move out of their offices to embrace the people.

The relationship that Religious Brothers are called to with the people of God, is modelled on the relationship of Jesus to his followers. Hence, they are called to be, and try to see themselves as, brothers to all. Religious Brothers are called to consecrate their lives as a sign of God’s place in the world, to challenge the people of the world to look again at where God is present. The Religious Brothers live to make a difference to the world. Part of this difference is to bring about dialogue and reconciliation within the

community when there is a misunderstanding among kinsmen or in-laws. This is part of the challenge; how does a Religious Brother respond to misunderstanding, how do they deal with grudges in community life, how do they willingly open their lives to “do not let the sun set on your anger” (Eph. 4:26)?”

The Religious Brother and Sister ... are permanent reminders for all Christian people of the importance of the total gift of self to God and a reminder that the mission of the Church ... is one and is shared by all. However, we recognise that the vocation of the Religious Brother and Sister is not always well understood and appreciated within the Church (*CICLSAL, 2015*).

Commitment

The lively, energetic Religious Brother expresses his radical commitment to being a disciple of Jesus in the way he lives. Indeed his public profession of a way of life involves:

- (i) total priority to the God-relationship by living celibately in community;
- (ii) communal listening, by the vow of obedience, for what God is saying in our world;
- (iii) fundamental awareness, by the vow of poverty, that “hanging on to things” draws us away from God who is the professed centre of our being.

To give oneself completely to the service of God, to make a commitment until death, is a big challenge. To commit is to pledge yourself to a certain purpose. It also means practising your beliefs consistently. There are, therefore, two fundamental conditions for commitment. The first is having a sound set of beliefs. There is an old saying that goes, “Stand for something or you will fall for anything.” The second is faithful adherence to those beliefs with your behaviour. Possibly the best description of commitment is “persistence with a purpose”.

Commitment is a statement of what has priority in life. The Religious Brother supports this by his choice to invest in his per-

sonal growth, to attend to his own human development, religious and spiritual development, and to commit to reading about and understanding his religious life. It means being committed to fraternal and communal living, and pastoral involvement. The interpersonal dialogue with the mentor and spiritual director, helps to make sense of it all and contributes to the commitment. It also means being prepared to pass on what he knows to those who follow him.

The essence of Religious Brotherhood is the call:

- (i) to follow Jesus through his teaching and his works for others
- (ii) to live in community
- (iii) to pray together
- (iv) to live the vowed life of poverty, celibate chastity and obedience
- (v) to support each other in ministry.

Martin Luther King Jr. shared one of his last insights spelling out something of the essential desire of all people, "I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit together at the table of brotherhood".

If you are feeling you might be being called by God to be a Religious Brother, or at least to explore it as a possibility, then you are encouraged to try to deepen your relationship with Jesus through frequent prayer and receiving the Eucharist. Also, it would be good to find a spiritual guide who can help you to decide whether you should explore this call more fully, and who can help you in this process.

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CHAPTER 8

Technology and Religious life

By

Cynthia Mgwen

Our world is swiftly changing and we must not overlook the impact of this rapid instability on the ministry and identity of religious life today in Africa.

There is this pervasive existence of digital media as an integral part of our lives. Our daily lives are occupied with technology through which we communicate, work, play and even engage for making meaning. Living in a digital age has significant implications on the institution of the Church and consecrated life in Africa.

The implications of living in a digital culture are quite immense, and therefore, the attention of this chapter will be limited to how a religious community is formed and sustained, its performance and the possible repercussions and benefits of technology to evangelisation. It will look at the interactions between Religious women and men in Africa, and technology, to provide a significant site for reflection.

How does Religious living in a digital age play an active role in their ministry and their community formation? Digital technologies are more than tools or technological inventions, but are closely related to who we are as humans, how we live our lives, and what choices we make in the midst of several options provided by the digital media. Despite living in this digitally oriented

culture, there is still a gap in terms of a religious response in Africa to technology. In response to this, the aim of this chapter is to inspire thoughts with regard to living in a digital culture.

What is religious life/consecrated life? The word “consecrate” in the Latin language is “consecrare” and it has its origin in the word *sacrum* meaning sacred, God-like or set apart for God. Hence to be consecrated, or to live a consecrated life, is to be chosen by God exclusively for himself. As it is only God who makes holy, it is only God who consecrates people. According to Pope John Paul II (1996) “consecration signals a profound change in the person and thus distinguishes the form of life to be lived”.

Lohfink (1986) asserts that Religious are seen as counter or contrast society because of their radical lifestyle in living the gospel’s values. They are prophetic people, who act as the spiritual check and balance of God’s people. Moloney (1980) sees them as a protest movement against a Church that had conformed itself too much to society at large. The Church in differentiating this form of life, the consecrated life, from all other forms of life in the Church says that it is “a life to follow Christ more freely and to imitate Him more nearly by the practice of the evangelical counsels” (*Perfectate Caritatis 1*).

Invariably, consecrated life is essentially the embracing of the evangelical counsels, which comprise the three vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. The three vows are the distinguishing marks of the consecrated life. The vows represent the total renunciation of the world, of all human goods and comforts. Moynihan, (2000) notes that consecrated people negate the three most important aspects of human life, that is, economic, social and political, in order to be with Christ. Hence, the vows are the declaration of their choice for Christ alone, who is above all things the joy and meaning of their life. They embrace and promote Christ’s message of salvation and in their daily life share in his passion and resurrection by being in solidarity with the world. Consecrated people are reminders of the intimate link between being a Christian and following Christ.

Against the backdrops and cultures which tend to differentiate the two, making the following of Christ an abstract thing, consecrated persons, according to J B Metz (1994), have to provide productive models for the Church and the world, at all times and in every culture, on how to follow Christ. These models should illustrate how fellowship with Christ is to be lived in the new social, economic, intellectual, cultural and digital world of today. Like the biblical prophets, consecrated people are called to condemn the sins and indifference of the people to the teachings of Christ and their holiness of life. In line with this, *Vita Consecrata* no 84 teaches that consecrated people, like prophets, should feel in their hearts a burning desire for holiness of God and, having heard his word in the dialogue of prayer, they should proclaim that word with their lives, with their lips and with their actions, becoming people who speak for God against evil and sin. In other words, consecrated people are the watchdogs of the Church by being alive and alert to the signs of the time and confronting them with the gospel's values. The women and men who are called to choose this way of life have prayer, community or service as the major pivots of their lives.

Fuellenbach (1994) states that, by embracing the consecrated life, the chosen people make the person of Jesus Christ and his mission of salvation the centre of their life. And what this means in concrete terms is that they belong, whole and entirely, to Christ's universal family. Their charism and apostolate are translated to universal fraternity or family. In this family what matters is the sharing in God's love and mercy, which was made manifest in Christ's death and resurrection. These events gave humanity a new life and new joy. And the point of departure in this is by presenting religious life/communities as seats of God's love, mercy, justice and peace. Furthermore, Pope Francis notes that consecrated people should be able to invite and welcome the world to their world of faith; they should be able to proclaim and present the Messiah to the world in the way they live out their joy of salvation with one heart and one soul (*Acts 4:32*).

Technology, as understood by the Church, is both a sign of the progress of humans and is always progressing itself as it addresses the complexity of the communications phenomenon today. The Church notes that “one of the greatest blessings of our age is the advance of technology and the progress made in social communication”. “Technology” can be described as products and processes used to simplify our daily lives. People use technology to extend their various abilities. Technology has advanced by leaps and bounds, to the extent that wisdom is now chasing after science; the verities of human experience have come into question in ways that, a generation ago, could never have been imagined.

To understand technology and consecrated life in Africa, it is inevitable to take a cursory look at the world we live in. That is, the circumstances in today’s digital world which can exercise a positive or negative influence on the consecrated life and present a context where consecrated persons ought to live and bear witness to the Gospel. From what is seen from the overwhelming and complex situation of this digital era, many Religious men and women are lost in time, they are dispersed in the fragments of reality and alienated in a kind of relativism that includes ethics, culture, society, politics and economics.

Many today live their identities and functional crisis by negating the supreme value of life. Threatened in their human finiteness, they are in search of sense and fulfilment, solidarity and communion, in order not to be alone in solitude and conscious of their limits. They are constantly in need of communicating the emptiness that they feel within themselves. How the consecrated people are able to handle this complex situation goes a long way in determining their true place and role in today’s digital world, particularly in Africa. Actually, this is not the first time in the history of the Church that consecrated people would be facing challenges in their mission in the world and in the Church. As in the past, the issue bears more on authenticity and application of the gospel values to the signs of the time.

The Orthodox Christian Bishops wrote in 2006, "The technology itself is not dangerous it is the human disposition which determines". Furthermore, Pope John Paul II also advised in 2005, "Do not be afraid of new technologies! These rank 'among the marvellous things'... which God has placed at our disposal to discover". Pope Francis reinforced this by saying that technologies are a gift from God. It is all a matter for the Religious to see the opportunities offered by the Internet, smartphones, and cloud communications, and to use them for the good of the Church and others. Thus, we cannot talk about technology without talking about the human person first. Every person is created in the image and likeness of God (*Gen. 1:26-27*). As a result, every person inherently possesses qualities from being created in the image and likeness of God. We see that divine image (or icon) through our free will, our intellect, our ability to form relationships, our creativity, our ability to love and to be loved, and many more. This divine gift also means that we recognise the living icon of Christ in each other. And if we love God, then we must also love those who are made in God's image and likeness. The Apostle John put it more forcefully: "If anyone says, 'I love God,' but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. This is the commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother" (*1 Jn. 4:19-20*). Thus the Religious should always bear in mind that every person, whether they encounter them in person or online, is worthy of dignity and must be treated with dignity.

The history many religious congregations in Africa walk in now is filled with mobile devices, social networks, wide Internet accessibility, data collection, and privacy concerns. There is a strong need to both train the Religious men and women in Africa in the use of electronic media and to protect them as they learn and relate through these means. Technology has the power to influence their lifestyles and habits. The role and impact of technology in religious congregations in Africa are ever growing. Technology is presented to the consecrated man and woman wrapped

with cultural values that compliment, challenge or repel religious attitudes, values and belief. Understanding how people shape technology, and how technology shapes people's interactions with each other and the natural world, is important not only for those who research, develop and implement new technologies, but also for religious congregations in Africa today. The Religious use technology in their working and personal lives on a daily basis. Technology is dynamic; it keeps on improving because our needs and demands for technology keep on changing. However, the Religious must be mindful that technology left unchecked could have negative effects for society in general and for their community and spiritual experiences in particular. Though on the brighter side, modern technological innovation has brought congregations and communities closer to each other, to the world and to God.

Media, as a continuously evolving innovation, contributes to the pursuit of truth and the speeding up of progress. Coleman (1993) notes that the Church people who want to understand the mass media need to remember the multiple functions of the mass media and communications in society, and pass on the assumptions and consensus to society. In Coleman's understanding, media supports popular sentiments and institutions; it does not compete with the Church, rather the purposes it is used for are what create competition (Jorgenson, 1984; Soukop, 1993).

Media is inherently neutral but can be used for good and evil. Technology use is fundamentally positive and encouraging for the religious congregations. Yet technology does nothing by itself; the instruments and tools are used as people choose to use them (*Ethics in Communication, 2000*). The Church notes that, like so many other good things in creation, the media is open to misuse and still, together, we consider before God what measures may be taken to prevent its desecration. Thus, the Religious have to be aware of this as they plunge into the digital world.

“Research that has directly examined the Catholic Church’s stance on media, through the analysis of papal encyclicals and other documents produced by the Vatican councils, notes the existence of both a need for using media as a useful instrument, along with understanding the importance of agency in the Church engagement with media. Too often, the impact of technology on religious life is seen as negative.” But this misses the greater opportunities technology presents to religious organisations. Social networks, including Facebook, have active and close-knit communities of religious communities. Religious should embrace technology as it is a gift from God and shall be treated and engaged as such. Fore (1987) explains the role of media in that it is an ever ready companion for entertainment, yet it also cultivates a mean world full of violence; that its values and stories demand and dehumanise us, and that its religious impact is the very antithesis of the Christian faith which most people in our society profess and believe.

Pope Benedict states that “the exponential rate of development in the capacities of the technologies available is to support and facilitate human communication. The new digital arena, the so-called cyberspace, allows them to encounter and to know each other’s traditions and values”. Therefore, the combination of the developments in mobile telephony, computer technology, fibre-optics and satellites mean that many of the Religious men and women now carry with them devices that allow them instant access to an extraordinary range of information, news and opinion from around the globe, and that enables them to communicate, by word, text or the sharing of images, with people and institutions in every corner of the world. The desire for connectedness is innate in human beings, hence the Religious are also not left out. From the perspective of theology, it can be presented as a manifestation of our created nature made in the image and likeness of God, a God whose essence is relational; human beings desire union with each other and are called at the heart of their being to be persons of love. Technology thus enhances and facilitates this relationship among the Religious and the people of God.

The British philosopher Onora O'Neill has observed the serious social risks that result: "If the media mislead, or if readers cannot assess their reporting, the wells of public discourse and public life are poisoned". Given the doubtful, and often anonymous, provenance of what appears in cyberspace, it becomes very easy for those who wish to deceive and manipulate to disseminate their views. People use fake names, surnames, age, occupation and places where they live. The new information technologies may be anti-authoritarian, but curiously they are often used in ways that are also anti-democratic. They undermine our capacities to judge others' claims and to place our trust".

One common response to this phenomenon is that people, in this case the Religious, turn only to sources of information and opinion that they judge to be trustworthy. This is a natural and understandable approach but it is not without risk. The risk is always there to become the other, to fake and play tricks, forgetting who the person is – "a Religious". Often the judgement as to what sources are trustworthy is rooted in the person's pre-established world view and serves only to confirm people in their opinions, rather than leading to a real search for truth and understanding. A similar phenomenon is emerging in the world of Catholic media, especially in the blogosphere, where often it seems not enough for protagonists to propose their own views and beliefs but where they tend also to attack the arguments, and even the person, of those who disagree with them. It is natural that debates about faith and morals should be full of conviction and passion, but there is a growing risk that some forms of expression are damaging the image of consecrated life and, moreover, are unlikely to draw the curious and the seekers to a desire to learn about the Church and its message.

In Africa a particular challenge to the possibility of the new media serving as channels for dialogue and growth in understanding between peoples is that the extraordinary range of words and images generated by these media, the speed with which they are produced, and the constant stream of news and information means that there is very little room and time for a sustained and

considered engagement; this leads to a real danger that our cultural discourse becomes superficial. Fore (1987) has expressed this risk succinctly, "Visual and electronic media, today's dominant media, need a certain kind of content. They thrive on brevity, speed, change, urgency, variety and feelings. But thinking requires the opposite. Thinking takes time. It needs silence and the methodical skills of logic". These aforementioned features of the digital culture present a formidable obstacle to those who wish to use the new media to speak of meaning and truth, to share their faith and beliefs.

For the consecrated, the challenge is to find a language that is appropriate for this new forum but that does not betray the depths and nuances of the message that has been entrusted to them. In many ways, the message from consecrated men and women is more radically counter-cultural than ever. The Church speaks of truth through its chosen, the Religious, in an environment where scepticism is the norm; it seeks to speak to all in a milieu where the focus is on niche markets and interest groups and it invites people to commitment in a world where novelty reigns.

Technology undoubtedly offers the Religious man and woman a greater opportunity to make known the Church's teaching more widely and more directly to ever greater numbers and across all types of political and cultural boundaries. It is possible, using the new technologies, to reach new audiences, to invite them to a consideration of the great questions concerning the meaning and purpose of life and to offer to them the great wisdom of our tradition. However, there is a need for Religious to understand better how their message is being heard and understood by different audiences. The emergence of the internet as an interactive medium, where users seek to engage as subjects and not just as consumers, invites the Religious to develop more explicitly dialogical forms of teaching and presentation. In learning to speak the languages of the new media, Religious will be preparing the way not just for their own effective use of the new media as tools for evangelisation, but also for the promotion of that universal

discussion and debate that is necessary if these media are to realise their potential to serve the good of all people. The need to find a new “language” is not new for people of faith. Throughout its history, the Church has learned to proclaim the unchanging message of Christ in new idioms and in ways that respond to different cultural contexts. The Church has long been “multi-lingual”. The new language, in which it must be fluent in order to be present in the new forum of ideas and information, will stand beside the other languages of its tradition. Those who are concerned that the language of the digital culture is too banal or ephemeral to translate the profundity of the Christian message should remember that it is not a language that will substitute the precise language of dogma and theology, or the rich language of homiletics or liturgy, but rather will serve to establish an initial point of contact with those who are far from faith. Within the Church, we are accustomed to the use of texts as our primary language of communication. Many of the websites that have been developed by different Church institutions continue to use that language. The web carries many wonderful homilies, speeches and articles, but it is not clear if they speak to a younger audience that is fluent in a different language; a language that is rooted in the convergence of text, sound and images. Many of the texts have been shaped with a particular audience in mind, an audience that is willing to study and analyse the text, but their appeal can be limited to those who are browsing and who will move on very quickly if their attention has not been immediately engaged. The difficulties are compounded when the actual texts use a vocabulary and forms of expression that are experienced as unintelligible and off-putting, even by sympathetic audiences. The deeper problem, however, is precisely about the over-reliance on texts.

Pope Benedict observed in his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* , “Just because social communications increase the possibilities of interconnection and the dissemination of ideas, it does not follow that they promote freedom or internationalise development and democracy for all. To achieve goals of this kind, they need to focus on promoting the dignity of persons and peoples, they need to be

clearly inspired by charity and placed at the service of truth, of the good, and of natural and supernatural fraternity”.

Like other communications media, it is a means, not an end in itself. The internet can offer magnificent opportunities for evangelisation, if used with competence and a clear awareness of its strengths and weaknesses. Many Religious in Africa are increasingly turning to the world of cyberspace as a window to the world. Though technology can never replace that profound experience of God which only the living, the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church can offer; however, it can certainly provide a unique supplement and support in both preparing for the encounter with Christ in community, and for sustaining the consecrated women and men in their journey of faith. Despite its enormous potential for good, some of the degrading and damaging ways in which technology can be used are already obvious to all, and religious congregations in Africa surely have a responsibility to use this marvellous instrument to serve the common good and to ensure that it does not become a source of harm to their members. The fact that, through the internet, the Religious can multiply their contacts in ways hitherto unthinkable, opens up wonderful possibilities for spreading the Gospel. This is the purpose of evangelisation. And this is what will make the internet a genuinely human space, for if there is no room for Christ, there is no room for man.

The internet is relevant to many activities and programmes of the consecrated men and women in Africa; this is in Church evangelisation, including both re-evangelisation and new evangelisation and the traditional missionary work *ad gentes*, in catechesis and other kinds of education, news and information, apologetics, governance and administration, and some forms of pastoral counselling and spiritual direction. Although the virtual reality of cyberspace cannot substitute for real interpersonal community, the incarnational reality of the sacraments and the liturgy, or the immediate and direct proclamation of the gospel, it can complement them, attracting people to a fuller experience of the life of faith, and enriching the lives of the Religious.

According to McCombs (2004), the internet has a number of striking features; it is instantaneous, immediate, worldwide, decentralised, interactive, endlessly expandable in contents and outreach, flexible and adaptable to a remarkable degree. It is egalitarian in the sense that anyone, with the necessary equipment and modest technical skill, can be an active presence in cyberspace, and declare his or her message to the world. Religious are called to use science and technology in a full and constructive way, while recognising that the findings of science always have to be evaluated in the light of the centrality of the human person, of the common good and of the inner purpose of creation. Thus, the Religious are encouraged to use it in an informed, disciplined way, for morally good purposes. It provides the Religious with a means for communicating with particular groups of people, especially young people and young adults, the elderly and homebound, persons living in remote areas, and the members of other religious bodies who are out of reach.

Religious men and women in Africa continue to plug in and engage with technology in order to come closer to God and be more involved in their communities; however, they must do this with caution. Time management is the process of organising and planning how to divide your time between specific activities. Good time management enables one to work smarter so that one gets more done in less time, even when time is tight and pressures are high. If religion allows technology to control it, finding time and space where Religious will not be interrupted by WhatsApp messages is very crucial. However, since social media is used in receiving emergency messages, secrecy messages, entertaining messages, it is very addictive in nature and it is difficult to resist its incoming messages. Many Religious have fallen victim to bad time management due to distractions caused by WhatsApp messaging. Research suggests it takes approximately eight minutes to recover from being interrupted when you are in the middle of a task (evangelisation). Misuse of the latest innovative technologies by Religious women and men has great impact on the witnessing of the gospel. Since WhatsApp is a real-time messaging

application, it has contributed much to failure in time management and this has had a lot of implications for religious life. When people fail to realise that there isn't time for everything, a big problem arises. The problem is caused when a Religious person does not prioritise that which is important at a given time and at a given place, and hence concentrates on social media. The writer of Ecclesiastes 3:6 tells us there is a time for everything, describing the endless ebb and flow of actions that can sweep us up in an endless flurry of activity that leads to stress. Lack of proper time management, triggered by entertaining WhatsApp messaging, has contributed to poor punctuality to community times by many of the Religious. Instead of other technologies helping reduce the time and frequency of regular meetings, the opposite is true. More time is lost when members are mainly concentrating on social media.

Through evangelisation of technology, in this case WhatsApp, in the Lord's vineyard of the Church's teaching helps to keep the truth of the gospel and to spread it to the ends of the earth. WhatsApp usage in pastoral ministries to spread God's love to the dejected and depressed people will bring consolation, healing, trauma recovery, edification and enrichment of people's spirituality. The Church, right from the day of Pentecost, has maintained her position of preaching the Good News of Jesus' resurrection. "Men of Israel, listen to what I am going to say, Jesus the Nazarene was a man commended to you by God" (*Acts 2:22*).

Reconciliation is at the heart of Christian teaching and mission. The Church, walking in the footsteps of her founder, Jesus Christ, is mandated to carry out the same duties as her master. Jesus Christ came into the world for the very purpose of reconciling the broken world with the eternal love of God, the father. The Religious in Africa, using the pulpit and evangelising through the social media of WhatsApp, shoulder that mission of love for the world, reconciling all the people of different races among themselves, with God. Videos, messages and images on WhatsApp can yield more souls for God on reconciliation and evangelisation by reinforcing God's love with him and others. "For if we were ene-

mies were reconciled to God through the death of his Son... we are filled with exultant trust in God our Lord Jesus Christ”: War-torn countries in Africa using WhatsApp for evangelisation and reconciliation will be moved to acknowledge their evil-doing, take the initiative and forgive. This is the true procedure of the Christian teaching of reconciliation using the social media platform of WhatsApp for evangelisation.

In summation, technology has had both negative and positive impacts in our world today. The consecrated in the world have not been left out. Thus, for a consecrated life in Africa to meet the demands of the digital world, it must embrace the spirit of change ranging through the age without losing itself and its essence to change itself. To improve in its engagement with the digital world, there is a need to examine the understanding of the role of the consecrated in the world. The consecrated men and women in Africa, in their interaction and use of technology, have to return to their origins, to the gospel, to the charisms of their founders and to healthy traditions that have come down to the present time. The Religious, through the present technologies, should form the world conscience, renew witnessing of God in the world, and promote authentic human nature.

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CHAPTER 9

The Religious Life: A Historical Survey

By

Joseph Omoregbe

Introduction

The religious life is a life dedicated to the service of God through the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. It is essentially a communal life; members share the same faith, live together, work together, pray together, eat together, and own things together.

Acquisition of material properties and preoccupation with marriage and the rearing of children are seen as obstacles to spiritual progress. The vows of voluntary poverty and celibacy free the heart of the Religious from such preoccupation, while the vow of obedience eliminates pride and encourages humility. It is a life of renunciation and self-denial, with the objective of spiritual purification, spiritual growth and spiritual progress.

The Religious Life in Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism

Although this chapter is a historical survey of the religious life in the Church, it should be noted that the religious life did not originate with Christianity; rather, it predates Christianity and it is still very much a prominent feature in some non-Christian re-

ligions. For example, the religious life in the form of monasticism has been part of the Indian religions of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism from their very beginning.

Hinduism, the traditional religion of the Indian people, has no founder; its origin dates back to the Aryan invasion of India around 2,500 BC.

Buddhism was founded by Siddhartha Gautama who was a prince, born in northern India in 563 BC. He began as a Hindu prince, brought up in the luxury of the palace but, at the age of 29, his encounter with a Hindu monk inspired him with the desire to become a monk. He left his father's palace and went into the forest where he joined a group of Hindu monks. He eventually broke away from Hinduism and founded Buddhism when he achieved illumination (enlightenment) and acquired the title, The Buddha.

Jainism was founded by Vardhamana (otherwise known as Mahavira) who was also a prince, born in 540 BC. At the age of 30, he left home, renounced all worldly possessions and began a wandering life in search of illumination. When he eventually achieved illumination he founded the religion of Jainism, an austere monastic religion right from the beginning, with emphasis on asceticism. Thus, the religious life in the form of "*fuga mundi*", renouncing the world, and monasticism has been a prominent feature of each of these three Indian religions from the very beginning of their existence (*Omoregbe, 1999, pp 75-141*).

The Religious Life in the Qumran Community

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947 threw light on the religious life lived by a sect of Judaism towards the end of the Old Testament period, around the 2nd and 1st centuries BC. The Scrolls show that a sect of Judaism was living a monastic life in the Qumran desert. Members of this community renounced the world and went into the Qumran desert to prepare themselves for the New Covenant which was prophesied by Jeremiah (*Jer 32:37-41*). They saw themselves as the New People of the New Covenant, preparing themselves for the coming of the Messiah. They lived a strictly

regulated life of voluntary poverty, chastity and obedience. They belonged to different groups, prominent among which was the Essenes. A newcomer aspiring to join them was required to live with them and observe them for a year, after which he underwent a purification ritual before being admitted into the monastic community (*Brown, 199, pp 942-995*).

The Beginning of the Religious Life in the Catholic Church

“If you want to be perfect, go sell all that you have and give the money to the poor and you will have treasures in heaven. Then come, follow me.” This was what the Lord Jesus said to the rich young man who was aspiring to spiritual perfection (*Mt. 19:21*).

The young man asked Jesus what to do in order to have eternal life, the Lord replied by telling him to keep the commandments. But the young man said he had been doing that from his youth and he wanted to do more than just keeping the commands. He was aspiring to a higher level of spiritual life and he wanted to know from Jesus what to do to fulfil his spiritual ambition of living a higher spiritual life. The Lord’s reply was “if you want to be perfect, go sell all you have and give the money to the poor and you will have treasures in heaven. Then come, follow me”. He invited the young man to come and live the religious life with him. But the young man turned down the invitation; he refused to part with his wealth to follow Jesus because he was very rich and his heart was attached to his wealth.

“We have left all things to follow you, what we will have?” This was the question Peter asked Jesus. He wanted to know the reward the Apostles would have for leaving all things to follow Jesus (*Mt. 19:27*). What is the reward of a person who leaves all things and follows Jesus in living the religious life? This question is still relevant today.

“The group of believers was one in mind and heart. No one said that any of his belongings was his own, but they all shared with one another everything that they had” (*Act 5:32-35*). This

passage, with its emphasis on the community being one in mind and heart, living a communal life, with communal possession of goods, was the background of St Augustine's monastic rule which the Augustinians and the Dominicans are still using today. The Scriptural roots of the religious life in the Church can be seen in the quotations above.

The Religious Life Lived by Jesus and the Apostles

It was the Lord Jesus himself who began the Christian religious life when, at the age of 30, he left home to begin his public ministry. After his baptism in the river Jordan by John the Baptist, he went to the wilderness to fast and pray for 40 days in preparation for his public ministry. After the 40 days of fasting and prayer, he began his public ministry.

He eventually selected twelve Apostles out of his numerous followers and began to live the religious life with them. They lived a communal life dedicated to the service of God, a life which involved chastity, voluntary poverty and obedience. This was the beginning of the Christian religious life, inaugurated by the Lord Jesus himself. He invited the rich young man to join him in living the religious life but the man turned down the invitation; the Apostles, however, accepted the invitation, left all things and followed him. They lived the religious life with him for three years, working together, going together from one village to another preaching the word of God, eating together, having a common purse, etc.

The objective of the religious life in the Church is to follow Jesus more closely, with greater commitment. It is a positive response to the Lord's invitation to the rich young man, "If you want to be perfect go, sell all you have and give the money to the poor. Then come, follow me". The objective of the vows of chastity (celibacy), voluntary poverty and obedience, is to free the heart from attachment to material things and from the distractions of married life, so that one is disposed to serve God with total commitment, full attention, and undivided loyalty; as St Paul says: "I

would like you to be free from worry. An unmarried man concerns himself with the Lord's work because he is trying to please the Lord. But a married man concerns himself with worldly matters because he wants to please his wife" (1 Cor. 7:32).

The Desert Fathers (Hermits)

Taking seriously the Lord's invitation to the young man to go, sell all his possessions, give the money to the poor and then come and follow him, many Christians in the 2nd century AD, sold all their properties, gave the money to the poor, left society, and went into the desert of Egypt to follow Jesus.

They began by living as hermits. The desert of Egypt was populated by Christian hermits. All they wanted was to be alone with God. But their desire to be alone was short-lived, for as they were leaving society and going into the desert, people who knew them as holy men went into the desert looking for them.

Holiness is like light; it is attractive and it cannot be hidden. So, as these holy men left society and went into the desert, their admirers went in search of them until they found them. They wanted to be with them and be their disciples. The holy men did not turn them back, they welcomed them and built monasteries there in the desert to accommodate them, and they lived a communal life (the religious life) with them as monks. They drew up rules to guide and regulate their daily lives. Thus, the hermits who wanted to be alone with God were compelled by force of circumstances to become monks. This was the origin of hermitage and monasticism in the Church; there was a change from eremitical life to coenobitical life, that is, a change from the hermit's life to the monastic life.

St Anthony of Egypt is the best known of the Desert Fathers, while Pachomius is best known for effecting the transition from eremitical life to coenobitical life (*Omoregbe*, 2014, p 65).

Monasticism

The Religious life began in the Church in the form of monasticism and it became virtually synonymous with it until the Middle Ages. The Religious were the monks and the monks were the Religious. Monasteries began to spring up in different parts of the Christian world in the 3rd and 4th centuries.

St Basil, St Eusebius, St Patrick, St Augustine of Hippo, St Columbus, St Martin of Tours, St Benedict, and others, were among the early founders of monasteries, each with his monastic rules for his monks. Asceticism, self-denial, self-mortification, fasting, rigorous exercises of self-discipline, characterised the monastic life. The rigour of asceticism, fasting, and self-mortification, differed from one monastery to another.

The most popular and the most successful type of monasticism, which has had the greatest influence on the western Church, is Benedictine monasticism (while that of the Eastern Church is the monasticism of St Basil). Born in AD 480 in Italy, Benedict came to Rome to study, and after his studies, he went into the desert to become a hermit, alone with God. He actually succeeded in living alone as a hermit for 30 years, before people discovered him and requested to be with him, to become his disciples. He welcomed them and built a monastery for them on Mount Casino in 529. That monastery is still there till today and is the oldest existing Benedictine monastery in the world.

From Italy, Benedictine monasticism spread rapidly to other countries in Europe. It became very successful. Its success was due mainly to two factors. Firstly, its rule prescribes moderate ascetic practices; St Benedict cautiously avoided extreme asceticism which was common among monasteries at that time. Instead, he prescribed moderate ascetic practices for his monks. Secondly, Benedictine monasteries embarked on “social services” for the benefit of the people in whose land the monastery was located. This practice has remained a feature of Benedictine monasticism; the monks make sure that, apart from evangelising

the people around them, they do something in the form of social service that the people will benefit from. For example, they build schools, hospitals or clinics that the people can benefit from.

The Cathedral Canons

After a prolonged and dramatic spiritual struggle, Augustine of Hippo (354-430) became converted to Christianity. He sold all his properties, gave the money to the poor, converted his personal house to a monastery and lived there with his close friends as monks. He had no intention of being a priest, much less a bishop. All he wanted was to be a monk and a writer for the rest of his life. When, however, by popular demand he was ordained a priest and later consecrated bishop, he continued to live the monastic life even as a bishop. He converted the bishop's house and the cathedral into a monastery and lived there with his priests as monks. This was the model for the cathedral canons in the early Middle Ages. Taking Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, and his priests as their model, and making use of his monastic rule, the cathedral canons lived the religious life as monks in the cathedral under a common monastic rule, that of St Augustine. The canons were priests living the religious life in the cathedral, following the example of Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, and his priests.

Military Religious Orders

When, in the Middle Ages, Muslims began to invade Christian territories, including the holy land itself, European Christians saw it as a challenge. Accordingly, at the Council of Clermont in 1095, Pope Urban II called on western Christians to go to the Holy Land and fight against the Muslim invaders of the Holy Land, to defend and protect it from desecration. This was the beginning of the series of crusades that later followed, and it was seen as "holy war".

Many Christians volunteered to join the "holy war" and fight, to defend the Holy Land against the invasion of Muslims and protect it from desecration. Military religious orders were formed

for this purpose, to fight the “holy war”. Members of these religious orders were knights; soldiers living the religious life, and fighting a “holy war”. This was the beginning of knighthood in the Church. The soldiers took, as their models, the Maccabees who, in the 2nd century BC, fought against the Greek invaders of Israel to defend their nation and protect their religion from suppression by the Greeks (see 1st and 2nd Books of Maccabees). Members of these military religious orders were soldiers and at the same time, they were Religious. They were also knights, who dedicated their lives to the service of God by fighting to defend the holy land and protect it from desecration.

The Mendicant Orders

The 13th century gave birth to a new kind of the religious orders, popularly known as “contemplative-active” orders, or the “mendicant orders”. These were their two main features. They combined the contemplative life of the monks with involvement in active evangelisation and ministry in the outside world. They were known as mendicant orders because they lived on alms given to them by generous Christians who appreciated what they were doing. They were also known as friars, as distinct from monks.

There were four of them: the Franciscan Order, founded by St Francis of Assisi; the Dominican Order, founded by St Dominic; the Augustinian Order; and the Carmelite Order.

The Augustinian Order emerged when the Church brought together the hermits of St Augustine who were living separately as hermits. The Church felt the need for evangelisation and brought these hermits together, to form the mendicant order known as the Augustinian Order, and charged them with the task of evangelisation, thus combining evangelisation with their contemplation.

Similarly, the Church brought together the hermits who were living on Mount Carmel and formed them into what is now known as the Carmelite Order, with the task of combining evangelisation with their contemplation.

Until the emergence of these four mendicant orders in the 13th century, the religious life was virtually synonymous with the monastic life, which was cloistered life in the monastery. But the mendicant orders came as a bridge between the cloistered life in the monastery and active involvement in evangelisation and ministry in the world. The friars combined both.

The Society of Jesus (the Jesuits)

In the wake of the upheaval of the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, which shook the Church to her foundation, a Spanish soldier by the name Ignatius, from the city of Loyola, whose ambition was to win glory in the military profession, was seriously wounded in a battle and was taken to the hospital. There in the hospital, while he was undergoing treatment and recovery, he was given spiritual books to read. His reading of these books had a tremendous influence on his life; he changed his ambition from military glory to ambition for the spiritual life.

When he recovered and was discharged from the hospital, he was no longer interested in the military profession or military glory. To achieve his new ambition for the spiritual life he went to the university to study theology, to become a priest. After his ordination, with a few close friends, including Francis Xavier, he founded the Society of Jesus (popularly known as the Jesuits) in 1534. The influence of his military background can be seen in the rigorous training and discipline of the members of the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits).

His main objective was to support the Pope and defend the Catholic Church against the attack of Protestant reformers. He structured the new religious order on a military model with a special commitment to be at the service of the Pope in his struggle against the Protestant reformers. The Society of Jesus emerged as a highly trained, highly disciplined and highly committed spiritual army, placed at the service of the Pope and the Catholic Church during the turbulent period of the Protestant Reformation. For this reason, in addition to the traditional three

religious vows taken by members of religious orders, members of the Jesuits take a 4th vow, that of obedience to the Pope, which brings them into a special relationship with the Pope, at the service of the Pope.

The new religious order played a prominent role during the counter-reformation period (*Schreck, 1997, pp 96-97*). Challenged by the upheaval of the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Church looked into herself and embarked on “self-reformation”, which culminated in the Council of Trent (1554-1563). The Society of Jesus was the last of the great religious orders of the Middle Ages. The Jesuits eventually became great missionaries, great intellectuals and great academics.

Missionary Religious Congregations

The 17th century was a century of unprecedented missionary zeal which led to the founding of many missionary congregations such as “Brothers of the Christian School”, the “Priests of St Sulpice”, the “Vincentians”, the “Salesians”, the Ursuline Sisters”, the “Sisters of Charity” and others.

The 18th century gave birth to other religious congregations, such as the “Redemptorists”, the “Passionists”, the “Holy Ghost Fathers”, the “Society for the Divine Word”, and so on.

In the 19th century, more congregations sprang up, including the “Oblates of Mary Immaculate”, the “Marist Brothers”, the “Precious Blood Missionaries”, the “Missionaries of the Sacred Heart”, the “White Fathers”, the “Sacred Heart Fathers”, the “Salvatorians”, the “Assumptionists”, and others.

The 20th century saw the emergence of the “Little Brothers of Jesus”, the “Little Sisters of Jesus” and the “Little Brothers of the Virgin of the Poor”.

There are several congregations of Sisters in various dioceses all over the world that are still at the diocesan level, founded by bishops to work in their dioceses. There are several such congregations all over Africa, congregations that have not risen to the international level or drawn international recognition.

The Taize Community

One of the most impressive and heart-warming ecumenical developments in the 20th century is the Taize Community in France, an ecumenical monastery where Christians of different denominations live the religious life in common.

This ecumenical monastic community was founded in 1940 by Brother Roger Schutz. The monastic religious order has about 100 members from Catholic and Protestant Churches from about 30 different countries, living the monastic communal life. The community has become a centre of attraction, a centre of pilgrimage and tourism. Over 100,000 young people from all over the world come here every year for pilgrimage, prayer, Bible study and communal work. Members of the community travel out to live and work among the poor in places like Calcutta in India, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Kenya, and Senegal. The objective of the founder, Brother Roger, was to live the simple life of the Gospel as Jesus lived it with his Apostles, the same objective St Francis of Assisi had when he started his movement that eventually led to the emergence of the Franciscan Order in the 13th century (*Omoregbe, 2014, pp 73*).

The Religious Life in Africa

As the Christian faith is growing and spreading rapidly in Africa, as the Catholic Church is growing, so is the religious life. Secularisation has had a seriously detrimental effect on the Christian faith and the religious life in Europe, with a serious reduction in Mass attendance and religious vocations. Many religious orders and congregations are being threatened with extinction due to lack of religious vocations.

Secularisation has turned Europe into a “secular society”. The average European today is no longer interested in religious activities, religious organisations, religious rituals or religious vocation. Perhaps by special Divine providence, the dying faith and the dying religious orders in Europe are springing up and flourishing

in Africa. Religious vocation is booming all over Africa; in addition to the traditional religious orders and congregations from Europe, there are indigenous, locally founded congregations, especially those of Rev Sisters, founded mostly by bishops. They are all thriving, replete with vocations, "*ad maiorem Dei Gloriam*" (for the greater Glory of God).

Conclusion

This historical survey shows that, through the ages, there have always been people who, in their search for God, renounced the material values of this world. There have always been people who preferred spiritual values to material value; there are still people like that in our own time and there will always be such people in the future.

Preference for spiritual values over and above material values is part of religion. The religious life was introduced to Christianity by its founder, the Lord Jesus, and it has remained an integral part of the Catholic Church through the ages, up to our own day. The Catholic Church has always cherished it, nourished it and preserved it, describing it as the "consecrated life"; that is, a life consecrated and dedicated to the service of God. It is attractive to those who have the vocation and who respond positively to it. The historical survey shows that it has also been part of the Catholic Church right from the beginning and it will continue to be part of it. It is gratifying to see that it is growing and thriving in Africa, along with the Catholic Church, because the religious life is an integral part of the Catholic Church.

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CHAPTER 10

Communication, Media, Technology and Religious Life in Africa

By

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Introduction

The Church in Africa has undergone a lot of contextual experiences and transformation in as far as contemporary issues are concerned.

Chief among them are issues of social justice, gender inequality, environmental consciousness and the contextual theologies like inculturation theology and so on. Among the new developments that have entered the fold are the modern means of communication, media and technology. These advances in communications, media and technology have affected the world, just as they have affected religious life on our continent of Africa.

The most common expression of this advancement is the famous term of renowned Canadian media expert Marshall McLuhan, who posited the concept of the world as a “global village”, and that is precisely what we have become. As Religious on the continent, we have to be aware and open to the possibilities of using these new developments for our own lives, as well as for our various respective missions inspired by our founders’ charisms.

In this chapter, I want to look at four critical areas that can help a Religious be immersed in the world of communication, media and technology. Firstly, I will look at how the Catholic Church has highlighted the importance of communication, media and technology. Secondly, I will discuss the importance of formation for communication, media and technology. Thirdly, I will assess how communications, media and technology influence the Religious in Africa, and finally, I will look at one subject that is mostly neglected when talking about technological advancement, the question of media education and literacy as a tool for Religious to be critical in using these means of communication.

I want, from the outset, to clarify the subject matter of the terminologies that are being used in this paper concerning communication, media and technology. In my view, when we talk about communication it is in reference to the process by which information is passed from point A to point B, or between one individual/group and another, taking into consideration that there is a sender, a message and a receiver. In contrast, media involves the means that one uses to pass on a message from one end to the other, and these means could be through phones, radio, television, etc. And when we talk about technology, it is the whole sphere of development, beyond just the means of communication and media, and also involves efforts to simplify what we use for medical, engineering, climate, industry and of course communication and media advancements.

The Catholic Church's Perspective on Communication, Media and Technology

The Catholic Church has long been proactive in the area of the modern means of communication, media and technologies, especially in the 20th century period, where a number of encyclicals and documents are concentrated. The documents that I refer to are what I consider the five fundamental teachings of the Catholic Church on the media as follows: *Vigilanti Cura* (1936); *Miranda Prorsus* (1957); *InterMirifica* (1963); *Communio et Pro-*

gressio (1971) and last, but not least, *Aetatis Novae* (1991)³³. All these documents fundamentally address the importance of modern means of communication, both with their opportunities and their challenges. A few other documents have been written to reflect the current challenges and opportunities magnified. Among them are, for example, *Pornography and Violence* (1989); *Criteria for Ecumenical and Interreligious Cooperation in communications* (1989); *Guide to Training of Future Priests Concerning the Instruments of Social Communication* (1986); and *Instructions on Some Aspects of the Use of Social Communication on Promoting the Doctrine of Faith* (1992).

Be it also indicated that the Church, since 1967 when it declared the celebration of World Day of Communication, has seen every reigning Pope since then write an annual pontifical message, published every 25th January (The Feast of St Francis De Sales – Patron of all Journalists), reflecting on different themes. Some of the themes that have been written about include: *Social Communication and the Development of Nations* (1968); *Social Communication and Family* (1969); *Social Communication and Reconciliation* (1975); *Rights and Duties of the Recipients in Social Communication* (1978); *Social Communication for a Christian Promotion of Youth* (1985); *The Media: Modern Focus for Promoting the Role of Women in Society* (1996). These are some of the few themes that the Church has shared and reflected on in highlighting the importance of communication to particular themes. The latest publication was by Pope Francis for this year's World Communication Day (2019), and its theme was: *From Social Network Communities to the Human Community*. Basically it reminded the world, and the Church at large, that our lives are taken up more and more by social networking and we are forgetting the importance of the “human community” aspect. This development that the Pope highlights comes with challenges that need to be critically examined, at as he states:

33. From now on the following abbreviations will be used when I cite the stated documents as thus: *Vigilanti Cura* (VC); *Miranda Prorsus* (MP); *Inter Mirifica* (IM); *Communio et Progressio* (CP) and *Aetatis Novae* (AN) with respective document numbers.

Today's media environment is so pervasive as to be indistinguishable from the sphere of everyday life. The Net is a resource of our time. It is a source of knowledge and relationships that were once unthinkable. However, in terms of the profound transformations technology has brought to bear on the process of production, distribution and use of the content, many experts also highlight the risks that threaten the search for and sharing of, authentic information on a global scale. If the Internet represents an extraordinary possibility of access to knowledge, it is also true that it has proven to be one of the areas most exposed to disinformation and to the conscious and targeted distortion of facts and interpersonal relationships, which are often used to discredit (*Pope Francis, 2019, p 2*).

For Religious on the African continent, the Church has set up a precedent on how we are to understand the importance of these means of communication, in particular, the social media and how they can be relevant tools for our use. The document *Miranda Prorsus* states, "...from the time when these arts first came into use, the Church welcomed them, not only with great joy but also with motherly care and watchfulness..." (*Eilers, 1993*). This is a statement that, from the very beginning, we ought to have a watchful eye as far as these means of communication and technological advancements are concerned. The first ever document on motion pictures, *Vigilanti Cura*, emphasised the following: "...the cinema is in reality a sort of object lesson which, for good or evil, teaches the majority of men and more effectively than abstract... to conformity with the aims of a Christian conscience and saved from depraving and demoralising effects" (*Eilers, 1993*). The Church has taken great exception in appreciating the importance of these technological developments, as stated in the document *Inter Mirifica*:

Among the wonderful technological discoveries which men of talent, especially in the present era, have made with God's help, the Church welcomes and promotes with special interest those which have a most direct relation to men's minds

and which have uncovered new avenues of communicating most readily news, views and teachings of every sort (*IM*, 1963, p 1).

This notion of the importance of the technological development is also enhanced later on when the Pontifical Council for Social Communication (PCSC), as it was called then, released one of the key documents in 1991, known as *Aetatis Novae*, which states from the outset that:

At the dawn of a new era, a vast expansion of human communications is profoundly influencing culture everywhere. Revolutionary technological changes are only part of what is happening. Nowhere today are people untouched by the impact of media upon religious and moral attitudes, political and social systems, and education (*AN*, 1991, p 1).

The Church has indeed created awareness for all Religious and people of God about the importance of these technological developments. This is only if only they are used for the betterment of society at large, and for our own spiritual well-being, especially for us Religious in Africa. As Religious in Africa, we cannot be exempt from these challenges if we are to understand and utilise them for our mission of evangelising.

In their book *The New Era of Religious Communication*, Pierre Babin and Mercedes Iannone wrote about the aim of religious communication by stating that, "The Christian purpose is to be the salt of the earth; today, the Christian aims to be the salt of a civilization of information and communication" (*Babin and Iannone*, 1991). The proclamation of the Gospel in our time requires, more and more, that we are being called upon as Religious to present the "salt of civilisation" of technology as a means for evangelisation and spreading the gospel. It cannot be business as usual but rather, we must use the wisdom of the Church, where we can draw one or two lessons on using media and new technologies. They must be almost a second nature to all of us especially on our African continent if we are to be effective evangelists and proclaimers of the Word. Steward Hoover, a renowned expert on

religion, media and culture wrote, "Religion and the media seem to be ever more connected as we move further into the twenty-first century. It is through the media that much of contemporary religion and spirituality is known" (Hoover, 2006).

Importance of Formation for Communication, Media and Technology

Despite a number of documents having been written by the Church, it is still amazing to see how most Religious, including here in Africa, go through formation having learned very little about media, communication and technology. I personally came to know more about the Church and the media when I was asked to start a radio station for my congregation in the western part of Zambia. This "calling" made me attend a number of media courses and, in particular, courses at the Centre for Research and Communication (CREC, Lyon, France). This experience made me aware of the importance of communication for evangelisation, and also as the new language of the Church in the modern world. Most of the documents I have indicated in the opening paragraph emphasise the need for training consciously Religious, priests as well as the laity.

In *Inter Mirifica* it is indicated thus; "It is, therefore, an inherent right of the Church to have at its disposal and to employ any of these media insofar as they are necessary or useful for the instruction of Christians and all its efforts for the welfare of souls" (IM, 1963, p 3). As pastoral workers in the vineyard of the Lord, we are urged to embrace all forms of technology for the enhancement and preaching of the good news through training. The same argument is made by the Congregation for Catholic Education in the document entitled *Guide to the Training of Future Priests Concerning the Instruments of Social Communication*, which states that, "education and training in communication should be an integral part of the formation of pastoral workers and priests" (Eilers, 1993). This aspect of ongoing formation can never be underestimated. And that is why the Church, in its wisdom, has set

out in various documents the need and importance of being up to date with the changing world and media development, to the point of asking religious leaders of congregations, as well as bishops, to be involved as indicated in *Communio et Progressio* that states “the local hierarchies will take a keen interest in the apostolate of social communication. They will seek the advice of the priests and laity” (CP, 1971, p 167).

The aspect of formation still stands as the greatest challenge in the implementation of many of these policies and suggestions made, at various times, by the Church in respective documents, as a guide. Pierre Babin, when talking about formation, identified this challenge as the first priority when he indicated that, “in my opinion, the most important task is not to plug holes, but to launch a programme of formation and training in both understanding the present and mastering the new modes of communication” (Babin and Iannone, 1991). They further ask the following questions about what one could term a slowness of the Church leadership to be on top of the technological advancement; “what is happening to make us respond so half-heartedly to such interest? Why is there such indifference to media studies in centres for the training of clergy? Why is there such suspicion generally with regard to new techniques of communication?” (Babin and Iannone, 1991).

Whatever responses we give to these authors, the onus is on all of us pastoral workers to be proactive and take interest in what is going on around us, including the realities of new communication, media and technologies. We are called to be part and parcel of leading the response to changes in the media so that we can be effective ministers and evangelisers in these means of communication. Formation taught me a lot about media and technology in relation to the Church and pastoral work. Starting the radio station was not just an exciting event or moment, but also it turned out to be a true blessing for our evangelising efforts in one of the most difficult terrains in the country, where the plains flood for almost eight months of the year, and in the dry season it is difficult driving in the loose and deep Kalahari sands.

The radio is able to reach out effectively to more places than we would have imagined.

We have to be part and parcel of the media, communication and technological formation because we are living in the context of a “new culture”. And a culture comes along with the new meaning, codes, symbols, and explanation about content. The content of this communication, media and technology is the information that we can communicate or pass on from one person to the other, or to groups. This includes the use of social media like Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, Instagram, Messenger, and YouTube. This is what we are called to be part of as Religious in the context of our African religious life, and the question is: How do we fit into this whole development for our religious life and its mission of evangelising?

Communications, Media and Technology and their Influence on Religious in Africa.

The communication, media and technological advancements do not know colour, age, race or culture, to mention but a few. Hence, religious life in Africa does indeed stand out in the midst of these mass opportunities as well as challenges. Despite being known as the developing world, the continent of Africa has made tremendous strides and progress in as far as communication, media and technology are concerned. There are more people in Africa who use these means of communication now, in this twenty-first century, than at any given time in history. Mostly, we receive the already made products imported into the continent, much as we try to do our own simple technological inventions, for money transfers for example.

Most Catholic Churches on the African continent do have one form of media or another. The most common are print media and electronic media, in particular radio. In Zambia, most of the arch-dioceses and dioceses own a radio station. By the time of writing this article, nine out of eleven dioceses owned radio stations, and the remaining two had plans on the way for the establishment of

their own stations. Two of these nine radio stations are owned by religious congregations, the Missionary Oblates in the west and the Jesuits in the south of Zambia respectively. The rest are under the respective Diocesan Administrations. These means of communication have remained a part of pastoral communication plans for the bishops in Zambia, along with the overall pastoral plan for the respective dioceses. They affirm the importance, as well as the challenges, as put in the words of late Archbishop John P Foley (former president of the Pontifical Council for Social Communication), writing a foreword to the book entitled *Pastoral Planning for Social Communication* that, "the challenge for the Christians is to use the technology well in the service of the Gospel; to work to prevent abuse in the use of technology, and to be ever open to newly developing opportunities to proclaim the Gospel" (Sunderaj 1998).

A lot of efforts have been made by the Church in Africa to make communication, media and technological advances tools and means for evangelisation. In an article "Towards a Pastoral Plan for Social Communication in the Post-Synod African Church", Joseph Faniran writes, "over the years the Church in Africa, through the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of African and Madagascar (SECAM), has demonstrated in words and deeds the seriousness with which she views social communication in her mission on the continent" (Faniran, 1998). Faniran further notes that a meeting was held in Ibadan, Nigeria, as a Pan-African meeting for the Church and the media; he states that, "barely two years after the PCSC published *Communio et Progressio* in 1971, it went on to sponsor a Pan-African meeting in social communication in Ibadan, Nigeria, under the aegis of SECAM" (Faniran, 1998).

The six key areas explored included press, radio and television, cinema and audio visual, training, finance and structure. It was further noted that, "under press, the meeting called for a quality press which would be Catholic as well as African... the press in the continent should have a truly African outlook; an understanding of the African mentality and of the African problems; and the capacity to promote truly African values" (1998). There-

fore, this call, though made decades ago, still stands valid if our wish, as Religious in Africa, is to influence the direction of how we will use the communication, media and technological means in advancing our mission.

The participants were called upon to followed up on the six-pointers, to adhere to the resolutions taken and to bring those resolutions to their respective episcopal conferences. This, we are told, culminated in the formation of the Pan-African Episcopal Committee on Social Communications (CEPACS). CEPACS task was to “animate, encourage and co-ordinate the Church’s activities in the field of communication at the regional and continental levels” (1998). The Church, especially through various assemblies, continued to reflect and ponder on the use of these means of communication and technology; a 9th Plenary Assembly of SECAM took place in Lomé, Togo. It was at this assembly that the other regional conferences, like the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) and the Inter-Regional Meeting of Bishops of Southern Africa (IMBISA), also played a role in the discussions.

Other Conferences further took place on the continent of Africa, especially in the 1970s and early 1990s. These are highlighted in the book entitled *The African Church in the Communications Era: A Handbook Source Texts for Christian Communication in Africa*, which was edited by Michel Phillipart of the Catholic Media Council (CAMECO)³⁴. A number of conferences thus took place under the sponsorship of CAMECO, as well as technical support efforts. What seems to be the thread in all these conferences is the importance of training for all those involved in communication. At the Lusaka (Zambia) Conference, held from 14-18 December, 1971, with the theme: Basic Principles for Effective Communication in Development, it was emphasised that “training in

34. CAMECO is professional research counselling office in the field of communications in developing countries. It is based in Aachen, Germany. From its foundation in 1969, CAMECO is at the service of the Church funding agencies as well as of the project holders and communicators in the developing countries in evaluating and advising on projects in the communications field (Phillipart, 1992).

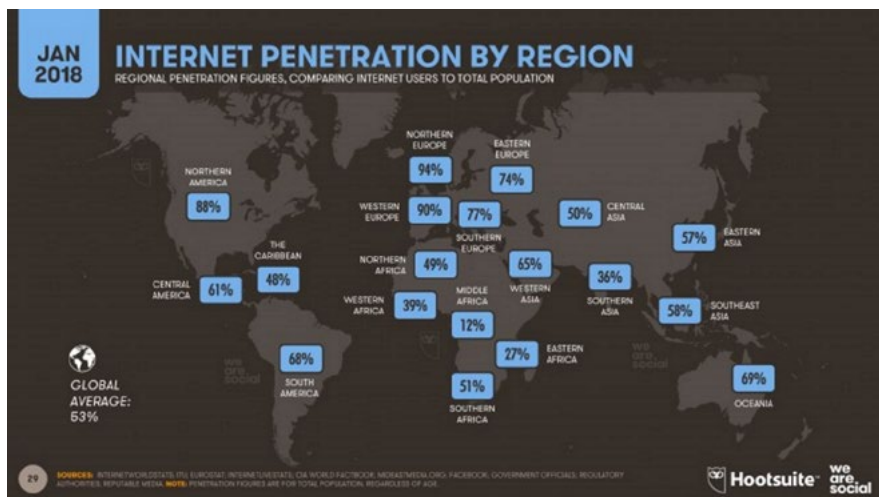
the communication skills, related to African culture and development, is of greatest importance. The lack of trained communicators in Africa, especially in mass media, is still acute" (Phillipart, 1992). This aspect of training was further affirmed by Conference of Lomé, Togo (22-29 July, 1990) in their final communique of the 9th Plenary of SECAM that, "for an effective evangelization through the modern media, we realize the absolute need for the training of personnel in the science of communication...it is our view that the training of the media personnel be in Africa whenever possible.." (*Phillipart, 1992*).

With all the above supporting facts, advancement in the means of communication, media and technological development is a fundamental right for the Church in Africa and especially for the religious communities. We ignore this call at our own peril. We are invited, as Religious, to take a keen interest in using modern technologies as a way of being part of the "new" culture trending, but we must also remember to challenge the negativity that these modern developments bring with them. The primary starting point of formation for communication, media and technology is during the initial formation stages of a young female or male Religious, so that they may be prepared in not only how to use, but also to understanding what it means to be immersed in this media culture and technological development. Babin and Iannone point out, while talking about formation and immersion, that:

. . . formation by immersion is a training, the content of which is expressed primarily by the medium and our living experience of it, and only secondarily by the lessons themselves...in formation by immersion, the ground is more decisive than the figure; the atmosphere counts as much as the formal instructions. Was this not the case in our family life? Weren't the attitudes of our parents and the atmosphere in the home a much more powerful language than the words themselves?" (*Babin and Iannone, 1991*).

Media Education for Religious in Africa

According to the Internet World Stats, 35.2% of the total population uses the internet in Africa (IWS, 2018); this is around 4.5 million people against a population of 1.2 billion. This means that media literacy is growing in Africa at a fast rate, but not as fast as in the rest of the world. The level of penetration of social media use is described as follows according to Smartinsight.com (2018):



One can easily see that the internet penetration as of January 2018 was quite high, as an average of penetration in north Africa (49%); western Africa (39%); middle Africa (12%); eastern Africa (27%) and southern Africa (51%).

This kind of information reminds us, especially as Religious, that whenever we have an internet development penetration it suggests that the high use of all forms of communications media and technological development is, or will continue to be, high. The higher the concentration, the more we have found that we have needed ways in which to curb the abuses of these media and technological advancements. Hence, the subject I want to discuss now is that of media education.

Media Education

I call to the attention of Religious in Africa, the need to enhance how we use these means of communication, media and technology. Media education calls us to be responsible for how we use all forms of media to communicate; in particular we start by assuming that the first priority is for the common good and for advancing the gospel of Jesus Christ.

As Religious, we should be part of that culture that makes an effort, especially through religious leadership, on the proper use of the media and technological development. A classic definition that I use a lot is from David Buckingham, an expert in media education. He defines media education as, “the process of teaching and learning about media ... therefore aims to develop both critical understanding and active participation” (*Buckingham, 2003*). I thought it important to end our discussion on the importance of communication, media and technology by appealing to each one of us, as Religious, to be users of these communication means, but at the same time to be vigilant. It is not enough to just highlight the wonderful things that these developments have brought us, but also we need to make ourselves religious ambassadors in Africa for educating, especially the *formandi*, on the proper use of communication, media and technologies.

Franz-Josef Eilers, in his book *Communicating in Community*, talks about media education and states that, “the importance of media education as education for the critical use of media in Christian schools and formation houses is another concern...it aims at the formation of receivers for critical use and integration of the media” (*Eilers, 1994*). In another of his works, Eilers further sees media education, or media literacy as some call it, in the following way; “sometimes we are simply ‘blind’ spectators, just uncritical consumers of media” (*Eilers, 2003*).

Media education calls us to be the guardians of good Christian values, to be passed on from one generation to the next as communication, media and technology advance. This means that it

is not just enough to make use of the communication, media and technologies, but also we need to impart that critical eye and ear concerning what we see and listen to. This is a tremendous task for the Religious, especially in our African context. It will be important in this light to organise seminars, with Religious in various countries, concerning media education and the role that we Religious can play in appreciating communication development, but also in being aware of the follies that come with it. This is especially so as some of these technologies are new experiences for the Church in Africa and so the level of excitement, use and sometimes abuse, can never be underestimated. This kind of training should start first with religious leaders and local community superiors before it is given to those aspiring to enter fully into our respective congregations during their initial formation.

Conclusion

In this chapter I initially looked at the Catholic Church's perspective on communication, media and technology as presented in various key documents that have been written over the years since 1936 (*Vigilanti Cura*).

The perspective of the Catholic Church concerning these new developments has been encouraging, as is the emphasis on how the Church leadership ought to be interested "in these things", as stated in one of the documents. The second aspect was to look at the importance of forming those who use these media or have not used them before. Religious are invited to make a deliberate choice to see to it that in their congregation's formation in the area of communication, media and technology takes centre stage.

Thirdly, I discussed a point of view regarding communication, media and technology, and how they have influenced the Religious in Africa. The trend, as far as the use of advances in communication, media and technology by Religious in Africa, is not new and the efforts through various fora like SECAM, IMBISA, AMECEA and joint bodies like CEPACS, show the commitment from respective episcopal conferences who share the knowledge with

Religious superiors. Resolutions from these fora have been well tabulated by Africa scholars in the area of communication, media and technology. Finally, I called attention to all Religious, involved or not involved in media, to take the aspect of media education seriously as a way of participating in appreciating the communication, media and technological developments, as well as of helping to preserve a high standard for the use of these mediums.

Therefore, one can conclude that the future of the Church and Religious in Africa, in as far as communications, media and technology are concerned, is very bright; it is imperative then that keen interest is taken to fulfil the goal of making as many Religious in Africa media literate as are other Religious across the “global village” and “global Church.”

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CHAPTER 11

The Legislation of the Church on the Assistance to be Given to Religious who Depart from their Institute

By

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Introduction

Speaking in the context of this book's title, *The Future of Consecrated Life in Africa: Trials and Visions*, one readily identifies the prophetic tone which accompanies the invitation to redefining religious life in the 21st Century in the African context.

For religious life to be more understood and appreciated in Africa, Religious themselves make it more visible not only through the witness of their lives and works but also by writing about it. One such way would be to identify and write about the challenges which face religious institutes and members in living life. As a contribution to this quest, this chapter addresses the topic of help to be given to Religious who depart from their institutes.

Rationale

The vocation to religious life is a mystery that calls on those who have assumed it to seek the will of God continuously in their life.

After the profession and the subsequent incorporation of a Religious into a particular institute, it is presumed that the religious has the intention to embrace a lifelong membership in that institute. However, in certain cases, further discernment and formation result in the decision that the member is definitively separated from the institute of ascription, either voluntarily or otherwise. Such moments can be very difficult for both the institute and the departing member, especially one whose membership has been for a longer period.

The whole process of separation of a member from a religious institute is often complicated, difficult and stressful as it involves tough decisions which require serious discernment, clarity of intention and well-grounded causes. Besides the emotional and physical energy involved in the psychological, physical and spiritual preparation on the part of the member, still, the transition from one state of life to another may be very traumatic. Certain issues will require urgent considerations. The member may not be able to get employment or be too old or sickly to be employed, or too needy, especially those so advanced in age that they are no longer able to take care of themselves or do not have qualifications for jobs that are available.

In the context of religious life in Africa, where the popular notion is that it is a permanent state of life for those who embrace it, departure may be particularly difficult, as it may be seen as a betrayal of God and the Church by the Religious. More often than not, in African society, such Religious who depart from their institute would be treated with stigma, suspicion and blame. Also, given the economic challenges in Africa as a developing continent, the realities of unemployment, lack of means of livelihood and abject poverty do not spare those who depart from religious life. To settle to a new state of life will require, among other things, economic and financial arrangements.

While justice, charity and equity have been long-standing principles of the Church, experience shows that many religious institutes do not adequately apply them. This could be due to dif-

ficulty in determining, in their proper law, what these principles mean or imply; this may be the result of lack of proper understanding of the teaching and the law of the Church. It could also be a question of mere negligence or laxity in the application of the principles. This chapter therefore, attempts to highlight the teachings and legislation of the Church on justice, equity and charity toward departing Religious, as found in the law of the Church, magisterial documents and jurisprudence. Such a reminder is resourceful to moderators of religious institutes, and other persons who may be involved in assisting those departing from religious life; it gives guidance on what the Church considers as the operational way of proceeding for such cases.

The Legislation of the Church on the Assistance to be Given to a Member Departing from a Religious Institute

In the current legislation of the Church, the directive is that even though a departing member is to request nothing from the institute as compensation for the work performed while in it, the same law obliges institutes to show equity and charity towards a departing member.

The issue of how best a departing Religious can be assisted as he or she exits to the secular world has been something both the Church and religious institutes have grappled with over the centuries. In the event of the departure of a member, most religious institutes are faced with very challenging realities as they try to assist the departing member.

One immediate dilemma that authorities in religious institutes are confronted with is how to deal justly and compassionately with a departing member *vis-à-vis* the moral responsibility toward those who remain. The Church, for her part, has had to grapple with how best to legislate norms which could adequately and justly be applied by religious institutes in situations of departure of members.

As Luigi Ricceri explains, “having uniform norms with regard to the assistance to be given to Religious who depart is neither possible nor opportune. This is so because every case of departure is unique in itself on account of the circumstances of the member and other factors to be evaluated in individual cases. It is therefore, better to set down general principles and give guidance to institutes on how to adopt the general norms to the variety of situations”.³⁵

Prior to the present legislation, the Church tried, at different times in history, to resolve the matter of assistance to be given to a departing Religious by issuing some directives and norms. Before Vatican II, the operational norm in the Church with regard to the matter was the practice of admitting women Religious with a dowry. The custom of the dowry of women Religious came into canonical legislation in the 16th century as a practice which specifically concerned women Religious, even though some monasteries for men also accepted some form of voluntary donations from the members.

The underlying principle in the practice of payment of the dowry of women Religious was the foreseen care and support for both the individual Religious and the institute for the time the member belongs to an institute and for the occasions of separation from the institute in whatever manner and whatever motivation.

The rationale of the principle was the double protection it accorded the members as well as the institute. It took care of unfortunate situations which could arise if members returned to secular life and became destitute. It also safeguarded the institute from the abuse of those who only wanted to enjoy life in the monasteries. Moreover, it demonstrated a sense of responsibility and seriousness on the part of the members, and a positive contribution to the welfare of all.³⁶

35. Ricceri, L. “The Economic Subsidy to be Granted to Religious who Leave their Institute”, In *Consecrated Life*, Vol. 1, no. 2 (1977), p 165.

36. cf. T. Kealy, *Dowry of Women Religious*, Canon Law Studies, no. 134, Washington, DC, Catholic University of America, 1941, p 548).

The further intervention of the Church with regard to assistance to departing Religious is the legislation in the former law of the Church (the 1917 Code of Canon Law, c. 643) which had a provision that a lawfully dismissed Religious cannot seek for compensation from the institute for the works performed while in it.

In the second paragraph, the norm directed institutes to ensure that a woman ex-Religious, legitimately dismissed, and who had been received without a dowry, was to be given necessary assistance to allow her return safely and becomingly to her home, and a decent support for a period of time that was to be determined by mutual agreement between the institute and the affected member. Where there was difficulty in reaching an agreement, the local Ordinary was to ensure that the institute provided sufficient assistance for a decent livelihood in accordance with natural equity. Such legislation ensured that women ex-Religious who were unable to provide for their livelihood from their own resources were not reduced to destitution in secular life.

With the passage of time, the existing norms with regard to the help to be given to a departing Religious became inadequate due to some factors.

First, the norms appeared discriminatory, given that they were particularly concerned with women Religious. The norms somewhat excluded a male Religious from seeking assistance from his institute when departing.

Second, with the massive departures by Religious shortly after Vatican II, the existing norms were no longer able to respond to the more complicated and delicate situations that were motivated by the magnitude of the issue. This situation prompted the intervention of the Holy See, as many Religious institutes demanded further clarity concerning the help to be given to departing members, since the existing norms were no longer sufficient in dealing with the matter.

To that effect, the Church had to issue more norms and directives.³⁷

Last, with the revision of the law of the Church, a norm was legislated concerning the assistance to be given to a departing Religious. This norm, contained in c. 702, and which substantially repeats the former law states:

§1. Those who depart from a religious institute legitimately or have been dismissed from it legitimately can request nothing from the institute for any work done in it.

§2. Nevertheless, the institute is to observe equity and the charity of the gospel toward a member who is separated from it.

37. See for instance, *Sacra Congregatio de Religiosis*, Responsio, "Circa dotem religiosarum," in AAS, 16 (1924), pp 165-166, in which congregation issued a private response on the question as to whether, in a situation where dowry is insufficient to support a departing member, a religious institute is required to return only the dowry or it is obliged to supplement it to make up for the subsidy. The reply of the Congregation for Religious was in the negative to the first question and affirmative to the second.

Another intervention with regard to the issue of subsidy to an ex-religious was a document on 13 January, 1971, by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, that gave procedural norms for the return of clerics to the lay state. Part of the document encouraged Ordinaries, among whom the major religious superiors, to treat former members with fatherly and pastoral charity by coming to their aid in the necessities for maintaining an upright life (cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Reduction to Lay State: Procedural Norms," 13 January 1971, in AAS, 63, (1971), pp 303-308. Section VI, §5, p 308. English translation in *Canon Law Digest*, Vol. 7, pp 116-117). See also the *Apostolica Signatura's* Decision on Charitable Subsidy to Ex-religious, 6 July, 1971, in the case of Maria, a perpetually professed religious in a diocesan congregation, who was seeking compensation from her religious institute. In this particular case, decision of the Apostolic *Signatura* was that even though the institute is bound by an obligation to provide a former member with a charitable subsidy in accordance with canon 643§2, this charitable subsidy is not to include providing for the dismissed religious for the rest of her life, even if she is advanced in years and incapable of engaging in work (cf. *Apostolica Signatura*, Decision, "De subsidio caritativo religiosis mulieribus dando quae e Religione dimittuntur," in *Apollinaris*, 44 (1971), pp 625-627. English translation in *Canon Law Digest*, Vol. 7, pp 560-562.

Shortly after the conclusion of Vatican II, the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes issued a decree on subsidy to given to those leaving religious life in 1974. The decree was motivated by the increased number of departures since the Council forcing religious institutes to face complicated situations as a result of claims made on them by departing members. Taking note of the difficulties facing religious institutes on the matter, the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes issued a decree which provided the criteria by which those who leave would justify their claims (cf. Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, Decree on Assistance to those Leaving Religious Life *Deserunt prae-bendo*, 25 January 1974, in *Canon Law Digest*, Vol. 8, pp 424-427).

A literal interpretation of the content of this law implies that a Religious who has duly left the institute of ascription is not entitled to any compensation for any work done while in it. The justification of the above norm is based on the following factors. Firstly, the very nature of religious profession disqualifies a member from acquiring personal property from works done in the name of the institute. As Rose McDermott explains, this is one of the practical effects of the special character of religious life itself, that it is a life of self-donation oriented toward service in the Church.³⁸ By religious profession, a person freely offers himself or herself to God and dedicates his or her life to service within the institute of membership. In this total surrender to God and renunciation of one's life, the Religious places himself or herself in a state of trust and uncertainty with regard to the future.

Moreover, religious profession, by its very nature, is a reality in the spiritual and moral order and not economic, whereby one expects rewards for work done. The Religious are incorporated into a community and therefore are bound to that community as one is bound to a family.³⁹ Religious institutes therefore, cannot be compared to a kind of commercial enterprise whereby members are in pursuit of economic gains. Likewise, the relations between institutes and members cannot be equated to relations between employers and employees, who have labour contracts, or a master who rewards his servants for work done.⁴⁰ Departure from a religious institute does not qualify one to claim compensation. This might look like a daughter, who has just married and has left her parental home, asking them to compensate her for the duties she performed while living with them as their daughter. However, this does not mean that her parents cannot give her assistance if she needs it in her new state of life and if they are able to.

Secondly, by professing the evangelical vow of poverty, a Religious relinquishes the power to private ownership of prop-

38. Rose McDermott, "Canon 702§ 2-Equity and Charity to Separated Members," p 122.

39. *Gambari Ellio, I Religiosi nel Codice Commento ai Singoli Canoni*, Milano, Editrice Ancora, 1986, p 374.

40. Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, Decree on Assistance to those Leaving Religious Life, 25 January 1974, in *Canon Law Digest*, Vol. 8, p 425.

erty as a result of works of the institute. He or she becomes a member of the religious family, in which all are mutually interested in its preservation, growth and progress. To talk of service rendered in the institute automatically implies that the person is a member and the service rendered is better understood as service rendered to oneself. Consequently, the person cannot be asking another person or an organisation to pay him or her for services rendered to himself/herself. Moreover, members do not maintain private economic interests but all work for the common good. Whatever is acquired after profession by one's industry in the name of the institute belongs to the institute. This norm rightly protects the religious institute from unfounded demands by those who leave.

Thirdly, the norm also has its justification in the statutes which outlines the effects of legitimate dismissal of a Religious from his or her institute. The norm states that, with a lawful dismissal, a member loses all the rights and obligations arising from the profession (c. 701). Taken strictly in the sense of the application of the law, definitive separation from a religious institute severs all ties between a former member and the institute. However, in the second paragraph of c. 702, the institute is obliged by law to assist such a member in the spirit of equity and charity.

The interpretation and the consequent application of the above norms pose a possible dilemma or confusion in that the two norms, which appear in the same canon, seem to contradict each other. One would ask, how can the Church declare that a departing member deserves nothing from the institute he or she belonged to and, at the same time, direct that such a Religious is to be given assistance in the spirit of equity and charity? Such possible confusion would be around the practical interpretation of what equity and charity mean. In other words, an institute will have to grapple with what equity and charity are to translate into when giving assistance to a departing member.

A further dilemma in the application of the norm is that the principles of charity and equity which, according to the directives of the Church, are to be the basis of determining the kind of as-

sistance to be given to a departing Religious, are equally valid for both the Religious who leaves and the one who stays. This further complicates the matter. It becomes very challenging for the institute, in the light of its financial status, to determine what, how much and for how long the assistance to a departing member should be so as to qualify as a due charity. As Luigi Ricceri observes, the institute cannot ignore its obligation of charity and equity towards its own members, who continue in religious life, placing on them the burden created by those who depart.⁴¹

With the kind of possible confusion that may arise in the interpretation and application of the principles of equity and charity, in the light of assistance to be given to a departing Religious, a more extensive discussion on the meaning of the two principles would be appropriate.

Black's Law Dictionary defines 'equity' as, "justice administered according to fairness, as contrasted with the strictly formulated rules of common law".⁴² The term 'equity' denotes the spirit and habit of fairness, justness, and right dealing which would regulate the [relationships] between [human beings]".⁴³ The principle of equity was originally applied by Romans in their legal system, as a softer way of relaxing the harsh application of the law in a certain situation which demanded consideration. As Rose McDermott explains, it offered a more balanced solution in harmonising moral and legal values.⁴⁴ The principle was later incorporated into the Church's legal system as a way of bringing in the aspect of mercy in the administration of justice. Like the Roman legal system, the Church also acknowledges that the application of law sometimes can be harsh in certain situations. In such situations, the application of the law would neglect the humane and merciful side of the law by mainly emphasising justice.

41. Ricceri, L. "The Economic Subsidy to be Granted to Religious who Leave their Institute", p 165.

42. *Black's Law Dictionary, Definitions of Terms and Phrases of American and English Jurisprudence, Ancient and Modern*, 6th ed., West Publishing Co., St Paul, MN, (1990), p 540.

43. *Black's Law Dictionary, Definitions of Terms and Phrases*, p 540.

44. McDermott, R. "Canon 702§ 2-Equity and Charity to Separated Members", in Cogan, J.P. (Ed.), *Selected Issues in Religious Law*, Washington, DC, CLSA (1997), p 86.

In its usage in the ecclesiastical legal system, the principle of equity became an expression of the witness of the gospel values and of the defence of natural justice by the Church. The application of equity in the administration of justice in the Church demonstrated the fact that the Church recognises that, in order to promote charity, she must first give witness to charity by being charitable. Roman Pontiffs, like Paul VI, became ardent advocates of the principle of equity. In his address to the Roman Rota in 1973, he referred to equity as a canonical principle “marked with the spirit of charity, temperance, humanity and moderation”.⁴⁵ The Pope recognised equity as a higher kind of justice with a spiritual end, that is, the salvation of souls.⁴⁶ In the application of the law, canonical equity proposes that the application of justice is to be moderated with kindness or mercy. Equity is viewed as an attitude of mind and spirit that tempers the rigour of the law. In other words, the law of the Church is not just about justice, it is also about kindness and charity.⁴⁷

Turning now to charity, a term best defined from the Christian perspective as denoting love for God and neighbour. According to Cicognani, charity in the Christian understanding is the expression of love, as was taught by Christ. Evangelical charity therefore, is the imitation of Jesus who manifested love for

45. Paul VI, Allocution to the Roman Rota, 8 February 1973, in AAS, 65 (1973), p 99. English translation in Woestman, W.H. (Ed.), *Papal Allocutions to the Roman Rota 1939-2002*, Faculty of Canon Law, Saint Paul University, Ottawa, (2002), p 118.

46. Paul VI, *Allocution to the Roman Rota*, p 118.

47. The notion of canonical equity as Augustine Mendonça explains, presupposes that the rule of law can be understood properly only within the context of the common good. As much as justice requires equal application of law, sometimes there are situations which cannot be judged in accord with the strictness of the law. In such situations the good of the individual(s) cannot be achieved without considering one's particular circumstances in the application of a certain rule of law. When the application of law takes into consideration the particular circumstances of the place and persons, we can say equity has been applied. In such a situation, the application of law has not overlooked the common good intended by a law and, at the same time, it has taken into account the particular context of the case in question (see Mendonça, A., “The Application of the Principle of Equity in Marriage Nullity Cases,” in *The Jurist*, 5, (1995), p 666. It can be concluded that equity serves as a moderation when the law proves to be too harsh, and as a corrective measure where the law lacks the necessary balance.

souls, showed solicitude for the weak, was kind and patient with the sinner.⁴⁸ In its usage in the law of the Church, the expression “evangelical charity” is used interchangeably with the term equity. It is therefore becoming very difficult to draw fine lines of distinction between the two principles, especially in the application of the law. It is therefore important in the administration of justice that the two principles are not separated.

In the context of our topic, we can say that equity refers to putting certain things into consideration when giving assistance to a departing Religious. Such considerations would include; the age, the number of years in religious life, level of education and capacity for getting employment, the kind of environment the person is going to, the financial ability of the institute and so forth. Equity in this case, will also mean taking into account the human person and his or her circumstances, and applying the law in a more human and understanding manner.

Charity, on the other hand, would imply an attitude of kindness and compassion towards the departing member. It is also an attitude which would provoke a question such as: what would Christ have done in the situation? It is as McDermott puts it, an expression of great sensitivity and compassion in the consideration of the human dignity of those departing.⁴⁹ Charity towards a departing Religious demonstrates a sense of respect from the institute in consideration of the dignity of the human person.

In conclusion, we can say the principle of equity dictates what kind of assistance, how much and for how long, an institute is to give the departing member; it assumes that consideration has been given to the circumstances of the member and the financial ability and obligation of the institute towards the remaining members. Charity, on the other hand, determines the kind of attitude and spirit with which the assistance is given. A question which those charged with the application of the principle would

48. Cicognani, A. G. “Aequitas canonica in Salutem animarum - Canonical Equity and the Salvation of Souls”, in *The Jurist*, 19 (1959), p 1.

49. McDermott, R. “Canon 702§ 2-Equity and Charity to Separated Members”, in *Canon Law Society of America Proceedings*, 52 (1990), p 132.

ask could be: is the manner of assisting imbued with an attitude and spirit of evangelical values, such as compassion and kindness? Is the assistance given in such a way that it promotes respect for the dignity of the other?

Having expounded on the meaning and interpretation of the principles of equity and charity from the historical, ecclesiastical and legal perspectives, we now turn our attention to those things which are to be put into consideration when giving assistance to departing members.

Some Considerations in the Application of Equity and Charity towards the Departing Religious

Legally speaking, with the completion of the process of definitive separation from a religious institute, the legal tie between the former member is severed and he or she loses all rights and obligations arising from membership.

However, deeper than the legal bond, connections in the reality of life, history, spirituality, charism, and bonds of friendship which have been shared with other members in the institute, still remain. Such bonding cannot simply be terminated or be merely reduced to memories by the letter of the law. The separated member does not suddenly cease to exist. In reality, such a member is still connected with the former institute; his or her welfare, livelihood, and security, in some ways, still remain a concern of the former religious family. Such a concern by the former religious family is therefore what translates into equity and charity. While the law disqualifies them from getting anything from their former institute, equity and charity set in as a relaxation of the dictates of justice, which is tempered with kindness. The challenge however, is how much charity is charity and how much equity is equity to the departing member? Many religious institutes find themselves in this dilemma.

Apart from receiving mention, equity and evangelical charity are not clearly defined in the law of the Church, and this obviously leads to a variety of different applications in particular cases.

Due to their subjective nature, universal and detailed legislation on them is not possible. This is so because every departing Religious constitutes a unique case, which has to be treated on its own merit. Given the many varied cases and circumstances of those who depart from religious life, it becomes very difficult for religious institutes to determine the appropriate assistance to give.

As Luigi Ricceri puts it, is it to be given once or for a period of time? Is it to be proportionate to the number of years spent in the institute? Is it to be according to the amount of work performed while in the institute? Is it to be according to the expectations of the departing member?⁵⁰ In all cases of assistance to departing Religious, the common denominator, as the law of the Church proposes, is that, in observing equity and charity toward a departing Religious, the needs of the individual, the financial condition of the institute *vis-à-vis* the moral obligation to those who remain, and the opportunities and benefits available in society with regard to such cases, are to be put into consideration. Above all, in assisting departing Religious, the institute, through its leaders, is to ensure that the member is treated with pastoral solicitude, deep respect for their dignity, and sensitivity to their situation.

The Financial Status of the Institute

As a pastoral remedy to situations where the application of the law may jeopardise the ultimate end of the law itself, that is, the salvation of souls, the principle of equity has to be considered in view of both the institute and the member. In observing equity and charity, care is to be taken that this is done according to the means of an institute and in consideration of its obligations towards those remaining in religious life. As much as equity and charity towards departing members is an obligation of law, their application is not to put the institute into bankruptcy.

50. Ricceri, L. "The Economic Subsidy to be Granted to Religious who Leave their Institute", p 164.

As Luigi Ricceri clarifies, in observing equity and charity, the institute is not to ignore its responsibility of the same towards those who continue in religious life, putting on them the burden created by those who depart.⁵¹ Indeed, the duty of the institute to care for the remaining members is not to be compromised by the obligation of law on equity and charity towards departing members.

The Needs and Circumstances of the Departing Religious

Equity, by its very nature, is a relaxation of strict justice. In providing whatever kind of assistance to a departing member, leaders of religious institutes are to recall to mind that circumstances and conditions of the secular society today make transition and adjustment to secular life traumatic. It is therefore very important that the departing member experiences respect, in accord with human dignity, from his or her religious family. In the spirit of evangelical charity, a religious institute is to try, to the best of its capability, to provide appropriate and equitable assistance to a departing member.

The application of equity and charity is also to take into account the needs and circumstances of the individual. As Francis Morrissey affirms, “whatever amount of financial assistance a departing member is to be given, several factors must be taken into consideration: financial situation of the institute, the member’s age, state of health, education and training received, number of years of profession, the capacity of finding suitable employment and so forth”.⁵² The implication therefore, is that these principles can never be applied in uniformity. Observing them will require prudence and discretion on the part of the leaders who, despite

51. Ricceri, L. “The Economic Subsidy to be Granted to Religious who Leave their Institute”, p 166.

52. Morrissey, F. G. “Art. 3: Commentary on Dismissal of Members,” in Marzoa, A. Miras, J. Rodríguez-Ocaña, R. (Eds.), and Caparros, E. (gen. Ed. of English translation), *Exegetical Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*, Vol. II/2, Wilson & Lafleur Limitee, Montréal, (2004) p 1887.

the motivating reasons for departure, are to ensure that appropriate assistance is given to departing members within the context of justice and in the spirit of evangelical charity according to the ability of the institute.

The essence of charity implies that religious family should provide for the spiritual, moral, social and economic welfare of those leaving. In determining the circumstances and needs of individuals, Luigi Ricceri offers some criteria to be used in giving assistance to departing Religious. In these criteria, he categorises the departing Religious into three groups. The first category consists of those who have received a good education, have a career, professional experience and personal qualifications, with the assurance of employment. This category leaves when they are still young and energetic, having received everything from and, as some would say, given nothing in return to, the institute. Some may refer to them as debtors to the institutes which they leave.

The second category consists of those who leave the institute intellectually and socially improved, with a good human and social formation, and qualified with some skill. The third category includes those advanced in age, or persons who are physically or psychologically ill, or individuals with limited aptitude or ability.⁵³ In this category we could also add those from a very poor background, as well as those who lack immediate family and have no one or nowhere to go back to.

In applying equity and charity, consideration has to be given to each of the categories mentioned. For those who fall into the first category, while the letter of the law entitles them to some assistance, the kind and amount of such assistance will not be the same as for those in the second and third categories. For those in the first category, the transition to the secular world may not present such great obstacles economically, as they are able to get a job more easily and, hence financial security. The second category, even though not as privileged as the first, may not have much difficulty settling in secular life. With some increase in the

53. Ricceri, L. "The Economic Subsidy to be Granted to Religious who Leave their Institute", pp 163-164.

minimum amount, and with due understanding and generosity of the authority of the institute, such departing members soon settle down in their new status and comfortably sustain themselves.

The main challenge is those in the third category. Those in this category will require greater solicitude from the institute. With little formal education or professional experience, with advanced age, poor health and limited chance of gainful employment, equity and charity demand that greater consideration, in terms of assistance, is accorded to such members. As Rose McDermott points out, it is a matter of grave injustice to see a Religious, who has laboured for so many years in an institute, be reduced to destitution because the institute neglected the obligation to assist them at the time of departure.⁵⁴ In this category, depending on the gravity of some cases, apart from the initial monetary assistance, there may be a need for continuous assistance, or to retain such persons in the medical programme of the institute, for those advanced in age and those of ill health, for instance. For those who are homeless or have no family, arrangement could be made for some shelter (pay rent) for a period of time before they get gainful means of livelihood. Other means of assistance to consider would be helping those without a job to get some employment, and arranging some training or education for those without skills. In the spirit of evangelical charity, the legislation in the proper law of an institute may determine a minimum sum of money which is applicable to all departing members. Such legislation however, is to provide latitude for the discretion of the authority charged with giving assistance, to increase this amount and consider other means of necessary assistance for those in the second and third categories.

Above all, it should be borne in mind that the process of departure from a religious institute can be a very traumatic experience, irrespective of the category of those departing. Depending on the nature of the case and motivation for departure, sometimes the departing member may have feelings of anger or resentment, or

54. McDermott, R. "Canon 702§ 2-Equity and Charity to Separated Members", p 129.

may harbour a spirit of revenge. Charity requires that efforts are made to encourage the departing member to engage in dialogue with the authority of the institute regarding the immediate foreseen difficulties after departure, so as to enable the institute to assist the individual as she/he makes the transition to the new state of life.

In most communities in African society, there is usually a general notion that Religious who depart from their institute must have done something wrong, and mostly they are suspected to have broken the vow of chastity. As they return to the secular society, they are aware of the disapproval and stigma from society which awaits them. Sometimes they may face rejection from their families or community, who may view them as failures. Moreover, some Religious are from challenging and needy backgrounds, and others have no family to go back to. In such cases, some process of discernment, accompanied by psychological and spiritual help, is necessary. This will require a well thought out programme which consists of prayer, dialogue, reflection and spiritual direction. As a help towards the transition to a secular life, those in authority in religious institutes have to take care that there is sincere sensitivity and charity toward the departing member, who is treated as a human person with dignity. Evangelical charity demands that the departing member leaves as consoled as possible. He or she is to be treated without ill feeling, helped to keep the faith and to continue the practice of it.

Benefits in Society and other Opportunities

One other consideration, when giving assistance to departing Religious in the light of equity and charity, would be to explore and take advantage of existing social benefits in society. In some countries, there exist well established social agencies which render a variety of social services to people undergoing certain challenging situations, like one transiting from religious to secular life. Some of those agencies render moral and economic help to those in financial need, counselling, and even job placement.

Such agencies or organisations can be very beneficial to a departing Religious. Also, institutes can explore the possibility of collaborating in establishing a resource office which includes a social security office for the assistance of ex-Religious.

Other than opportunities of social services, the family can also be a great support to a departing Religious, especially in the African context. In most African family systems, there are strong bonds of kinship and interconnectedness. Family members are usually available to support those undergoing difficult times in their life. It would be important that, during the process of a departure from an institute, if the departing member permits it, the institute leaders involve close family relations for support and accompaniment. Some Religious would find it easier to open up to some family members in such circumstances. Such family members can be very instrumental in helping the departing member to transition to a secular life.

Recommendations

Having discussed the various things an institute has to consider when giving assistance to a departing Religious, we now propose some suggestions which may be helpful as remedies to the challenging experiences connected to the departure of Religious from their institutes.

- 1. Vigilant care in Admission of Candidates.** The superiors who admit candidates to religious life are cautioned by the law of the Church that, before such admission, they are to take utmost care that only suitable persons are brought in. Most authors on religious life strongly believe that many of the underlying problems, which eventually lead to a departure from an institute, existed before admission into religious life. For instance, experience has proved that some people join religious life with varied motives such as getting a good education and training, or having a better life. Usually, such people leave the institute after they have achieved their goal, that is, to obtain quality education and professional skill, for instance. Also, such people are to be

accorded some assistance as they depart from the institute. It is important that institutes be very vigilant in their scrutiny of candidates, and also put in place a mechanism which will identify such signs early enough. A thorough scrutiny of candidates, and assessment of their motivations, could help an institute reduce the number of cases of departures and, consequently, the challenges of having to grapple with the issue of giving assistance to departing members.

- 2. Proper and Clear Policy on the Treatment of Departing Religious.** It is of paramount importance that religious institutes have clearly stated norms in their proper law which specify the kind of assistance to be given to a departing member, and the criteria to be used in determining the manner and amount to be given. Moreover, the policy is to be clear on how the charity shown to the departing member is harmonised with the charity towards the remaining members. The finance directory could have a section in which the manner of dealing with the topic is clearly specified.
- 3. Professional Training.** One big challenge for some departing Religious is the inability to find gainful means of livelihood due to lack of professional training and academic qualifications. Something that religious institutes, especially those in Africa, are now considering seriously is the level of education, and the suitability for professional training, of those they admit into their formation programme. Experience indicates that the majority of candidates to religious life in many religious institutes in Africa are admitted without any professional training, or with very poor academic qualifications. In the event that such members are to depart from the institute, if they have not been helped to get some training or skills during their time of service, helping them to settle back to secular life may be very demanding for the institute. We recommend that institutes revise their admission criteria so as to emphasise the admission of candidates with at least some skills or

training. Also, the formation programme needs to include some professional training, especially for those who enter without skills. Such empowerment may be very helpful in situations where a member departs, as they will have the opportunity of getting employed.

4. **Adequate knowledge of Norms Concerning Institute and Personal Property of Religious.** Sometimes the challenges and complications which arise with regard to the assistance to be given to a departing Religious are due to lack of proper understanding by members of the norms and practices of an institute concerning the distinction between institutional and personal property. Such misunderstandings can become very challenging especially in Africa where, in some parts, the society view religious life as an opportunity for one to get a better life and acquire goods. It is important that every institute, through their formation programme, helps members to understand the meaning of religious life, particularly its implications with regard to the vow of poverty, in order to avoid the misunderstanding that, at departure, a member is entitled to rewards for work done while in the institute.

Members are also to be conscientised regarding the laws and practice of the institute with regard to personal and institutional property, particularly the distinction between the two. One great help would be to observe faithfully the requirement of Canon 668 of the 1983 Code of canon law on the manner of proceeding and dealing with personal property of Religious. This canon requires that, when making the first profession, a Religious is to sign three documents relating to personal property: 1) the agreement not to demand compensation for services rendered, or for future considerations; 2) the cession of administration of goods presently owned, or to be acquired in the future; 3) the last will determining how any personal goods are to be disposed of after death. The document on the cession of administration (2) applies while the Religious is alive; the agreement (1) applies when a member leaves the institute; and the last will (3) applies after death.

Conclusion

As has already been discussed, a departure from a religious institute can be a very traumatic and challenging experience for both the departing member and the institute. However, a bigger challenge that most religious institutes have been grappling with is how to assist the departing member in the spirit of equity and evangelical charity, as the law of the Church directs. This is so due to the complexities and uniqueness of every case of departure. Putting into consideration the circumstances and needs of the departing member, and the financial ability of an institute, the kind, amount, duration and manner of giving assistance to a departing member need to be decided upon.

While the legislation of the Church offers general directions on the manner of proceeding on the matter, the Church however, leaves latitude to individual institutes to determine in their proper law how to deal specifically with the topic. Nevertheless, whatever assistance an institute gives to a departing member, the principle of equity and the spirit of evangelical charity have to be observed. Being a mother, as well as teacher, the fundamental mission of the Church is that all her children come to know and experience the redemptive love of Christ and, by doing so, gain the salvation of their souls. In her dealings with her children through her various structures, the Church is to shine forth in loving justice, which is equity spiced with evangelical charity, and resonating with the Psalmist when he exclaims: if you O Lord should mark our guilt who would survive? (*Ps 103:3*)

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CHAPTER 12

Vowed Life From an African Perspective

By

Charles Kabeta

Introduction

The development of this topic came about way back in 2011, when I was requested to give a one-day study presentation to consecrated religious men (Association of Religious Men in Zambia - ARMZ) and women (Zambia Association of Sisterhoods – ZAS) of Lusaka Archdiocese, in Woodlands, at St Mary's Girls Secondary School hall.

Realising the diverse cultures of the group, I dwelt on the topic of vows (chastity, poverty and obedience), as traced from the various African cultural milieu; this was done in terms of the meaning of the word 'vow', or 'oath' in the context of day-to-day usage in language, and in application to life.

Additionally, after this presentation in Lusaka, I was accorded another opportunity to present the same topic to a congregation of Augustinian Sisters Pan-African Assembly for a week in Windhoek, Namibia. This occasion enabled me to add depth to the topic, as I interacted with sisters from ten different countries and was able to borrow some definitions of vows and oaths from their rich international cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, I was able to understand how their different cultural tenets enabled them to adhere to their communal emphases on vowed life (chastity, poverty and obedience).

Subsequently, I have had interactions with different audiences, apart from the above two groups, including the religious formative sisters of Kalundu Study Centre (from 2014 to 2017), engagement in lectures, and various joint male and female initial formation candidates at Kalemba Hall. These opportunities provided a wider context to verify the extent to which vowed life was understood by Africans, and whether the African perspective helped religious to live out celibacy authentically and to adhere to the requirements of the three vows.

Therefore, this article serves to outline the meaning, context and usage of the vow and oath, as applied in various African life situations and realities. To fully explore the application of the terms vow and oath, I had to arrive at a conceptual diagram that would easily explain what I was to share and the interpretation in the context of the gospel imperatives, as integrated into an African cultural setup or worldview.

Objectives of the Topic on Vowed Life

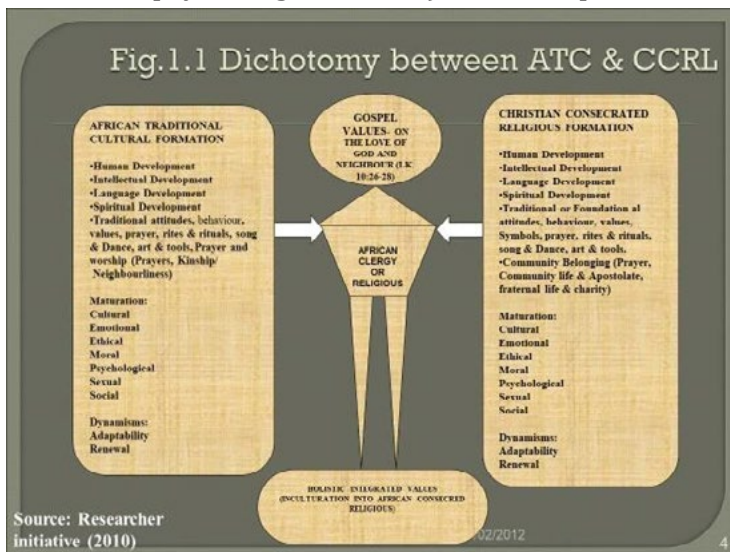
There are many possible objectives that could be used when discussing this topic, but it suffices for now to use but a few, as outlined below:

1. To identify and look at the basic cultural formative elements that foster maturation and responsibility of a human person and that lead to leadership/formators (servant leader);
2. To identify some cultural tensions/conflicts that might work against the communion and harmony of a community;
3. To bring about an awareness of certain formative pressures/forces (community dynamics – see O'Reilly, 1998, p 7) that arise from different relationships within the community, from the varying levels of commitment of community members to the community's goals, and from the different needs members bring to the community; and
4. To find the way forward towards a harmonious corporate belonging and an enhancement of the common vision and mission.

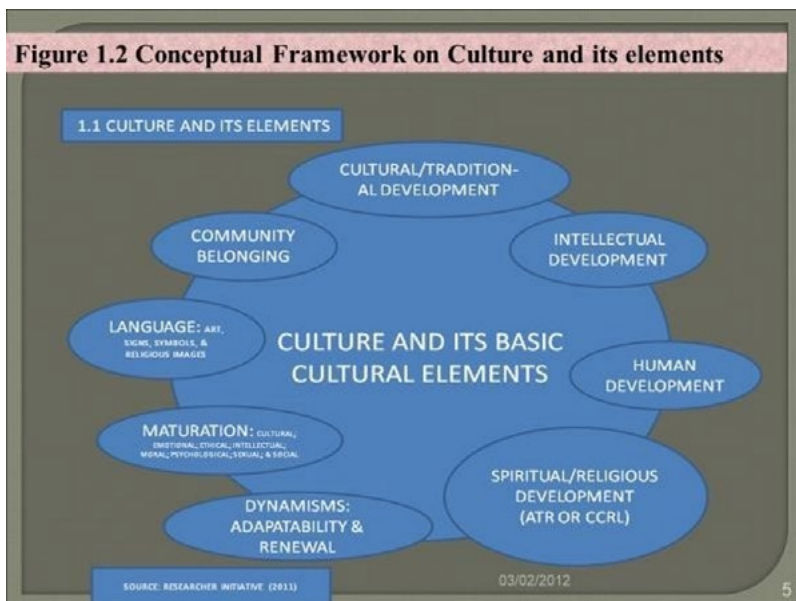
Asserted African Cultural Limitation or Dichotomy in Living Out Vowed Life

The conceptual frameworks below, Figures 1.1 and 1.2, serve to illustrate the process of identifying and comparing the formative elements enshrined in both African Traditional Culture (ATC) and the Christian Consecrated Religious Life (CCRL). The purpose of this is to identify the meeting points of African culture and Christianity, in terms of the process of holistic integration, or simply the process of inculturation of the gospel within the African cultural milieu.

I found it important to use these conceptual framework diagrams to illustrate what constitutes a culture and what its formative elements are. The development of these elements in a person leads to holistic growth against a cultural and religious background. It is clear (*Figure 1.1*) that there is a large overlap between the formative elements of African traditional culture and of the Christian consecrated religious life. The integration of the two sets of formative elements (in terms of cultural attitudes and behaviour, as well as views on ethical, moral, sexual, spiritual, social, and psychological issues) indicates possible meeting



points between the two world views of African traditional culture and Christian consecrated religious life (which embodies several other cultures, including Greek, American, European and Asian, and many others). However, there are also dissimilar elements between African traditional culture and the CCRL, and the identification of these dichotomies is equally important for harmonisation and holistic integration.



The Concept of Culture and its constituents both in ATR and CCRL Vowed Life perspective

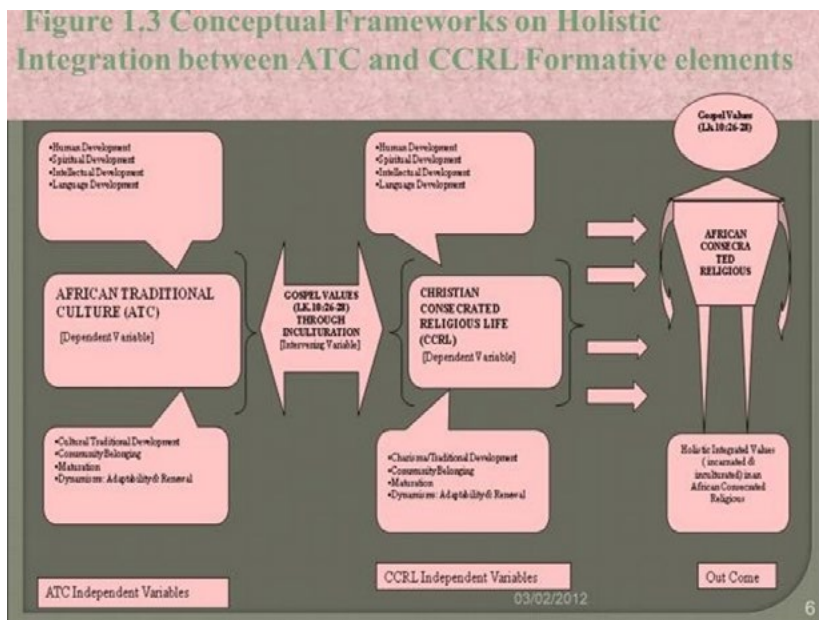
The above schema (*Figure 1.2*) serves to give an overview of the intrinsic (microcosms) and extrinsic (macrocosm) cultural constituents that function in harmony other than in isolation. Details of the different cultural elements are given below:

- 1. Cultural Traditional Development** is what provides an individual with the context of his/her upbringing, towards a full human development, within the cultural context or worldview of a given society;

2. **Intellectual Development** refers to the development of an individual's capacity to behave intellectually, in perceptions and interpretation of the life realities, within a society or social belonging;
3. **Human Development** is both the intrinsic and extrinsic capacity of an individual to positively or negatively behave towards another individual through the sense of belonging or relatedness;
4. **Community Belonging** is a context in which a person is born and raised as a member of a particular group of people; it is the context in which positive and negative attitudes and behaviour develop, as a means by which an individual relates to other fellow human beings;
5. **Language development** is a process by which a means of communication develops; this is through speech, signs, symbols, art, paints and images, to mention but a few. It is for interactive purposes and signification of meanings between and among people;
6. **Spiritual/ Religious Development** is the enshrinement of the spiritual world of the supernatural being or the concept of God/gods, spiritual mediums, ancestors, prayers, symbols, rituals, song and dances, images, and painting, to portray the spiritual realities or interpretations;
7. **Maturation** comes to its fruition through adequate possession of cultural heritage, humane growth, emotional, ethical, intellectual, moral, sexual, social and psychological integration; and
8. **Dynamisms of both the Adaptations and Renewal** are a set of changes or dynamics that are within a cultural milieu of mutuality or particularity of these formative elements, be it from African traditional culture or Christianity, and its missionary sending culture. The ability to make cultural adaptations when one is exposed to another culture, leads to a renewal process that, if handled authentically without prejudice, brings about cultural renewal where one no

longer looks at another culture as limited and his own as superior.

The process of inculturation, as a holistic integration or meeting point between Christianity and African Traditional Culture, is highlighted in the conceptual framework below (*Figure 1.3*):



In spite of African clergy or consecrated religious being faced with two realities of life (or worldviews), that of African traditional culture and that of Christianity, they would be able to embrace the process of holistic integration, or inculturation, if they seriously sought and were guided by the Gospel imperatives “to love God with all one’s mind, heart and soul and to love others as one would love him/herself” (Lk.10:26-28). This is the core value of Christ’s evangelising mission, centred on chastity, poverty and obedience to God, with total commitment to His will, in justice and love. The religious life should be lived in an ever-embracing ecclesiastical communion, where the community shares everything they have in common with an option for the poor and needy in society.

With the above schema of inculturation it is therefore imperative for every African Christian to seek Christ in a deeper way and imitate his celibate life, as well as to uphold the Gospel attitudes, behaviour and values. Christ, himself, lived these vows adequately, without any dichotomy, even in terms of abiding by his Judeo-Greek culture, and when facing the strong opposition he encountered from the Pharisees and Scribes. Even from his own family, who judged his sayings and behaviour as having lost his senses or mind, he experienced societal criticism.

Today, our societies are still full of such prejudices and condemnations. When one aspires to spiritual or religious fulfilment, one is seen as a rebel from traditional cultural heritage and as embracing the western lifestyle or white man's lifestyle, as it were. The importance of the process of inculturation is to embrace the incarnational reality of Christ, who was born in Jewish culture but did not succumb to its cultural limitations and prejudices, but strongly challenged its exclusive nature, as a chosen nation. Christ proposed, instead, an inclusive and universal communion where God is at the centre of life, fostering his love for everyone, irrespective of culture, race, social status, creed or shortcomings. The Christ way calls for a holistic integration that bears authentic Christian unconditional love, compassion, mutual sharing, just and peaceful relatedness as brothers and sisters of Jesus, on one hand, and as daughters and sons of God, the Almighty and Creator of all.

Vows from an African Perspective

Regarding the topic on vows (evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience) I am sure by now that many of you have an adequate background of what essentially vows are, and of their religious and theological significance. Therefore, the purpose of this article is a thought provocation to engage you into a self-introspection and, where applicable, a group discussion on the meaning of the terms "vow" and "oath", each from his/her cultural background, deriving their usage and meaning as illustrated below:

1. An oath (meaning, significance, application);
2. A vow or swearing (meaning, significance, context);
3. Single life and virginity in traditional African sense (meaning and application);
4. Traditional African understanding of obedience and contexts of its usages; and
5. Poverty and sharing from the traditional African point of view (meaning and application).

To tackle this topic from the two perspectives, namely that of a vowed religious life and that of an African perspective (African traditional religions), it will be important to trace the application and meaning of these terms (vow or oath) from our own cultures. In this way, each one of us, African or missionary, shall determine what is understood as a vow or an oath, in an African context on one hand, and a Christian religious context on another hand.

Dockrey et al. (2000, p 240) in their book *The Student Bible Dictionary* define the word “vow” as “a personal, voluntary promise”. They assert that in the Bible, the vow is almost connoting to God (*Kalunga/Hompa* in Lukavango; *Katonda* in Luganda; *Mungu/Ngai/Leza* in Kenya/Tanzania; *Leza/Lesa/Mulungu/Mulimu/Kalunga* in Zambia; *Mwari/Nyadenga/Musiki* in Shona Zimbabwe) (*Gen. 28:20-22; Acts 18:18; Num. 6:5*).

They emphasise that sometimes the vow was conditional on God’s action or response; in another sense, it was simply a dedication of devotion to God. Therefore, it is from this perspective that I employed the term “oath” (*Omaganeno* in Oshwambo; *Echilailo* in Luganda, *Mhiko* in Shona and other related terms in various African languages) as an affidavit of oath for an agreement or pact, before a commissioner of oaths, magistrate or judge, and Priest or Bishop, which is very common in the African understanding of the word “vow” (although sometimes the oath is loosely used, depending on the situation one is in, and this is a source of inconsistencies and breach of contracts).

Another term that represents or would be associated with the vow is that of “swearing” (*Okugana* in Oshwambo; *Okulaila*

in Luganda; *Kupika* in Shona). which many Africans are fond of using, for instance, among the Nsenga of the eastern province of Zambia, the use of "*Kaleza kaningámbe!*" or "*Napali Ambuye!*"- "*May lightning strike me dead!*" or "*I swear upon God*"; and the Tongas of the southern province in Zambia use "*Ndikati tee akuli Taata Singuzu!*", which translates as, "*If I lie may God split me into two halves*". The usage of these sayings is by people who would authenticate an agreement or deal by swearing that, if they are found wanting, they fully expect to experience the wrath and anger of God. The aspect of splitting into two halves, if you recall from the Bible, was the same motif used during the covenant between God and Abraham, with the symbolism of the cutting of the animals and birds into two halves (*Gn. 15:8-11*).

Therefore, basing the argument on the African usage of such terms relating to the vow or oath of obedience/sincerity in the pre-scriptural times, was it a coincidence that, even before the coming of scriptures with early missionaries, Africans already used such expressions that indicated they saw a vow or an oath as a legal or binding means?

Dockrey et al. (2000, p 201) in the same book define the word "religion" or "religious" as "belief in and worship of God or gods" (*Jas. 1:26-27*). In addition, they define "a religious person" as "one whose religion is genuine and will show, through attitude and actions, a depth of commitment to the one worshipped."

Although Dockrey et al. do not give us a comprehensive definition of the word "religion", we can still derive meaning from its adjective "religious", which means a practice of belief and worship in God or gods. You may be aware that the African belief system comprises the supernatural, being God, the creator and maker of all that exists, and hence the address of God in vernacular as *Leza Mubumbi* (Tonga); *Mulimu, Mung'abupilo, Mubupi-Silozzi; Lesa Kabumba-Cibemba; Ambuye Mulungu Mulengi* (among the Zambian tribes), and *Mwari/ Nyadenga/ Musiki* (in Shona in Zimbabwe), to mention but a few examples. Therefore, a religious here, from the point of view of his/her genuine religion, expressed through

attitudes and actions such as pronouncement of a vow or an oath to God or gods before the community, ratifies the legality of any undertaking or agreement made thereupon (authentication).

In other words, a vow or an oath in an African sense was seen as a pact or covenant (for example, blood pacts in *Silozi = Bukwamanyinga* in Zambia) under the punishment of death if the pact was compromised or flouted. A religious, therefore, is one bound by the vow, or an oath, to remained faithful, to worship God or to intercede with ancestral spirits, gods, who are mediators between God and the clan, as understood from African hierarchy of divinities and the sacred.

The aspects of religion and vows, or oaths, are therefore foundational values, traceable from the African traditional culture, that serve as a framework upon which fidelity and vowed life in a consecrated religious life is built. Therefore, the establishment of the terms of vow and oath are seen as cross-cultural tenets that are used in the wider African context in many applications to life.

Clerical and Consecrated Religious Formation

Candidates for priestly, or for Religious male and female vocations, are usually taken for an exclusive formation period. However today, with the emphasis on inter-congregational formative collaboration, such as the Kalembe programme in Zambia, Tangaza College in Kenya, Cedara in South Africa and Mwanza in Tanzania, the main focus is orientation of the candidates into particular charisms of their religious traditions that can be compared to their own various African traditional cultures or clans, with a specific world view and spirituality.

Such formative orientations are a means by which particular congregations, societies or orders inculcate in their religious candidates the spirit of their founders and foundresses, with regard to the requirements of their Rule of Life, the Magisterium teachings, the mission of the Church and their commitment to justice, peace, and charity in response to the contemporary emerging needs of our society.

Formation, therefore, serves as the rite of passage from a novice, who is perceived as a raw African Christian who merely received catechetical instruction on who God is, to a religious. During formation we learn to relate to God through discerning the Holy Spirit and we learn a personal or radical way of responding to Christ's call to discipleship, and how this discipleship is made relevant to the challenges and needs of today. This type of formation does not happen in a vacuum, but occurs within a particular cultural context.

Malley's (2003) philosophical paradigm of humanisation, identifies a dynamic process of achieving one's human potential through personalisation, socialisation and spiritualisation.

Personalisation involves intra-personal development, and implies self-awareness and self-affirmation, culminating in one who is confident in him/herself and can act as foundation for reaching out to others.

Socialisation refers to the development of interpersonal and reciprocal relationships with others in terms of the *four belongings*, namely material belonging (cosmophany), inter-personal belonging (anthropophany), collective belonging (koinoniphany) and transcendental belonging.

Spiritualisation involves the development of a relationship with God. In the contexts of our diverse African (Zambian, Zimbabwean, South African, Namibian, Ugandan, Tanzanian, Kenyan, and Angolan) cultures or religious traditions, we see that the cultural context plays an important role in formation.

With the discovery of the de-humanising experiences, the third dimension of formation is **re-humanisation**. This is the dynamic process of healing through liberation and reconciliation, of the victims of alienation and evil in the four basic belongings. Tertiary agents (human persons and corporate personalities, in so far as they are agents of liberation through their mission) are involved in this process of re-humanisation and reconciliation that, in turn, promotes re-humanisation for victims of alienation and evil in the context of the human faith experience. At this junc-

ture I wish to implore the readers to pay attention to the various terms employed in the above reflection such as “vitality and truth”; “healing”; “liberation”; “evil”; “reconciliation”; “victims of alienation”; “tertiary agents”; and “human faith experience”.

From the above theme of re-humanisation, we could contextualise this Christian philosophy into the African philosophy, and wisdom sayings give us a glimpse of how deep-seated or prevalent the above terms are in African tradition and religious value systems. In an African setting, the vitality or life-force is what determines the sacredness or religiosity of a given people. This is what St Ignatius of Loyola, in his spirituality, terms “seeing God in all things (and one’s experience)”. Africans often ask themselves such questions as Who is the source of life? Where do we come from? Who brought about problems, sickness and even death? Where do we go after death? Is there any possibility of another life after death? The answers to these questions are found in the worldview of each given cultural milieu.

This worldview is what constitutes religion, which is merely one of the basic elements of culture, although it is slightly predominant as it animates the entire culture. Therefore, the religion, though part and parcel of culture, is what holds together the whole culture of traditions in terms of norms, behaviour, customs, ethics, morality, and values upheld for the well-being of both the individual and the community. This can be understood in the anthropological sense of the South African Zulu term of *Ubuntu* (*Untu-unto*, *Womuntu* in Okavango in Namibia). This term is equally understood by African ethnicities and indeed all Bantu speaking ethnicities in the same context as that of the Zulus of South Africa. In other words, *Ubuntu*, anthropologically means “being human” or “togetherness”, which John Mbiti understands as an African philosophical sense of belonging; “I am because others are, and others are because I am”.

Contextually, this could mean that an individual and community are one and the same. If the individual in the family or community is hurt, the whole community empathises with him/her,

and likewise if the community is befallen by some misfortune, the individual shares in the same misfortune. Hence, the expression such as the joy of an individual is the joy of the community and *vice-versa*, or the sorrow of the community is the sorrow of the individual, attest to the same sense and meaning of *Ubuntu* philosophy. In this case, what values do we derive from the concept of *Ubuntu*?

For the African values to withstand the test of time, they are communicated verbally from one generation to another, through folk tales, proverbs, wise sayings such as riddles, and poetry. All these cultural tenets cited above promote a sacred life-force associated with an omnipotent, all-knowing and ever-living God, who controls and animates His people in the four belongings. God is seen as a healer, liberator, conqueror of evil, reconciler of His people even in times of conflicts and hatred, comforter and compassionate God to the victims of alienation. He calls and sends us in our own cultural contexts, be it Luales, Kaondes, Lundas, Bembas, Ngonis, Chewas, Tumbukas, Tonga-Ilas, Lenjes, Toka-Leyas, Lozis, Nkoyas, the Wes (maZambezi), and many other African cultures, to be tertiary agents who are motivated by their human and faith experiences to transcend their own cultures in order to become men and women of God, servant or steward leaders.

Similarly, to the process of humanisation, de-humanisation and re-humanisation, there is the dynamic process of spiritualisation, de-spiritualisation, and re-spiritualisation. Spiritualisation here entails the dynamic process of an encounter with the crucified and glorified Jesus, fostering His friendship with us personally, inter-personally and through collective belonging by the power of the Holy Spirit in the Church, so as to continue His mission and compassionate love, justice and peace to the world. This makes us missionaries to our own cultures, times and localities.

Our Mission in the Church: Spreading the Love of God through our Existence, Works and Ministries.

Our call to priestly and religious life is not cultivation for a personal goal of salvation, although in a way it is, but our reaching out to others after we have experienced the love of God so that they too can know and love God. The “Rule of Life for Brothers of the Sacred Heart” (Article 18) stresses the Brothers’ participation in the mission of the Church by the witness of their lives and by their dedication to Christian education, especially that of the young, the needy and those without hope. This article is qualified by Article 11 of the same Rule of Life, which states that the motivation behind Brothers’ involvement in education is to re-live the institute’s charism and our founders’ vision to instruct neglected youth and bring them to the knowledge and love of God. And it continues to cite the purpose of our foundation as a response to missionary needs of our times as below:

1. Learning from the foundation of the Institute of the Brothers of the Sacred Heart, and indeed of all other existing religious institutions, orders and societies, a call religious life is to actively and personally share in the vision of our various charisms/traditions and the mission of the Church.
2. This charism and mission involvement could be summarised with the help of the following paradigms or themes on faith, discipleship, incarnation, cultural values and servant or steward leadership.

Faith Incarnation of Values in our Cultures (African or Religious Traditions): Discipleship, Servant and Steward Leadership

For one to reach full maturation or holistic integration through the incarnational process of Jesus Christ, the word made man, born of humanity and in Jewish culture, one has to follow and imitate him as the way, the truth, and life through:

1. **FAITH:** Loved by God through His Son, the Crucified and Glorified Jesus, we are beneficiaries of this all-embracing love to which we are called to witness as instruments and agents of its propagation in the world. This love points to, and is realized through, personal, inter-personal, collective and transcendental belonging (Universal family-communion) where love, hope, peace, justice and integrity prevail.

Tadeusz Dajczer (1993, p 1) in his book, *Inquiring Faith*, defines faith as a virtue. He understands its meaning in the context of the theological virtue of faith, which he sees as particularly complex. However, he maintains that interpreted from this point of view, the reality of faith is understood, not in terms of dogmatic theology, but in the sense of theology of spiritual life.

For Dajczer, it is the faith of the New Testament which is mankind's answer to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Therefore, faith is to be understood "as a sharing in the life of God, experiencing God's life within us, among us and among our cultures and this allows us to see ourselves and the realities that surround us as if we were seeing through the eyes of God". It is the adherence to Christ, our Master, Lord, and friend; relying on him – the never-failing rock of our salvation – and entrusting ourselves and our works to his infinite power and boundless love. As a result, in the face of challenges of life, difficulties, sufferings and human helplessness, faith becomes the continuous resort to the limitless mercy of God and the awaiting of his providential compassion.

In summary the great theologian and philosopher St Thomas Aquinas sees faith as sharing in the life of God and brings us closer to God's knowledge when he writes: "*Omnia quasi oculo Dei intuemur*" meaning, "By sharing in God's life, we start to see and evaluate everything as if through His eyes" (In Boeth. De Trinitate, qu 3, a.1)

2. **INCARNATION OF OUR CULTURES:** Here, this calls for revisiting of our cultures and the traditional values that

shape our Africanness, in the light of the Gospel values – Inculturation.

In African traditional society, stable maturity and wisdom are always associated with adults/elders who, by their age, assume societal roles and responsibilities of exemplifying societal norms, customs, morality, ethics, attitudes and values. By this, they become pillars of their particular traditional and religious values, which even follow them to the grave by crowning them, when they are deceased, as ancestors and spiritual mediators between the family/clan and God. Likewise, as priests and religious men and women, we are looked upon as stable adults/elders with exemplary attitudes and values, to whom society looks up for advice in times of need. Therefore, traditionally speaking, an African person is at the centre of every culture, surrounded by all the cultural constituents or formative elements which are basic developmental traits of human growth and maturation.

Yusufu Turaki (2006, p 106ff), in his book *Foundations of African Traditional Religion and Worldview*, ends his book by looking at what it means to be human (Ch.11), and he looks at the meaning of life. He focuses more on the relationship between human beings and the cosmic spiritual and mystical forces. This is what gives him a wider focus on the traditional African understanding of human nature, as expressed in his overriding question, “What does it mean to be human?” In the light of his question, perhaps we can rephrase the question in the context of our religious affiliations, “What does it mean to be a religious (brother, priest or sister)?”

The two questions above are important because they portray the aspects of faith and culture, and the roles they play in defining human nature, as observed from many beliefs about how people should live and how they should relate to God, fellow human beings and the world around them. Turaki asserts that this is what makes many scholars argue that the traditional religions of Africa are anthropocentric, that

is, they start with a focus on what is important for humans and what is required by human nature, rather than with a focus on the divine. In other words, Turaki is reminding us that, in our efforts to evangelise our own cultures and the people around us, let us not over spiritualise but be practical to the human concerns of life and material needs.

The accomplishment of what pertains to being human and the meaning of life itself is what we, as priests and religious, respond to through the reinterpretation of our charisms and living out of the mission of the Church. Our apostolic works and ministries are rich in their diversity because we respond practically to what shapes the human identity (through education, social work, health and vocational training) and human aspirations to give meaning to life itself by exemplifying the use of the heart (feelings and emotions) towards the needs of others, rather than the use of mental perceptions (intellectual evaluations and judgements) of realities of life.

Therefore, the call to incarnating our cultures in the light of the gospel is first to use Jesus' motivation to human condition (See, Judge, and Act) by being present to the people we evangelise, and making them feel accepted as equal human beings; then, only when you have done that, you can you succeed in spiritualising them. This way of evangelising is very characteristic of most of our early missionary evangelisation through building schools, hospitals, orphanages, and various apprenticeship training centres, be they for carpentry, metal work, auto mechanics, plumbing, tailoring, weaving or one of many other skills.

The skills above first gave an identity to the people as achievers of their human potential selves, and the products of their skills provided services to others and this strengthened their reciprocity of services to each other and the sense of belonging collectively and communally. Today, perhaps we identify ourselves so much with the elite that, if we are teachers we do not teach much beyond the lay teachers, if

we are nurses we do not handle patients beyond the ordinary nurse, and if we are orphanage attendants, we do not go beyond the lay social worker who does what they do because they earn a living out of it. This is a challenge to each one of us and a call to be prophetic evangelisers.

3. **DISCIPLESHIP:** Oftentimes, when a priest or religious is asked why they chose to be priests and religious, the answer is because they want to follow Christ more closely and love him more intimately and uphold his attitudes and values as the sole motivation for their responding to discipleship in reaching out to others in need or helpless in life. Contrary to the most recited and almost unconscious answers to discipleship, our presence and relevance to society entail that we embrace parental roles and significant elders from the African perspective.

We are seen to embody and cherish our African heritage (customs, rites and rituals, attitudes and values, practices and worldview), and to integrate these with our Christian and religious traditions (attitudes and values, rites and rituals and the worldview) such that we are shaped into a new identity of African Christians or religious, without any foreseen dichotomy in our lifestyles.

Discipleship entails that we contextualise our formal and informal education if we are to be educators and teachers who foster the holistic and integral development of the youth in both faith and culture. Many of the challenges we see today among the youth are characterised by cultural erosion, such that they lose their identity in allurements to a permissive and materialistic society. Here, unfortunately, the youth's perception of being human, as well as their understanding of the meaning of life, does not go beyond luxurious living and possession of material gain; this is what people understand as an easy and comfortable life.

Aljazeera Television broadcast of March 2011, at 20:45hrs, in one of its advertisements said: "What we see, hear, taste,

feel, or touch shapes our knowledge, memory and aspiration, and should help us determine our destiny". Secular as the Aljazeera TV broadcast may be, it has a positive reflection to offer to us that all sensual perceptions and experiences are not ends in themselves, but means that should enable us to determine our destiny or future.

Our call to priesthood and a to consecrated religious life is harmonised with African cultural values and morality on the one hand, and fostering the Church's mission (building God's Kingdom) through our various apostolic works and pastoral ministries, on the other hand. This allows us to become both African moral guides and pastoral workers. This task is not only fulfilled through a formal educational setup, like a classroom situation or a catechetical class, but through other avenues such as social and pastoral involvement with the youth, drama, poetry, singing, spiritual direction and counselling. Sometimes this works well in merely casual and informal conversations.

4. **A CALL TO SERVANT/STEWARD-LEADERSHIP:** The term servant/steward-leadership is coined from the various scriptural passages that portray Jesus Christ as the perfect servant-steward the world has ever seen (Ps. 110:1-Cf. Acts 2:33-35; Lk. 20: 41-44; Lk. 22:66-69; Acts 5:29-31; 7: 55-56; Lk. 23:34, 46; Acts 7:59; Eph. 1:18-21; Hb. 8:1-2; 12:2; Phil.2:9-11). Jesus was born and raised within a limited Jewish culture, he grew up seeking the will of His Father and this compelled Him to challenge His own culture as He claimed His truly human and divine identities.

Wilkes (2008 p 9) in his book *Jesus on Leadership* develops an excellent model of servant leadership. He sees Jesus as one who taught and embodied leadership as service; therefore, he asserts that Jesus was a servant leader in every sense of the concept. Wilkes maintains that "for Jesus, the mission was to be the Messiah. He was sent to bring salvation to the world as one sent by God. He served that mission as a suffering servant Messiah and His mission was every-

thing for Him – doing His Father’s will. It was His purpose and direction for all He did while on earth – including His death”.

Wilkes, in an attempt to define Jesus doing the Will of God, gives us the model of leadership that was servanthood, which captures his mission and the vision in the following scriptural passages:

1. When Jesus stood in his hometown synagogue, he read his mission statement from the Prophet Isaiah: “The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the oppressed and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour” (*Is 61:1-2; Lk 4:18-19*).
2. When Jesus stood among his disciples and defined what it meant for greatness and being a leader in the Kingdom of God, he cited his mission statement as: “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (*Mk 10:45*).
3. When Jesus stood in the tax collector, Zacchaeus’ home, he rephrased his mission statement in another way: “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost” (*Lk. 19:10*).

Wilkes also gives seven observations that he sees foundational to the Seven Principles to Lead as Jesus led:

1. Jesus humbled himself and allowed God to exalt him. (Principle No.1: Humble your heart) (*Lk 14:7-11*);
2. Jesus followed his Father’s will rather than sought a position. (Principle No.2: First be a follower) (*Mk 10:32-40*);
3. Jesus defined greatness as being a servant and being first as becoming a slave (in Greek, “*doulos*”). (Principle No.3: Find greatness in service) (*Mk 10:45*);
4. Jesus risked serving others because he trusted that he

- was God's son. (Principle No. 4: Take risks) (Jn. 13:3);
5. Jesus left his place at the head-table to serve the needs of others (the washing of his disciples' feet). (Principle No.5: Take up the towel – imitate Jesus) (Jn. 13:4-11);
 6. Jesus shared responsibility and authority with those he called to lead (e.g. Peter, Judas). (Principle No.6: Share responsibility and authority) (Acts 6:1-6); and
 7. Jesus built a team to carry out a worldwide vision (the twelve apostles). (Principle No.7: Build a team) (Mk. 6:7).

Servant Leadership Model

The four operative concepts of servant leadership, as Wilkes (2008, p 20) conceptualised above, are: mission, vision, equipping/empowering and team. Mission is God's call on your life; vision is your unique take on that mission; equipping/empowering is how you train others to join you to complete the vision; and team is how you mobilise those you have equipped to carry out the mission beyond your departure. The implication here is that, when a person becomes a servant to mission and vision, s/he also becomes a leader. This corresponds with Jesus' mission as the Messiah and his vision of the Kingdom of God.

Below the horizontal line are the elements of equipping and team. Here too, when a servant to mission recruits a group of people to carry out that mission with him/her, s/he becomes a leader who serves. His/her service is by equipping those on a mission with him/her, thereby mobilising them into teams to reach the vision cast for them. These elements correspond to Jesus' serving his disciples by calling them to follow him and by building the twelve into a ministry team where they all participated wholeheartedly in the same mission and shared dedicatedly in the same vision. Hence Wilkes, citing Oswald J. Sanders, author of *Spiritual Leadership*, gives us the following natural and spiritual parallel schema on leadership styles (Table 1):

Natural leadership	Spiritual Leadership
Self-confident	<i>Confident in God</i>
Knows humanity	<i>Knows God</i>
Makes own decisions	<i>Finds God's will (through communal discernment)</i>
Ambitious	<i>Self-effacing</i>
Originates own methods	<i>Finds and follows God's methods</i>
Enjoys commanding others	<i>Delights to obey God</i>
Motivated by personal considerations	<i>Motivated by love for God and fellow human beings</i>
Independent	<i>God-dependent</i>

Table 1: Comparison of natural and spiritual leadership styles.

As you can see in Table 1, the differences between those who lead using their natural motives (instinctual power) and those who lead from a spiritual base (God driven/inspired) are clear. Jesus, as Wilkes asserts, modelled on the power of authentic, spiritual leadership from the servant perspective. Similarly, those of us born and raised in our African cultures, diverse as they may be, must model our leadership in the church on that of Jesus' servant leadership style. This style seeks the will of God and shares the vision for salvation with the team, so that they too may further the mission and vision beyond their cultures and contemporary needs.

Finally, in the epistle to the Philippians, we find Jesus portrayed as the perfect servant-steward. The synthesis of the Christian faith experience in the New Testament is beautifully expressed in St Paul's epistle to the Philippians. Paul presents a liturgical hymn in which he exhorts the members of the community at Philippi to have Jesus' attitude of humility. Therefore, in

this hymn, Paul poetically pictures Jesus as emptying himself and taking the form of a slave, although he had equality with God. He humbled himself and became obedient unto death:

“Because of this, God highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name above every other name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heavens and on earth and under the earth. And every tongue (should) confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (*Phil.2:9-11*).

It is from the passage above that we can see the inspiring summary of Jesus’ identity and mission that revealed him to be *perfectly human* and *perfectly divine*. It is St Paul who emphasised the identity of Jesus Christ, especially when he used the word, “name” (*onoma* in Greek). Hence, in the biblical sense, this word signified the very being or existence of the person (*cf The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary*, p 747).

The role St Paul took after his dramatic conversion is very important because of his personal witnessing to the powerful presence of the crucified and glorified Jesus as the proper Son of God. At the same time, St Paul was testifying to his personal experience of Jesus within the Christian community and, with the help of Jesus Christ, he was able to foster a positive image of Jesus as a servant-steward leader to whom we ought to model our discipleship in our ongoing call to prophetic mission.

Praying our Experiences

This statement may sound archaic and yet it is a reality of our call to an authentic living of our vowed religious life as Christ’s disciples and prophetic missionaries of our time. This paradigm of prayer and life is very inherent in our African traditional religions. What I mean here is that from the ATR worldview, life is entirely sacred; God reveals Himself through other people, through events (good and bad), and through nature, such as rivers, rocks, trees, animals, and shrines. In Zambia, we do not have to go far in looking for examples of the mingling of faith and culture, evi-

dent in names derived from totems, as well as life circumstances. The naming of a person is religious and, at the same time, symbolic of the clan lineage or totem. For instance, among the Bembas of the northern province, we have names such as: *Mulenga* (meaning creator, *Chiti* (meaning a big tree), *Musonda* (meaning a rock), and *Bena Ng'andu* (meaning a crocodile clan). Among the Nsengas of eastern province, we have names such as *Njovu* or *Ndlovu* (meaning from the elephant clan or totem), and *Shumba* (from *the lion totem*); from southern province, among the Tongas, *Mudenda* (derived from the elephant totem), *Mulonga* (meaning the river), *Munsanje* (for the hare), *Bansaka* (for the dogs), and *Bachimba* (for the baboons); the Lenje of central province use names such as *Chibwe* (meaning the rock), and in Uganda there is the locust clan.

All these traditional practices of naming with the influence of particular religiosity, if you like, show us how thin is the division between faith and culture, or religion and cultural heritage; hence springs John Mbiti's assertion in his book *Introduction to African Religion and Philosophy* that "Africans are notoriously religious". From a few examples above we can see how spiritually rich our African heritage is, and that it should be seen as a foundation upon which vowed religious spirituality can build.

However, apart from focusing on the African perspective, I wish to end my presentation by borrowing some insights from Ayestaran (2009, pp 7-11) where he develops the five facets of religious life which he categorises in his book, *The God Experience in a Fraternity Open to the World* as:

1. God's plan for the world;
2. Community's mission;
3. Personal life project (salvation or forgiveness);
4. Prayer (petition, intercessory, lamentations, thanksgiving, adoration, glorification), and
5. Compassionate love.

Furthermore, Ayestaran maintains that, in order to understand the connection of the five facets above, it is important to

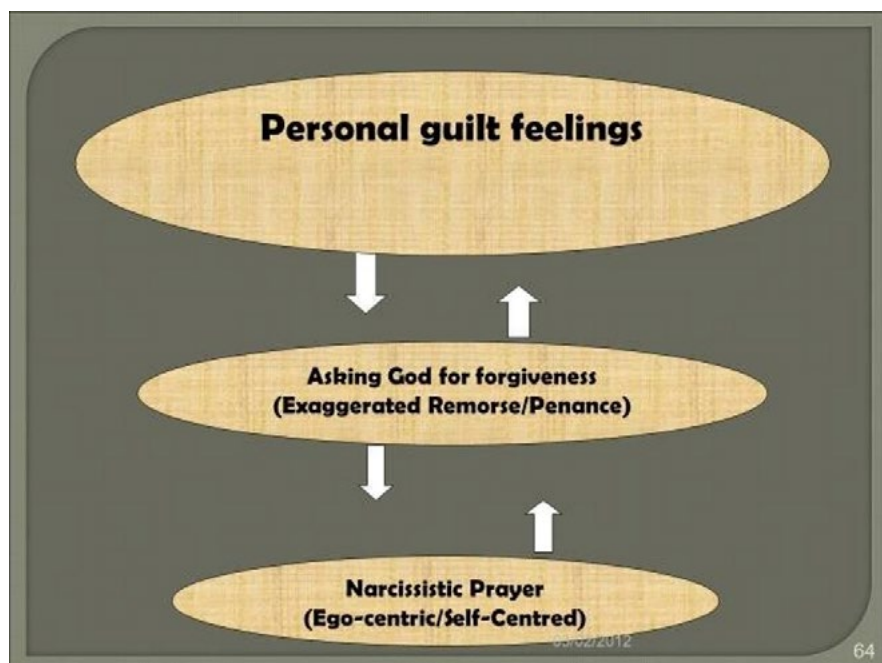
clarify and comprehend how our model of God conditions our experience of God. This is not different from African traditional belief systems where people tend to see God from their lived life experiences and nature creation.

What Ayestaran sees as a model refers to a picture existing in our brains or minds that we can examine at will and can use to view and interpret clearly a particular aspect of reality. He argues that we all accept that our God experience is the foundation of a religious fraternity or sorority. A religious fraternity or sorority has therefore, no reason for being other than to share God's plan for the world. In order to give a practical explanation, Ayestaran cites Sallie Mc Fague's book, *Models of God*, which can be a source of reference, one that provides us with new schemes to understanding the sense of our God experience which leads us:

- to understand why in prayer, we speak to God about the suffering that we find in our midst and comprehend his request that, in carrying out our personal or communal project, we should not depart from God's plan for world-discerning the will of God;
- to understand why a prayer, based on feelings of guilt and atonement, imprisons us in our narcissism (self-admiration or self-aggrandisement such as the biblical publican or tax collector's prayer);
- to understand why dialogue with God must be open to God's plan for the world.

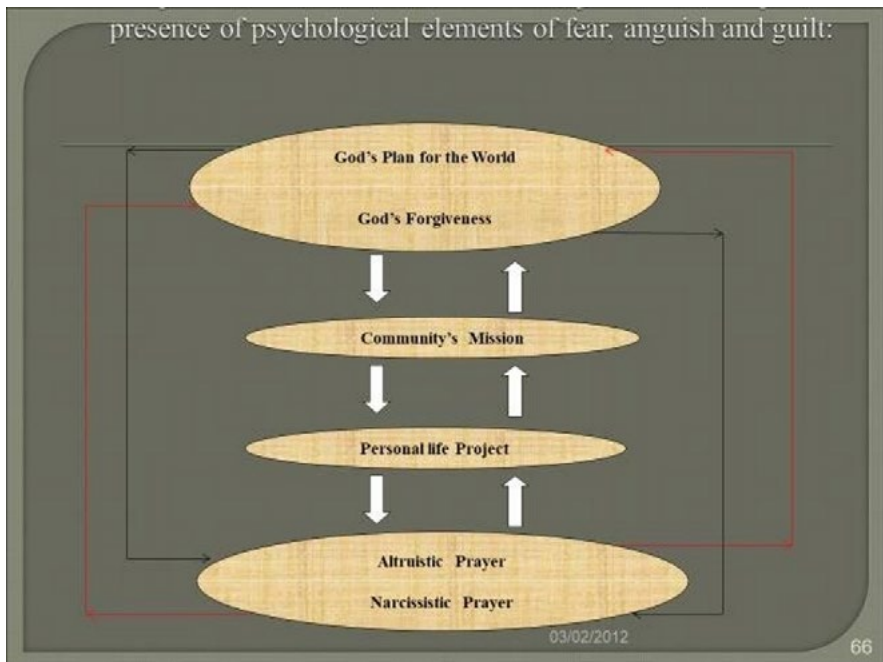
Therefore, Ayestaran, in his presentation of models of God, emphasises that the nucleus of a religious fraternity/sorority becomes a community plan, open to the world, where one experiences God's free love for the world that is:

- a love which values and promotes people;
- a love which shares people's pain and impotence when confronting the world's trials and tribulations;
- a love which reveals in the company of others and shares in their decisions and responsibilities in the workplace.



4.2 A personal life project: Open to God's plan for the world and those who suffer around us, promote compassionate love and participation in the salvation promised by Jesus:





With the understanding above, the God experience is, therefore, the foundation of a religious fraternity or sorority (communion in prayer, apostolate and mission).

The above insights, that pertain to the kind of love that values and promotes people, correspond to the South African Zulu human philosophy of *Ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* is not a foreign term within our Zambian contexts, for it is about the well-being of people, people's humane attitudes towards others, the call to love and compassion beyond the confines of our families, clans, ethnicities, and nationalities, even extending continentally and globally. This human philosophy encourages people to take others, even strangers, as children of God and fellow human beings, deserving respect, dignity, love and life. His is what brings about African quotations such as "Every child is every adult's child, and every adult is every child's parent".

This understanding is a call for coexisting against a background of reciprocal or mutual relatedness.

Another tangible example I would recall in the context of

Zambia is the lack of serious conflicts between different tribes. Although the pursuit of the Barotseland Pact and other political utterances could be divisive and misleading, all in all, our first republican motto of “One Zambia, One Nation” is accommodative, even to foreigners and refugees, such that they feel at home. This is truly *Ubuntu* or *Bukamunu* (in Luvale), *Buntu* (in Tonga, Lenje, Soli, Ila and Kaonde), and *Butu* (in Silozi). This philosophical term points at the sacredness of life, dignity and deserving respect for every human being, regardless of status, race, age and ethnicity. Vowed religious life from the African perspective touches on various issues stipulated in this presentation and many others the presenter has not dealt with for lack of time.

Conclusion

Treating the topic of “Vowed Religious Life from an African Perspective” is not simple because it touches on various disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, theology, philosophy, and even psychology. Nevertheless, the request to make an input is, by itself, thought-provoking and worthwhile. Vowed religious life from an African perspective is a deliberate call and challenge to African priests and religious men and women to enter into dialogue with their own cultures and trace the meaning and relevance of their vocation in our contemporary society, through their own cultural values. It is a call to the transcendence of our indigenous cultures, which sometimes lead us to dichotomise our vocations.

The focus of this topic is not just to trace foundational religious values inherent in our various cultures, but also it is a challenge to examine how much our formative programmes are culturally based in terms of allowing formative candidates, formators and leaders in our religious institutions, as well as those already involved in the Church apostolates and ministries, to dialogue with their own cultures through inculturation. Inculturation is not to be taken lightly in the context of adaptation but a is biblically inspired synthesis of cultural and religious beliefs, customs, attitudes, behaviour, values, rites and rituals, and worldview; the re-

ligious need to evaluate how these promote vowed religious life or not. Such a comparative analysis shall enable them to arrive at a holistic integration for African Christian consecrated religious men and women and clergy.

Formation, therefore, should foster both processes of humanisation (as sometimes, candidates come into formation with unfinished businesses that needs correction) and spiritualisation, that enables a candidate to identify with Jesus Christ through radically living his/her baptism and intimately uniting with, and sharing in, his prophetic mission, which continues here on earth. Theresa of Avila's words summarise this when she says, "we are Christ's arms with which to work, legs with which to walk, eyes with which to see, mind with which to make right judgment and heart with which to feel". Vowed religious life calls for discerning the will of God, witnessing to His love and compassion, and integrating prayer and the work of charity or pastoral ministry.

Through this, we become co-creators of the world, with love, hope, peace, integrity, justice and reconciliation. It is through our co-operation with God's will that He comes to us personally, communally and corporately as the Church. Discerning God's will is what enables us to seek clarity and share in the God experience in fraternity/sorority, open to the world, where we witness to the compassionate love of Christ.

Pope John Paul II, in his encyclical letter (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, No.58, art.1), begins his introduction with a quotation from the prophet Jeremiah: "I will give you shepherds after my own heart" (Jer. 3:15). He asserts that, in these words from the prophet Jeremiah, God promises his people that he will never leave them without shepherds to gather them together and guide them: "I will set the shepherds over them [my sheep] who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed" (Jer. 23:4). John Paul II, therefore, stresses that the Church and the people of God constantly experience the reality of this prophetic message and continue joyfully to thank God for it.

He knows that Jesus Christ Himself is the living, supreme and

definitive fulfilment of God's promise: "I am the good shepherd" (Jn. 10:11). He, "the great shepherd of the sheep" (Heb. 13:20), entrusted to the Apostles, and their successors, the ministry of shepherding God's flock (cf. Jn. 21:15ff., 1 Pt. 5:2). Therefore, John Paul II did not miss the chance to remind us of our religious obligation to continue the mission of Christ, first within the confines of our cultural contexts, and then to all the people of God.

Finally, I end my presentation with words from yet another great pontiff, Pope Paul VI. His "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World" (*Gaudium et Spes*, par.4) refers to the situation of men (and women) in the modern world when he says:

Today, the human race is involved in a new stage of history. Profound and rapid changes are spreading by degrees around the whole world. Triggered by intelligence and creative energies of mankind, these changes recoil upon him/her, upon his/her decisions and desires, both individual and collective, and upon his/her manner of thinking and acting with respect to things and to people. Hence, we can already speak of a true cultural and social transformation, one which has repercussions on humankind's religious as well.

John Paul VI gives precaution on how, sometimes, we fall short of living our goals of discipleship and religious obligations, as emphasised in the following passage:

As happens in any crisis of growth, this transformation has brought serious difficulties in its wake. Thus, while humankind extends his/her power in every direction, s/he does not always succeed in subjecting it to his/her own welfare. Striving to probe more profoundly into deeper recesses of his/her own mind, s/he frequently appears more unsure of him/herself. Gradually, and more precisely s/he lays bare laws of society, only to be paralysed by uncertainty about the direction to give it.

Lastly, it is very important and necessary for us, from time

to time, to evaluate, renew and update ourselves in matters of faith, culture, fraternal and sororal communion, through the integration of our call to vowed religious life and our works for love, hope, justice, integrity and reconciliation.

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CHAPTER 13

Ethnicity, Media, and Violent Conflicts in Africa: Rethinking the Ambivalent Role of Church Leaders in Conflicts

By

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Introduction

Over the years, studies have shown how faith-based leaders seem to have a significant influence on members of society. This influence has justified religious leaders' increasing visibility in the resolution of conflicts at local, national, regional and international levels in the last three decades.

However, scholars have noted limited research examining the role of civil society organisations, including faith-based institutions, in conflict in Africa (Bodewes, 2010; Jordhus-Lier & Braathen, 2013). While some studies have found these leaders to have the reputation of neutrality and even-handedness in situations of conflicts, there is scholarly evidence that some faith-based actors have contributed to the escalation of violent conflicts. Considering the two scenarios, what do we actually know

about the role of church leaders in the various conflicts in Africa? This chapter discusses the ambivalent role of church leaders in situations of conflict in Africa from two perspectives: the dynamics of ethnicity, including the multiple identities of church leaders; and the significance of media in contemporary society, within the framework of media system dependency theory. The chapter begins with a review of the literature that has established at least two opposing roles of church leaders during conflict. In particular, scholarship that has demonstrated how church leaders have played a constructive role in facilitating the resolution of conflict, and the building of peace, is reviewed alongside literature that seems to show church leaders as catalysts in violent conflicts.

Based on the salience of ethnicity in violent conflicts in Africa, the second section of this chapter discusses the influence of ethnicity in the exercise of Christian leadership. Some studies that have interrogated this influence are sampled. Then, acknowledging the significance of media during situations of conflict in Africa, the third section provides an overview of the way church leaders engage both traditional and new media, and why such engagement matters.

The primary argument of this chapter is that church leaders are among members of society characterised with multiple identities. However, while other members of society would strive to balance their identities, especially during situations of conflict, church leaders are expected to have their religious and church identities trump all other identities, including their respective ethnic identities. In other words, church leaders are expected to foster authentic leadership qualities (Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, & Walumbwa, 2005; Holmquist, 2018; Onyalla, 2018a; Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008) and be seen to show integrity (Noelliste, 2013) by transcending their respective ethnic identities, as exemplified in making deliberate decisions to embrace all human beings in their distinctions, diversities, and uniqueness. Exposure to diverse media outlets within the context of media system dependency, especially during situations of conflict, could be an indicator of such deliberate deci-

sions. Ultimately, this chapter recommends that, in situations of conflict, church leaders play a constructive role, striving to make decisions that are consistent with their life mission, namely, unconditional service to all humanity, after the example of their master, Jesus Christ.

In this chapter, the term “ethnicity” is used in the narrow sense of belonging to a particular group of people with a shared ancestral lineage, similar to a tribe in the African context. “Faith-based” leaders or actors refer to religious leaders in general, including leaders of non-Christian denominations. The term “church leaders” makes reference to leaders of the various Christian denominations. The term “Church leaders” refers to Catholic Church leaders, in particular.

Role of Church Leaders in Conflict

Scholarship seems to show faith-based actors’ increasing visibility in the resolution of conflicts at the regional and international levels in the last three decades (*Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009; Heist & Cnaan, 2016; Luttwak, 1994; Mbona, 2011; Sampson & Lederach, 2000*).

For instance, in the 1990s, Luttwak (1994) examined the Franco-German reconciliation, focusing on the Moral Re-armament Movement’s role; Sampson (1994) investigated the Quaker’s intervention in the civil war in Nigeria. Other available research in the 1990s has included the study of religious conciliation in Nicaragua, particularly between the East Coast Indians and Sandinistas (*Nichols, 1994*); the role of the Catholic Church in the 1986 revolution in the Philippines (*Wooster, 1994*); churches’ intervention against apartheid in South Africa (*Johnston, 1994*); and the role of religious actors in the transition from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe (*Kraybill, 1994*), among other interventions by faith-based actors.

However, even before the 1990s, the Catholic Church successfully mediated the conflict between Chile and Argentina, which culminated in the signing, at the Vatican, of the treaty that

marked the end of the Beagle Channel dispute on May 2, 1985 (Garrett, 1985).

There are also Catholic entities that have been noted for mediating peace over the years. A notable example is Sant'Egidio, an international Catholic NGO established in 1968 in Italy, which has expanded to have 50,000 members in some 70 countries across the globe (Bouta, Kadayifci-Orellana, & Abu-Nimer, 2005; Hayne, 2009). Since the early 1980s, apart from in other countries across the globe, "Sant'Egidio has played an active peace-building role in several African countries beset by civil war, including Algeria, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Mozambique and Sierra Leone" (Hayne, 2009, pp 63-64). Between 1989 and 1992 in Mozambique, for instance, Sant'Egidio was quite influential in resolving the country's protracted civil conflict that had been ravaging the southeast coastal African nation since the mid-1970s (Bouta et al., 2005; Hayne, 2009). This success has been attributed to the Catholic organisation's "welcome neutrality and a compassionate outlook, with but one interest in Mozambique: to end the civil war and promote peace" (Hayne, 2009, p 64). Another strength of this Catholic organisation in Mozambique was the awareness of its shortcomings in international diplomacy. This humility caused Sant'Egidio to reach out for the expertise of other entities.

The example of Sant'Egidio serves to show that faith-based actors have the potentiality of offering their unique reputations for compassion and neutrality. When these qualities of compassion and neutrality are combined with skill, both from within and from other relevant institutions, faith-based actors can succeed in mediating between warring factions.

Some of the scholarship in the 2000s and 2010s has provided a systematic analysis of the role of faith-based actors in conflict (Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009; Mbona, 2011; Sampson & Lederach, 2000; Schliesser, 2018; Sundqvist, 2011). For instance, while Bercovitch and Kadayifci-Orellana (2009) focused on the resolution of international conflict, Mbona (2011) examined the

significant role of the group of churches in facilitating the end of the bloody conflict in South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal between 1990 and 1994. For their part, Sampson and Lederach (2000) edited the work by various scholars engaged in chronicling, analysing, and evaluating the contribution of the Mennonites to the theory and practice of conflict resolution and peace-building internationally.

These studies show that, while some researchers examine events that have recently happened, other scholars investigate events that date back some decades. An example of the latter is Schliesser (2018) who examined the 1994 Rwandan genocide, focusing on the role of Christian churches. Nevertheless, there does not seem to be systematic and planned research examining the role of faith-based actors in situations of conflict in Africa. Media reports seem to bridge this gap, providing some journalistic narratives of mediation effort or lack of it.

Recent Mediation Efforts: Media Reports

Focusing on the Catholic Church in Africa, the role of the Bishops in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) seems to stand out, deserving empirical research (*Jordhus-Lier & Braathen, 2013*). Over the years, the Catholic Church in DRC has played a significant role in moving the country toward respect of human rights, freedoms and greater democracy (*ACSS, 2018; Berwouts, 2018; Chimtom, 2018; Krippahl, 2018*). According to *ACSS (2018)*,

Today's secular Congolese civil society grew out of the structures of the Catholic Church. In 1991, the Church chaired the Sovereign National Conference that created a framework for the post-Mobutu political transition. This process was interrupted by the war against Mobutu and the subsequent devastating civil war. The Catholic Church persisted in its peace-making efforts throughout, however, and was instrumental in the negotiations that led to the 2001-2003 Inter-Congolese Dialogue that ultimately brought the war to an end (*para. 7*).

Media reports have confirmed a significantly positive intervention in the most recent crisis in DRC (ACSS, 2018; Berwouts, 2018; Richard, 2018), with the Catholic Church leaders winning the trust of the parties in conflict as to be allowed to mediate the talks towards a truce (Clowes, 2016; Mensah-Onumah, 2019). During the recent crisis occasioned by President Joseph Kabila's bid to "run for a constitutionally prohibited third term, the Archbishop of Kinshasa" (Richard, 2018, para. 5), Laurent Cardinal Monsengwo was described as being highly influential, and the most listened to voice in DRC (ACSS, 2018; Ansorg, 2018; Dupas, 2018; Richard, 2018). Considering this trust, the "influential Catholic Church mediated the December 31, 2016 Saint-Silvestre Peace Accord, which was supposed to have led to the formation of a transitional government, reforms within the electoral commission, and elections by the end of 2017, without Kabila as a candidate" (ACSS, 2018, para. 1).

Various media reports have described how the Catholic Church in DRC shifted from the role of mediation to the role of a mobiliser; from facilitating dialogue between the parties in conflict to organising peaceful protests that were met with resistance characterised by tear gas and live bullets, resulting in several deaths (ACSS, 2018; Ansorg, 2018; Richard, 2018). While elections were eventually held on December 30, 2018, the Catholic Church did not see the results as a true reflection of the voters' will; the Church had deployed over 40,000 observers in various polling stations and counting centres across the vast country (AFP, 2019, 2019; McKenzie, Gigova, Marsh, & Abely, 2019; Mensah-Onumah, 2019).

Overall, the Catholic Church is a significant institution in DRC. As Mensah-Onumah (2019) has noted, the influence of the Catholic Church in DRC "often supercedes all other institutions including political parties and government agencies" (para. 8). The success of the Catholic Church in DRC has been attributed to its being the most structured institution in the country, with a grassroots presence through parishes and networks, and with its involvement in health and education countrywide (Berwouts,

2018; Richard, 2018). This points to the social capital of church leaders in Africa as elsewhere across the globe.

The Social Capital of Church Leaders

A review of literature seems to demonstrate the extent to which religious leaders have a significant influence on members of society (Basedau, Gobien, & Prediger, 2017; Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009; Letsie, 2015). Letsie (2015) has described churches and their respective leadership as “agents of political socialisation” (p 75).

As a basis of their ministry in society, faith-based actors take the lead in the passing on of religious ideas through particular religious practices, which actually “demand investments in terms of time and can reinforce religious ideas and identities” (Basedau et al., 2017, p 6). When religious ideas are internalised at an individual level, and then collectively shared with others to constitute a religious group identity (Hayne, 2009), this results in social capital with profound implications at micro and macro levels.

As Hayne (2009) has clarified, besides being an individual concept, ‘identity’ notion “can also be a collective concept, extending to groups, communities and even countries in relation to their various ethnic, religious and cultural entities” (p 56). Taking the relation to a religious entity, religious convictions guide people’s lives and how they view the world. And, as Basedau et al. (2017) have argued, “Religious ideas shape the behaviour of believers by providing them with guidance for everyday actions and a moral understanding of the world” (p 6).

In addition, when religious leaders engage members of society in social activities, such as providing access to education and health service, these leaders eventually exercise significant influence on individuals and groups through messages of development (Abu-Nimer, 2001; Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009). According to Bercovitch and Kadayifci-Orellana (2009), religious actors:

have an impact on changing behaviors, attitudes and negative stereotypes; educating the parties; healing trauma and injuries; disseminating ideas such as democracy and human rights; drafting committed people to do peace work; challenging traditional structures that perpetuate structural violence; mediating between conflicting parties; reaching out to governments to incorporate elements of peacebuilding in their policies; encouraging disarmament, reintegration of soldiers and developing a sustained inter-faith dialogue (p 176).

Overall, religious actors and their respective organisations are directly involved in the shaping of people's religious identity through the sharing of religious ideas and practices. According to Sisk (2011), "While root causes of conflict are often found in injustice, indignity, marginalisation, inequality, deficits of basic needs, or the greed of a few, the state can be captured to be complicit in such mass violence" (Sisk, p 4). It is for this reason that faith-based actors can be best placed to intervene in situations of conflict. However, the factor of identity seems critical for a successful intervention. Little (2011) has considered how religious and church identity blur with ethnic identity and are fused with the way the nation is conceptualised; this fusion gives rise to the critical question of the role of religious leaders in situations of conflict.

This paper goes beyond that critical question and argues for a situation where religious and church identity trumps ethnic identity. This is because analyses of available scholarship seem to demonstrate two opposing roles religious leaders can play in situations of violent conflict (Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009; Fluehr-Lobban, 2011; Hackett, 2011; Little, 2011; Moix, 2006; Sisk, 2011)2011; Little, 2011; Moix, 2006; Sisk, 2011). As Bercovitch and Kadayifci-Orellana (2009) have observed, "Religious actors may use their political and social legitimacy to pursue peace or to incite division, conflict and violence" (p 177). But Sisk's (2011) expression of the juxtaposed role of faith-based actors in conflict exacerbation and conflict amelioration seems succinct:

Religious leaders, at times, contribute to conflict escalation through their doctrinal and ethical interpretations and specific calls to action. At other times we see religious leaders directly appeal for tolerance and a deeper relationship of coexistence, organizing interfaith dialogue and, in some instances, directly mediating peace (p 2).

This means that on one hand, religious leaders could play a constructive role in facilitating the resolution of conflicts and the building of peace. In an opposite role, on the other hand, religious leaders could contribute to violence escalation, including making utterances that seem to justify intolerance.

This section continues the discussion about the role of church leaders in situations of conflict in Africa by reviewing literature. Indeed, there exists a body of literature that discusses faith-based actors as peace builders, a role they play by making prophetic interventions aimed at abating further conflict (*Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009; Mbona, 2011; Moix, 2006*). Scholars have also examined how religious leaders have, in some contexts across the globe, contributed toward the escalation of violence (*Carney, 2008; Desforges, 1999; Haworth, 2018; Longman, 2001, 2013; Mwaura & Martinon, 2010; Opongo, 2010; Safari, 2010; Schliesser, 2018*). In some cases, the role of faith-based actors has oscillated between peace-building and conflict escalation (*J. Jeffrey, 2018; Kane, 2014*). While some situations around the world will be cited, African contexts will receive more attention.

Constructive Role of Church Leaders During Conflict: Cases

Uganda's Acholi religious leaders' peace initiative. In Uganda, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) movement caused what the United Nations described as "one of the worst humanitarian disasters in the world" (*Moix, 2006, p 582*). Some of the atrocities LRA's leader Joseph Kony stood accused of included mass abduction of children and forcing them to be child soldiers, concubines, or servants, and the indoctrination of the abducted children to

fight in a corrupt holy war. The creation of the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI) in 1998 is a demonstration of the visibility of faith-based actors intervening in violent conflicts in Africa.

The peace-building body brought together religious leaders from northern Uganda, among them Catholic, Anglican, Muslim, and traditional religious leaders. As Moix (2006) has confirmed, “ARLPI leaders began accompanying thousands of children known as “night commuters” who seek refuge from LRA abduction by sleeping at city bus stations, parks, and other public places” (p 582). In addition, ARLPI successfully advocated for the passage of legislation providing amnesty for LRA fighters who were willing to quit fighting and get integrated into their respective communities.

Besides, ARLPI has trained local leaders in peacebuilding and conflict resolution in addition to undertaking “nonofficial mediation between midlevel LRA leaders and government officials ... to help establish a ceasefire, encourage negotiations, and urge restraint on all sides” (Moix, 2006, p 583). All these are laudable initiatives by faith-based actors in Uganda in response to a situation of conflict. The intervention resulted in reduced suffering and the denouncing of violence motivated by spiritual misconceptions. Meanwhile, Pax Christi, a Christian non-governmental organisation, helped mediate the peace deal between LRA and the Ugandan government in 2006 (Hayne, 2009).

Nigeria, Mozambique, and Cambodia. Through case studies, Hayne (2009) has demonstrated faith-based actors’ attempts to intervene in conflicts in Nigeria, Mozambique, and Cambodia. The case of Nigeria involved the efforts of a Muslim and a Christian while that of Mozambique looked at the vitally important role of the Sant’Egidio, a Catholic organisation of lay persons, which facilitated the ending of the civil war in 1992. In Cambodia, the focus is on Maha Ghosananda, a Buddhist leader who notably mediated in re-establishing peace after a “deep-seated societal conflict” (Hayne, 2009, p 62). These case studies have revealed

that religious actors who have engaged in peace efforts create a positive impact. As Hayne (2009) has noted with regard to the three countries examined, “religious peacemakers can make a difference: left to their own devices, it is very likely that conflicting groups would have failed to reach a *modus vivendi* and perhaps lapse back into conflict” (p 62).

Hayne (2009) has also highlighted other success stories of faith-based intervention in situations of conflict. In particular, with finances from the Ford Foundation, Quakers mediated in the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-1970; All Africa Conference of Churches and the World Council of Churches facilitated the mediation of the 1972 Sudan conflict; a Timbuktu Imam mediated various conflicts in West Africa. “When successful, religion’s role in helping to resolve conflicts and build peace is a crucial component in helping to achieve human development more generally” (Hayne, 2009, p 60). This was the case in South Africa.

The church as a peace broker in South Africa. In tracing the role which religious leaders played in facilitating the end of brutal killings in South Africa’s KwaZulu-Natal between 1990 and 1994, various scholars have demonstrated how church leaders, through their ecumenical movement, helped end the bloody clashes (Mbona, 2011; Sisk, 2011). As Sisk (2011) has observed, “The religious-leader mediation in South Africa was an especially symbolic event in the peace process to move South Africa from apartheid to democracy; their moral stature bridged the distrust that had developed between Mandela and de Klerk over violence” (pp 1-2).

However, there were internal divisions and some church leaders were perceived as political sympathisers, thereby hampering and delaying the peace process. “Within the church leaders’ group there were some perceived differences in approach, which tended to retard progress... the church leaders were political sympathisers while, at the same time, the conflicting parties and the state all had a political agenda” (Mbona, 2011, p 3). The testimony by Ronald Kraybill advocating impartiality among church

leaders speaks to this: “Mediators cannot advocate a particular party or point of view, but rather we can, and often do, advocate particular processes for making decisions” (*Mbona, 2011, p 3*).

What seems critical is that in South Africa, the Natal Church Leaders’ Group (NCLG), an informal ecumenical entity, responded to the bloody tension between two political parties, the African National Congress (ANC) and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP). Some of the member churches included: the Roman Catholic Church (RCC), the United Congregational Church of South Africa (UCCSA), the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA), the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa (PCSA), and the Church of the Province of Southern Africa (CPSA). Overall, NCLG made a significant contribution “in creating an enabling environment for the first general election of April 1994” (*Mbona, 2011, p 3*). And, “even though at times the church leaders seemed confused, exhausted and divided, an ecumenical spirit was enhanced by combined action at regional or national level, and the church seemed to work better ecumenically on social issues” (*Mbona, 2011, p 4*). This speaks to the challenges which faith-based leaders face in the process of working toward the resolution of conflicts.

Challenges for Church Leaders in Peace-building

The challenge of neutrality. In the process of mediating conflict, neutrality, a seeming value, can be a challenge. This is true when faith-based leaders are actually expected to stand up against those perceived to perpetrate evil by taking clear positions. Mediators in conflict usually have personal histories, a system of values, and individual and group perceptions about the world. These are considered human qualities, intrinsic to each person individually and at times, collectively. Church leaders engaging in mediation would not be an exception. The challenge of neutrality lies in the ability to distinguish between personal sentiments and those of the respective parties.

It seems then that the mediation function that calls for neutrality and the prophetic function, which has to do with standing

for the truth, are actually incompatible. In the case of South Africa described above, neutrality was considered the main weaknesses of NLGC. As Mbona (2011) has explained, “the main weakness on the part of the NCLG was that there was naivety about the reality that mediation and prophetic witness were incompatible” (p 20). Therefore, how NCLG members got engaged in the mediation process, while being seen as neutral by both ANC and IFP, was a critical test. In particular, “the naming and shaming of the violent acts allegedly committed by the IFP was seen as part of being prophetic, yet that became a major stumbling block in the mediation efforts” (Mbona, 2011, p 6). In this regard, some church leaders attempted to overlook the incompatibility between being neutral and being prophetic, arguing “that both roles were part of their calling and they therefore wished to do justice to both” (Mbona, 2011, p 7).

The solution to the challenge of neutrality seems to be found in having church leaders with vast knowledge and worthwhile experience in the field of conflict resolution taking the lead. Their knowledge and experience would guarantee some progress in the mediation process, carefully walking the path between neutrality and being prophetic. In exercising the prophetic role of condemning violence, citing acts of violence by both parties would serve to illustrate church leaders as honest brokers lest accusations of being partisan find justification. But as Mbona (2011) pointed out, whatever the viewpoints, “the neutrality of a mediator is a complex phenomenon” (p 5).

The challenge of confidence. In South Africa, “the argument given by the ANC for being in favour of the role of the NCLG was that the church had no political ambitions or allegiances but had a human face only” (Mbona, 2011, p 11). This confidence can be in question if church leaders are perceived to be closer to one of the parties than the other. In South Africa, church leaders seemed biased towards the ANC, with some justification: While the “ANC was perceived as modern liberal party and was also regarded as the only party that was able and willing to end apartheid,” the IFP, by contrast, “was seen as traditional, rural-oriented, conser-

vative, out touch with modern politics and as having colluded in apartheid. Zulu ethnicity was at the core of the IFP ... but that principle of identity received strong support from rural communities" (*Mbona, 2011, p 12*). Whatever the justifications might be, perceived partiality seems to tarnish church leaders' role as mediation facilitators and compromises their confidence in mediating conflicts.

Other considerations. According to Hayne (2009), religious actors are most likely to succeed as peacemakers when their reach is international or at least transnational; when they consistently stress peace rather than resolving conflict through force; and when they "have good relations between different religions in a conflict situation, as this will be the key to a positive input from them" (*p 60*). Other scholars have identified mediator identity as being critical in conflict interventions.

Mediator Identity

Scholars have examined the role of faith-based actors in contributing toward the resolution of conflicts and found mediator identity to be instrumental in effective mediation of conflict (*Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009; Sisk, 2011*) This mediator identity includes particular attributes and motivations that make their interventions in conflict effective. According to various scholars, apart from factors such as the nature of the dispute and the background of the relationship between parties in conflict, scholars over the years have recognised the identity of mediators as critical to the success of all mediation efforts (*Bercovitch, 1986, 1993, 1996, 2007; Bercovitch & Houston, 2000; Bercovitch & Kadayifci, 2002b, 2002a; Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009*). For Bercovitch and Kadayifci-Orellana (2009), "Although there is no general agreement on the degree, it is often recognized that mediator identity is an important element for the effectiveness and success of any mediation effort" (*p 180*). In other words, who the mediators are seems quite significant in the success of interventions in conflict. Even Ott (1972), who relegated personal at-

tributes to a minor place in guaranteeing successful mediation efforts, recognised the prime place of mediator identity.

It is significant to address the identity of mediators because what scholars have enumerated as features of such identity seems to conform with the church and religious identity. According to Bercovitch (2007), "The identity of the mediator affects the mediators' influence, trust, and legitimacy" (p 185). This has been demonstrated in various empirical studies that have found those endowed with legitimacy due to their place in society do enjoy the trust of parties in conflict, an aspect that places them at an advantage in successfully influencing the effectiveness of mediation (Bercovitch, 2007; Bercovitch & Houston, 2000; Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009). Faith-based leaders seem to suit this description. As Bercovitch and Kadayifci-Orellana (2009) have stated, "For faith-based mediation to be effective, religious leaders, institutions and discourses must be perceived as legitimate by the parties" (p 194). When mediators have changed their role from constructive to destructive, or *vice-versa*, mediator identity can be seen as compromised.

Faith-based Actors' Changing Roles

Some studies about the role of faith-based actors in conflict have revealed changing roles. For instance, in a study that examined the Christian churches' role in Lesotho's political conflict since 1970, Letsie (2015) the two largest Christian denominations – the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) found changing roles that ranged from destructive to constructive. The study demonstrated how the rivalry between two major Christian denominations, the Lesotho Evangelical Church (LEC) and the Roman Catholic Church (RCC), undermined peace efforts following the annulment of elections in 1970. While LEC aligned with the Basutoland Congress Party (BCP), RCC was linked to the Basotho National Party (BNP). Considering the seeming visible mistrust between LEC and RCC, the condemnation of acts of violence by their collective body, the Christian Council of Lesotho (CCL), lacked credibility.

However, when there was a change of leadership in these denominations and the coming on board of another denomination, the destructive role due to mistrust changed. As Letsie's (2015) the two largest Christian denominations — the Roman Catholic Church (RCC study found, "in the first decade of this century, this mistrust gradually diminished and disappeared under new leadership in the churches, together with new leadership in the third largest church, the Anglican Church in Lesotho (ACL)" (p 76). There were also developments from the political front, which saw the 1997 formation of the Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) after the union of BNP and BCP, as well as the 2006 formation of the All Basotho Convention (ABC).

Eventually, the churches in Lesotho have changed roles to become meaningful players in the resolution of conflicts by facilitating the realisation of peace and reconciliation and "reaffirming their role as agents of peace-oriented socialization. This became evident prior to the 2012 general elections, when the heads of the respective churches became an integral part of mediation efforts and preparations for elections" (Letsie, 2015, p 76).

Letsie's (2015) study, which collected primary data through interviews with selected faith-based actors, and secondary data through a combination of academic journals, books, newspapers, and policy documents, serves to show the extent to which individual faith-based actors heading religious institutions can be a stumbling block to peace efforts, particularly when they are seen to be aligned to political parties, thereby playing partisan roles. Considering the salience of ethnicity in Africa (Berman, 2010; Chogugudza, 2008; Onyalla, 2018b; Robinson, 2020) such aligning could be based on shared ethnicity between the leaders of the political parties and the religious leaders. In addition, the different denominations need to speak with one voice to gain trust and confidence among the parties in conflict. As Letsie (2015) found, since the antagonistic relations between Protestant churches and the Roman Catholic Church in Lesotho diminished, the leaders from these churches "have become the most trusted mediators in the country's political conflicts, even succeeding where in-

ternational political intervention has failed” (p 86). Faith-based actors who are perceived to play partisan roles during political conflicts end up being candidates of mistrust, unable to win the confidence of the parties in conflict. This situation speaks to the destructive role of church leaders during the conflict.

Destructive Role of Church Leaders in Conflict

The discussion above has focused on the constructive role of faith-based actors in the face of conflict. The reviewed literature has largely demonstrated that, over the years, and in different contexts, faith-based actors, including individual clergy and groups, spiritually inspired leaders, and movements having the reputation of neutrality and even-handedness, and motivated by the religious value of compassion, have played significant roles in resolving conflicts. There is also a body of literature showing how some of these categories of actors in Africa and beyond have contributed to the escalation of the conflict. This subsection reviews scholarship around the destructive role of faith-based actors in situations of conflict, with a focus on church leaders.

Beyond Africa, the terror attack which rocked London on July 7, 2005, and resulted in the death of 52 and the injury of 770, seems a credible example of the extent to which religious actors could directly contribute to conflict and violence. This is because the findings from investigations revealed that radicalised Islamist clerics inspired the bombing. Discussing this event, Sisk (2011) stated, “This instance underscores a common understanding about the potential role of religious leaders in justifying or inciting violence” (p 1). Faith-based actors provided a violence warrant and articulated an injunction to a violent act against London.

Rwandan genocide. In Africa, several scholars over the years have demonstrated how both church leaders and ordinary church members were directly involved in the 1994 Rwandan genocide (Carney, 2008; Desforges, 1999; Haworth, 2018; Longman, 2001, 2013; Safari, 2010; Schliesser, 2018). According to Schliesser (2018), “It was not uncommon for a death squad in local commu-

nities to include prominent lay church people, priests, or other church employees and, at times, church personnel themselves would lead the killers to the people seeking refuge in churches” (p 3). While churches had previously been respected as sacred places where people hoped for sure refuge, they were death traps during the 1994 genocide. Longman (2001) attempted to paint a picture of how difficult it was to understand what happened, saying:

In the aftermath of the Rwanda genocide, many people inside and outside the country have struggled to comprehend the involvement of Rwanda’s churches in the violence. Many Christians in particular have wondered how such carnage could have taken place in one of Africa’s most Christian countries, how the population could have become so willingly involved in such deplorable acts in a country where more than 90 per cent of the population were members of the Catholic or Protestant churches ...not only did church buildings become the sites of massacres, but most of the killers were Christian, and even some pastors and priests participated in the slaughter (p 164).

In a later publication, Longman (2013) has described church leaders as having been actively involved in murder. “Numerous priests, pastors, nuns, brothers, catechists, and Catholic and Protestant lay leaders supported, participated in, or helped to organise the killings” (Longman, 2013, para 2). Some reports have indicated that there were more massacres in churches, where people sought refuge, than elsewhere (Haworth, 2018; Longman, 2001; Safari, 2010; Schliesser, 2018). Reflecting on the genocide and the direct involvement of faith-based actors, scholars have concluded that the leadership of the churches and the membership were complicit (Schliesser, 2018), allowed their respective ethnic identities to trump their church identities (Court, 2016), and failed in their Christian calling to non-violence, protection of life, and peaceful co-existence (Court, 2016; Haworth, 2018; Longman, 2013).

On her part, Schliesser (2018) has explored the role of church leaders in the Rwandan genocide and identified four factors that seem to explain the complicity of the faith-based actors in the killings. These include one, the kind of bond that existed between the church and the state; two, the way churches seemed to endorse ethnic policies; three, the power struggles that went on within the churches; and four, a rather problematic theology, which seemed to emphasise “obedience and respect for authorities” at the expense of “Christian responsibility for the other person”, including significant aspects such as “the active love of one’s neighbour and even one’s enemy” (Schliesser, 2018, p 5).

While the predominant narrative has been that all Christian churches in Rwanda were complicit in creating an atmosphere that allowed the genocide, Schliesser (2018) has described this view as “short-sighted” and “one-sided”, arguing that “a closer look reveals a far more complex picture as different churches reacted differently and, even within one and the same church, attitudes and action differed” (p 5). She has particularly highlighted the Protestant Churches and their peace initiatives. However, she has found these Protestant Churches’ initiatives as not reflective of the overall mood of the churches during the genocide and concluded, “in general, the churches remained silent” (Schliesser, 2018, p 6).

It is worth noting that, while the leaders and members of the various churches in Rwanda seemed complicit in the genocide, the process of reconciliation also involved the churches (Cantrell, 2009; Grant, 2018; Kubai, 2016; Schliesser, 2018). This reflects what Schliesser (2018) has described as a shift from a *theology of genocide*, which seemed to endorse ethnic violence, to a *theology of reconciliation*. According to Kubai (2016), “religion has been and continues to be part of Rwanda’s system of meaning-making and meaning-interpretation, and hence has contributed to shaping new values, demands of propriety and interpretations of old norms that have emerged after the genocide” (p 3). Considering the significant place of faith and religion in most African societies, churches have had a critical role to play in the reconciliation process in Rwanda.

While the process of reconciliation in Rwanda has generally been successful, the role of the Catholic Church in the entire journey has been portrayed as less prominent (*Cantrell, 2009; Grant, 2018*). Although the Roman Catholic Church is the country's largest single religious body (*USDS, 2016*), even after losing about a third of its members after the genocide because of the crisis of trust (*Schliesser, 2018*), the smaller denominations have been portrayed as having been more successful (*Schliesser, 2018; Sundqvist, 2011*). According to Schliesser (2018), the initiative by the Presbyterian Church of Rwanda (EPR), whose members number only about 300,000, seems to stand out, considering that EPR's members' "engagement for reconciliation and peace-building are being echoed in similar ways in other denominations, such as the Rwandan Anglican Church and the Pentecostal Church" (ADEPR).

EPR was the first to issue an official confession of guilt described as "Confession of Detmold" of 1996 — "for twenty years, it would remain the sole public confession of a church" (*Schliesser, 2018, p 8*). It was not until 2016 that the Catholic Bishops in Rwanda asked for forgiveness for the role in the genocide (*AP, 2016*), with their pronouncement deemed by the government as "inadequate", demanding an apology from the Vatican (*Kagire, 2016*). As Schliesser (2018) has explained, the Bishops' apology failed to "address any institutional guilt but rather saw only individual members of the Church implicated" (*p 8*). In March 2017, Pope Francis "completed" the Catholic Church's apology by imploring "God's forgiveness for the sins and failings of the Church and its members, among whom priests, and religious men and women, who succumbed to hatred and violence, betraying their own evangelical mission" (*Vatican, 2017*). The Pope accepted not only the individual but also the institutional guilt for acts committed during the genocide, long after other denominations had done so.

Overall, various scholars have demonstrated how faith-based actors have changed from destructive to being part of the constructive process toward sustainable peace and progress in Rwanda (*Court, 2016; Haworth, 2018; Kubai, 2016; Schliesser,*

2018). This phenomenon speaks to a situation where the role of faith-based actors is not fixed. Scholars and media reports have cited Kenya and South Sudan as examples of this unique situation ,where faith-based actors have presented mixed behaviour. Here, this is described as a mixed bag of reactions.

Faith-based Leaders' Mixed Bag of Reactions to Conflict

Kenya. The violence that followed the 2007 general elections in Kenya has provided a case for scholars to examine the role of faith-based leaders in violent conflicts in the Kenyan context (*Mwaura & Martinon, 2010; Opongo, 2010*). For instance, Mwaura and Martinon (2010) have placed religious leaders among those who “were perceived as politically tainted, partisan, or compromised” (p 39). They have explained that, “Many felt that the churches which, prior to the referendum on the draft constitution of 2005, were regarded as voices of reason and moral authority, had failed in the 2007 elections to provide visionary and unbiased leadership” (*Mwaura & Martinon, 2010, p 39*). In their assessment, faith-based leaders showed partiality during campaigns ahead of the elections by establishing and nurturing close ties with politicians. During the political crisis, it became difficult for religious leaders to criticise the politicians.

According to Mwaura and Martinon (2010), whereas the Catholic Church, one of the largest Christian denominations in the country, was vocal in advocating for multi-party democracy and constitutional reforms in the 1990s, the unity of purpose did not seem to persist through the new millennium. For instance, during the 2007 political campaigns, Catholic Church leaders did not seem to speak with one voice. According to Mwaura and Martinon (2010):

The image of the Catholic Church was in shambles because it was no longer considered an entity transcending ethnicity and capable of speaking in the interest of everyone. Many people ignored its messages because its leadership

was viewed as partisan. Catholic political influence was also limited by the vagueness of the Church's pronouncements, which tended not to criticise particular politicians nor offer specific solutions to the violence (p 42).

Some reports have documented that the clergy did participate in ethnic violence and that some religious congregations with multi-ethnic membership splintered. Mwaura and Martinon (2010) have explained as follows:

People expected more from churches in terms of messages of hope, reconciliation, justice, and creative political intervention in the crises. Christians also expected more bold and prophetic leadership that confirmed the Church as the *conscience of the nation* and that adopted a preferential option for the poor. The Church has been accused of complicity, of abetting the evil by its silence, and of allowing itself to be divided and driven by partisan ethnic interests. Consequently, the Church's integrity and identity have been called into question, necessitating an evaluation of its ecclesiastical mission and procedures, and its public role in society (p 45).

However, this view of the Catholic Church seems incomplete. There were actions on the part of the Catholic Church that portrayed the willingness to be genuinely in solidarity with the suffering. Indeed, the humanitarian assistance of the Catholic Church to the displaced families and efforts at peace mediation nationally, and especially at grassroots through parishes, proved a constructive role of the Church during Kenya's post-election violence. The Catholic bishops, through their conference, and the Religious Superiors' Conference of Kenya (RSCK), denounced violence and joined with other faith-based leaders to issue pastoral letters advocating for a cessation of hostilities, for tolerance, forgiveness, and peaceful co-existence through justice (Mwaura & Martinon, 2010).

Considering this, the Catholic Church in Kenya remains one of the national institutions most capable of going beyond the eth-

nic barriers that seem to cloud politics in the country (*Mwaura & Martinon, 2010; Opongo, 2010*). Catholic Church leaders will need to take the lead to tap into this resource. Despite the seemingly tainted episodes of the past, the future can be better.

South Sudan. In South Sudan, media reports have shown the role of church leaders in the conflicts as a mixed bag (*J Jeffrey, 2018; Kane, 2014*). During the several decades of struggle for independence, churches were the country's most reliable institution, providing education, health services, and humanitarian relief. As Jeffrey (2018) has explained,

Amid destruction and failed politics, church leaders emerged as the only players left standing with any credibility and national recognition, enabling them to effectively lobby the international community to support the southern cause while also brokering peace between communities torn apart by war and ethnic strife (*para 3*).

The Christian churches in South Sudan embraced an ecumenical approach, establishing the South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC), which influenced the 2005 peace deal that ended Africa's most protracted civil war, as well as the January 2011 referendum on independence. However, church leaders' response to the South Sudan civil war that has been raging since 2013 seems to have fallen short of the expectations, some reports accusing church leaders of complicity (Kane, 2014) and other reports indicating that church leaders have been caught in the conflict that has had people divided along ethnic lines (*J Jeffrey, 2018*).

In April 2018, South Sudan's Vice President James Wani Igga claimed that priests are promoting violence (*J Jeffrey, 2018; Oduha, 2018; Sudan Tribune, 2018*). Some negotiations that have resulted in peace pacts between political leaders in conflict have sidelined faith-based leaders (*Nzwili, 2015*). However, there have also been reports of laudable initiatives by churches at the grassroots level, reaching out to the suffering, spiritually but especially through material support (*Ajiambo, 2018; Herlinger, 2016; P Jeffrey, 2018*). All these reports combine to demonstrate the mixed

bag of roles played by faith-based leaders in the ongoing conflict in the world's youngest nation, South Sudan. There is hope that Pope Francis will honour the invitation extended to him by a delegation of Christian leaders when they met him in Rome in March 2018 (*Bordoni, 2018; Harris, 2018*). In some contexts, church leaders have lost the opportunity to intervene for peace.

A lost opportunity: Zimbabwe. There seem to have been some lost opportunities in situations where church leaders could have made particular initiatives to steer the national ship toward peace and tolerance. In Zimbabwe, Mbona (2011) thought that church leaders were losing an opportunity to mediate the country's conflict. In his considered view, the experience of church leaders in South Africa needed to be replicated in other situations of conflict. As he argued, "It is possible that the church leaders in Zimbabwe could be mediators between the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) and the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) formations" (*Mbona, 2011, p 21*). However, he regretted that such intervention was not taking place and decried, "While the mediation exercise appears to have enormous challenges, history may judge the church leaders in Zimbabwe for not taking initiatives to seek to achieve peace and political tolerance for the benefit of ordinary people" (*Mbona, 2011, p 21*).

This section has discussed the role of faith-based actors in situations of violence, with a particular focus on African contexts. A review of the literature has revealed a variety of scenarios. Faith-based leaders have contributed to peace-building, sometimes gaining trust from parties in conflict to mediate for a truce. In other contexts, faith-based actors have directly contributed to the escalation of violence, even standing accused of facilitating killings. Situations when faith-based leaders have switched roles between destructive and constructive, have also been highlighted. Lost opportunities, when faith-based actors would have positively intervened in conflicts, have also been documented. Considering the seemingly central place of ethnicity in conflicts in Africa, the next section focuses on the influence of ethnicity in the exercise of church leadership.

Ethnicity and Church Leadership

In the previous section, the Rwandan genocide was used as one of the best demonstrations of how Christian leaders have played the role of escalating violence to alarming proportions. A review of literature has also revealed that the same genocide actually stands out as the best illustration of how negative ethnicity can influence conflicts in Africa (*Carney, 2008; Desforges, 1999; Longman, 2001, 2013*). For the church leaders who contributed to the escalation of violence, ethnic identities seem to have trumped their respective church identities. This section seeks to briefly examine the influence of ethnicity in the exercise of Christian leadership in Africa, sampling some studies that have interrogated this influence against the backdrop of the salience of ethnicity on the African continent.

The Salience of Ethnicity in Africa

There seems to be much scholarship showing the salience of ethnicity in Africa, with many scholars linking it to conflicts on the continent (*Azarya, 2003; Berman, 2010; Carrier & Kochore, 2014; Chogugudza, 2008; Desforges, 1999; Haynes, 2007; Ilorah, 2009; Mbatia, Bikuru, & Nderitu, 2009; Nwozor, 2014; Omulo & Williams, 2018; Onyalla, 2018b; Osaghae, 2006; Osinubi & Osinubi, 2006; Paluck, 2009; Robinson, 2020; Wamwere, 2003*), including conflicts linked to general elections (*Carrier & Kochore, 2014; Ferree, Gibson, & Long, 2014; Yieke, 2010*). For instance, Mbatia et al (2009) have described ethnicity as “a means through which conflicts in many African countries are conducted and a powerful tool for political mass mobilization” (*para D*). This view seems to echo Chogugudza’s (2008) observation, “Unless and until Africa develops to a stage where ethnicity becomes irrelevant in politics and political organisations, regrettably, poverty, instability and the cycles of conflict will continue to inflict the continent” (*para 13*). Though pessimistic, these assertions seem to demonstrate that ethnicity is salient in Africa as one of the main causes of violent conflicts in Africa.

Analyses of the link between ethnicity and violent conflicts in Africa seem to point at the concept of identity (*Hayne, 2009; Opongo, 2010*). Opongo (2010) has argued that, in Africa, identity seems to be primarily attached to kinship units like family, clan, ethnic grouping, and national ties. In his considered view, these highlighted identities seem to matter more than other identities including religious identity. In other words, in the face of conflict in Africa, religious identity is relegated to the periphery, so that “in most African conflicts, Christians have faced off against other Christians – making their Christian identity secondary to ethnic or national identities” (*Opongo, 2010*).

However, some scholars have dismissed the salience of ethnicity, as well as the close link between ethnicity and violent conflicts in Africa (*Bannon, Miguel, & Posner, 2004; Kimenyi & Gutierrez, 2008*). Having examined 14,000 respondents from nine countries in Africa, Bannon et al (2004) found class and occupation to be the most salient identities, with just a couple of sampled countries demonstrating the salience of ethnicity. Similarly, Kimenyi and Gutierrez’s (2008) study, which engaged 1,207 Kenyan voters, found most respondents prioritising non-ethnic identities, including religion, occupation, social class, and gender. The analyses of these findings indicate that the salience of ethnicity is context specific and that the national contexts seem to be important considerations in examining the influence of ethnicity.

Overall, discussions around ethnicity as a catalyst in conflicts on the African continent have usually focused on its influence on political leadership, particularly how ethnicity has been used as a political tool against opponents (*Chogugudza, 2008; Mbatia et al, 2009*). In the 1970s, merchants of Asian origin were expelled from Uganda on the basis of their ethnicity. In South Africa, ethnicity was one of the strategies that sustained apartheid into the 1990s. In the 1990s, there were attempts to bar Zambia’s Kenneth Kaunda from trying for office, based on the argument that his parents were Malawians. Since 2000, ethnic tensions have characterised the relationship between white and black communities in Zimbabwe, with the government compulsorily reclaiming farms from

the white community members by engaging mobs and influencing courts to issue dubious legal judgements (*AFP, 2018*).

The focus on the influence of ethnicity on political leadership seems to have overshadowed the examination of the potential influence of ethnicity on other leaders in the African context. In particular, a review of literature has revealed relatively limited scholarship that has interrogated the influence of negative ethnicity on faith-based leaders in Africa (*Kamaara, 2010; Longman, 2013; McGarry, 2001; Sanou, 2015*). In fact, studies examining the influence of ethnicity have hardly considered the extent to which ethnic identities affect the exercise of leadership (*Chin, 2013; Windeler & Riemenschneider, 2016*).

Ethnicity and Church Leadership: Sampling Studies

As observed above, while research on the influence of ethnicity on political leaders in Africa has attracted many scholars, studies focusing on the influence of ethnicity on faith-based leaders are yet to gain any momentum (*Onyalla, 2018b*). In an attempt to fill this research gap, Catholic Church leaders ministering in the ecclesial territory covered by Nairobi Archdiocese were examined in studies that employed a qualitative research design, collecting data through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (*Onyalla, 2018b, 2018d, 2018c*).

For instance, Onyalla (*2018b*), who sought to investigate, among other aspects, the extent to which Catholic Church leaders identified with multiple identities, and to establish these leaders' most predominant identity by sampling 39 participants in Nairobi Archdiocese, found some indications of ethnic influence. Analyses of the findings established the phenomenon of multiple identities among the sampled Church leaders, who comprised Kenyan priests, nuns, and religious brothers. Virtually all participants confirmed the value they attach to Church identity and tribe as the two most predominant identities.

However, the study results did not seem to show sufficient evidence that Church identity trumped ethnic and other identi-

ties, even though most participants expressed their prioritising of Church identity. The participants did express a cautious attitude toward the influence of ethnicity, which was interpreted as fear to align with exclusive solidarities, bordering on ethnocentrism and nepotism. Onyalla's (2018b) research recommended the operationalisation of attribution theory in future studies, as a means of gaining deeper insights into the tendency, on the part of Church leaders, to avoid individual recrimination by attributing to others sentiments regarding the influence of ethnicity. The use of observation methodology would also go a long way in establishing, with more precision, the influence of ethnicity on Church leadership.

Overall, in situations of conflict occasioned by ethnic differences, faith-based leaders are expected to rise above their respective ethnic identities so that their religious identity trumps all other identities. It is such a stance that will enable faith-based leaders in Africa to work towards reconciliation and peace-building, key aspects of their mission, which involve credible witnessing, usually to multi-ethnic followers. Such witnessing would be furthering the tradition of Africa as a significant cradle of early Christianity, including figures such as Cyprian, Tertullian, Augustine, Cyril, and Athanasius.

As Opongo (2010) remarked in reference to the rich Christian history, "Africa's experience of injustices, conflicts, and mass atrocities seemingly contradicts this Christian influence" (p 78). Meanwhile, the scholarly tradition on conflicts in Africa has identified, in addition to ethnicity, the media as playing a significant role in furthering or abating strife. Basing on media system dependency theory, the next section discusses media and church leadership.

Media System Dependency and Church Leadership

A Theoretical Framework

Media system dependency theory (MSD) explains the reliance on media content to meet certain needs. Church leaders are among audience members that depend on the system of the media for particular information needs. Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur (1976) proposed MSD to postulate an integral relationship of dependency among three parties: individuals as audience members, the media, and the larger social system. Similar to uses and gratifications theory, MSD predicts that individuals depend on media outlets as information resources on the basis of the perception that media can be helpful in meeting particular needs and achieving some specific goals. They defined dependency as “a relationship in which the satisfaction of needs or the attainment of goals by one party is contingent upon the resources of another party” (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976, p 7).

At the micro level, since audiences do not depend on all media the same way, Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur (1976) identified two factors, which seem to influence the degree of an individual's dependence on media outlets. Firstly, individuals are likely to become more dependent on media outlets that meet a number of their needs, than on media platforms that meet only a few of their needs. Secondly, social stability influences media dependency. During situations of conflict and social change, when the established beliefs, practices, and even institutions seem challenged, individuals are forced to review and make new choices. Therefore, the assumption is that in such situations of conflict, individuals' reliance on media outlets for information increases; this is different from periods of stability, when dependence on media platforms might be comparatively reduced. The theory further assumes that when the degree of dependence on media outlets is heightened, media content is likely to achieve effects ranging from cognitive to affective and to behavioural (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976).

The relations at the macro level are such that media outlets establish some interdependent structural dependency links with the political and economic systems. In this regard, mainstream media houses will rely on political elites as sources of information and news actors; the political elites will rely on the media outlets for their access to the public. Altogether, the second factor at the micro level seems to speak to the situation of faith-based leaders and their need for information during conflict. The assumption is that faith-based actors will increase their reliance on media during conflict and that this heightened reliance on media will see media messages achieve cognitive, affective, and behavioural effects. Therefore, MSD seems the appropriate theoretical framework to ground the examination of the influence of media messages on church leaders during conflict.

Media and Situations of Conflict

From the sections above, the reviewed literature showed various scholars citing the genocide in Rwanda as exemplifying not only church leaders' destructive role in the conflict, but also the role of negative ethnicity in violent conflict. Focusing on the same, scholars have identified media in general, and radio in particular, as having played a significant role in the Rwandan deadly violence (Li, 2004; Mitchell, 2007; Paluck, 2009; Paluck & Green, 2009; Straus, 2007; Yanagizawa-Drott, 2014). In this regard, Straus (2007) has stated, "Radio has become a symbol of the genocide in Rwanda, and Rwanda has become a paradigmatic case of hate radio sparking genocide" (p 610).

The influence of the media in the Rwandan genocide, where faith-based leaders seem to have been directly implicated in furthering the conflict, has been a subject of study over the years, and from a variety of perspectives. For instance, while a number of scholars have blamed the media in Rwanda for contributing to the genocide, some other studies revealed a different narrative. In particular James (2008), who examined the historical development of Rwandan mass media, found that the role of hate media

in Rwanda has been overstated because it was actually a part of a much larger social process with many dynamics at play. In other studies, the coverage of the Rwandan genocide by western press has been criticised, with accusations ranging from lack of enthusiasm to report the massacres, and failure to depict the root causes of the conflict, to ignorance and/or distortion of the context of the genocide, among other media misrepresentations (*Chari, 2010; Melvern, 2001; Schimmel, 2011*).

Somerville (2011), who analysed the role of the media in Kenya's 2007/2008 post-election violence, cited observers who suggested that some vernacular radio stations in Kenya had acted like Radio Television Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM) in Rwanda. This serves to show that, although the Rwandan genocide has attracted many mass media researchers, various scholars have examined media's role in shaping the attitudes of audiences during violent conflicts in other contexts of the world (*Aday, Farrell, Lynch, Sides, & Freelon, 2012; Lazzolino & Stremlau, 2017; Weighton & McCurdy, 2017; Shinar, 2003, 2009; Somerville, 2011*). Whereas some scholars have singled out radio as the media outlet with the greatest influence on violence in Africa (Paluck & Green, 2009; Straus, 2007), others have looked at both traditional and new media as influencing audiences during conflict (Aday et al., 2012; Bratic, 2008).

However, these studies have hardly sampled faith-based actors, in view of establishing media influence on this significant population in Africa, during situations of conflict. This is because church leaders are among the audiences seeking media messages during situations of violent conflict, a behaviour that speaks to MSD theory.

Media and Church Leaders During Conflict

The paucity of studies focusing on the influence of ethnicity when sampling a population of faith-based leaders, noted above, seems true also for the influence of media on this population during situations of conflict. In other words, while many scholars have

examined the role of media messages during violent conflicts in African contexts, the interrogation of such influence on the population of religious and clergy is yet to be fully established. Some efforts have been made in the Kenyan context.

Sampling some studies in Kenya. In studies that sought to examine, among other issues, the extent to which the multiple identities of Catholic Church leaders in Nairobi Archdiocese influence their respective choices of news media outlets during conflict, Onyalla (2018b) and Onyalla (2018a) found a variety of influences. Participants confirmed the mutual influence of colleagues, friends, and family in choosing news media outlets, revealing a combination of encouragement to tune into particular channels, and discouragement from accessing certain news channels. While some participants linked the influence of colleagues, friends and especially family to ethnic influence, some denied such a link. The influence of church identity was voiced, exemplified in those who choose media outlets with programmes that inform their work of evangelisation.

Additionally, the sampled Catholic Church leaders also expressed the influence of some of the fundamental factors in journalism practice, including timeliness, balanced reporting, objectivity and impartiality, depth, and boldness, among others. In these Kenyan studies, while participants recalled media personalities who have influenced their choices of news media channels, none of these media personalities included those in faith-based media outlets; nor did any story published or broadcast by a church media establishment feature; these phenomena seem to show a blackout on faith-based media outlets during periods of conflict.

In yet another study in a Kenyan context, which sought to explore the extent to which Catholic Church leaders' ethnic identities influence their selection of information channels in periods of conflict, participants dismissed ethnicity as an essential factor, even when all acknowledged the value of maintaining ethnic affiliations (Onyalla, 2018c). Analyses of the findings revealed four

sets of insights: the examined Church leaders access information from both traditional and new media gadgets; they view news media as quite significant in contemporary society and hold a powerful media-effects perspective; they are critical of media outlets' tendency to focus on negative stories that feature tragedies, war, and conflict; and they are concerned with journalists and editors who fail to adhere to the established editorial policies of their respective media houses. Overall, the study established evidence for a comparatively heightened reliance on media messages during conflict, extending MSD theory within a Kenyan context.

In a qualitative study that sought to operationalise media domestication theory in an African context, by sampling a population of Catholic nuns in Nairobi, Kenya, Okoth & Onyalla (2018b) found evidence of mobile media appropriation among the religious sisters, a phenomenon that has impacted on the nuns' vow of poverty. As a result, participants gave testimonies of a lifestyle of dependency, many relying on people outside their religious communities, including friends and relatives, to acquire and maintain digital gadgets. Other issues, such as inequality and a competitive attitude, were voiced as challenges due to the process of domesticating digital gadgets; the values of transparency and accountability seemed compromised.

This high dependency on digital media was also revealed in a related study that sought to establish the extent to which religious women engage with smartphones and how this engagement impacts on their community life (Okoth & Onyalla, 2018a). Participants in the study provided evidence for positive and negative influences of smartphone domestication. Positively, digital gadgets are facilitating the fostering of interpersonal relationships, the promotion of religious orders' visibility, the provision of news, and the pursuit of academic goals. Negatively, engaging with the digital gadgets has taken the competitive attitude among religious sisters to a higher level, provided a high-tech forum for gossip, and an additional possibility for addiction.

Altogether, these reviewed studies in the Kenyan context demonstrate church leaders' reliance on media messages. In line with MSD theory, church leaders' dependence on media content for updates on the situation of conflict could be higher than in moments of stability. Considering studies that have revealed that ethnicity, alongside business interests and ownership, is one of the factors that seem to influence the political viewpoints of some media channels in Kenya (*Esipisu & Khaguli, 2009*), this paper proposes that faith-based actors strive to access diverse media channels, especially during conflict.

Accessing diverse media outlets. Faith-based actors have the mission of serving people of God, who have multiple identities. This requires access to information, which would enrich their knowledge that would enhance their communication with members of their respective congregations. Considering MSD theory, one effective way of acquiring information about events would be exposure to media content from diverse sources. Against the backdrop of the discussion around the influence of ethnicity on conflicts in Africa, and the significant place of some media with tribal leanings, church leaders can be among members of society who choose media outlets on the basis of their respective ethnicities. Such a stance would place such church leaders at the risk of manifesting attitudes of prejudice, bias, and even hate toward some information sources using ethnic prisms. If ethnicity guides the choosing of media outlets, there is likely to be ethnic prejudice against particular media channels, resulting in the negative profiling of the prejudiced information sources.

Therefore, this paper argues that church leaders should seek to access information from diverse media outlets, going beyond ethnic considerations, especially during situations of conflict. This is essential because limiting one's selection of media platforms on the basis of ethnicity would deprive a church leader of diverse information. In situations of conflict, church leaders choosing news media outlets based on their ethnic affiliations would end up with limited and even biased views about current affairs, a situation that would negatively impact their mission to

witness with unconditional love as servant leaders after their master, Jesus Christ. As various scholars have established, the way leaders choose, perceive, make sense of, and act on messages has an influence on these leaders' attitudes toward life situations, including periods of conflict (*Hayne, 2009; Hutchison, 2009; Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002*). Church leaders accessing information from multiple sources are likely to reach out to their followers with a balanced approach, which serves to guarantee integral and credible leadership. This can go a long way in ensuring that church institutions remain relevant to society, especially during situations of strife.

Overall, this section has shown that, while many studies have examined the role of media in situations of conflict, the sampling of faith-based leaders has usually been overlooked. The few studies within the African context seem to demonstrate how faith-based leaders' reliance on media messages during conflict is consistent with MSD theory. It has been argued that church leaders strive to select a variety of media channels during times of conflict in order to reach out to members of their respective congregations in a balanced way and to safeguard their integrity and credibility.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the ambivalent role of church leaders in situations of conflict in Africa from the perspective of ethnic influences and media selection. The reviewed literature revealed church leaders' constructive engagements that contribute to peace-building, destructive tendencies and actions that serve to escalate the violence, switching of roles between constructive and destructive involvement, and lost opportunities when the silence of church leaders has been interpreted as complicity. The chapter considered the salience of ethnicity in conflicts on the continent and proposed that, in situations of instability linked to ethnic differences, church leaders transcend their respective ethnicities, ensuring that their religious and church identities

trump other identities. This would require a deliberate decision on the part of church leaders, who have responded to the call to configure their lives to the person of Jesus Christ in his service to all humanity. The chapter has recommended exposure to diverse media outlets as an important strategy for church leaders to reach out to their usually multi-ethnic followers with balanced and rich information.

Overall, a deliberate decision on the part of church leaders to have their religious and church identity trump all other identities seems the appropriate answer to the ambivalent role of these leaders during conflict situations in Africa. While politicians are engaged in supremacy battles during conflict, church leaders have to persist with efforts for peace, aimed at saving the precious lives of ordinary people. There lies the role of church leaders, to shepherd their flock with credibility and respectability. This includes working tirelessly behind the scenes to influence parties in conflict to embrace peace. While mediation for peace during conflict is usually an enormously challenging process, history judges church leaders harshly for not taking appropriate initiatives toward peace for the benefit of ordinary citizens, the people of God. When church leaders constructively engage in the resolution of conflict, crucial foundations for progress can be established, and the enhancement of human development guaranteed in Africa.

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