

ECCLESIASTICAL MINISTRIES FOR LAY PEOPLE IN NIGERIA: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

Hilary Odili Okeke

I. INTRODUCTION

Official ecclesiastical ministries for lay people were introduced into the Catholic Church by Paul VI (1). Before the introduction, official ministry in the Church was understood strictly as sacred ministry which belonged to the clergy. Vatican II had opened the way to wider understanding of ministry, *ministerium*, as service, a word which the Council used to describe activities undertaken by the people of God. In nineteen places, the Council used *ministerium* for activities of lay people in the Church and in the world (2). The emerging consciousness of the place and role of lay people in the community of believers made it theologically possible to apply to the activities of lay people the word previously reserved, in ecclesiastical parlance, to the ordained.

The use of ministry for activities of the laity did not, however, admit lay people to ecclesiastical ministry. The development came with the reform of minor orders by Paul VI. Before the *Motu Proprio*, *Ministeria quaedam*, candidates for the priesthood, and hence for the sacred ministry, were admitted into the clerical status by tonsure, and they had to receive the minor orders of porter, exorcist, lector and acolyte before the major orders of subdiaconate, diaconate and then priesthood. The minor orders were reserved for clerics, that is, those set apart for the sacred ministry. The reform of Paul VI abolished the tonsure, minor orders and the subdiaconate, and established the two ministries of lector and acolyte, giving the episcopal conference the faculty to retain the subdiaconate and to apply for new ministries as the need of their regions dictated (3).

The relevance of this reform to our topic is that the Pope made the ministries open to lay people, and so they were no longer reserved to the candidates for the sacred ministry (4). By estab-

lishing the ministries of lector and acolyte, which are open to lay people who are not destined for Holy Orders, and giving episcopal conferences the faculty to petition for more ministries according to the needs of their regions, the Pope put into effect the conciliar understanding of the Church as a ministerial community in which all members of Christ's faithful share in their own way in the mission of the Church.

The new Code of Canon Law adopted the discipline of *Ministeria Quaedam* and in canon 230 provided for the installation of lay people whose age and talents meet those prescribed by the decree of the episcopal conference. The canon also provided for lay people, men and women, to receive temporary assignments in liturgical actions and to supply certain functions of installed ministers where the needs of the Church require it and where ministers are not available. The provisions for the official ecclesiastical ministries for lay people and their capacity to participate in a ministerial way in liturgical actions were given in the context of the obligations and rights of lay people.

John Paul II, in the post-synodal Exhortation, *Christifideles laici*, locates the ministries in the communion of the Church, teaching that all ministries are a participation in the ministry of Jesus Christ. The participation of lay people is different from that of the ordained not only in degree but also in essence (5), and he points out that one does not become a minister by performing a function but by ordination or installation as the case may be. After warning against possible abuses in the application of the new provisions of law, he states that the ministries and roles of lay people ought to be exercised in conformity with their specific lay vocation. Because of the problem of what constitutes the limit of the specific lay vocation in the Church, the Pope is to set up a Commission to provide an in-depth study of the various theological, liturgical, juridical and pastoral considerations associated with the great increase of ministries entrusted to the lay faithful (6).

There is a growing interest in these ministries in various parts of the world, as is evidenced by studies (7). I intend to show how the universal law on ministries for the laity has been implemented in the Church in Nigeria and the factors that influenced the implementation. This study is meant to bring out how the combination of the

attitude of the community, cultural factors and local conditions has affected the application of the law on ministries for lay people in Nigeria.

II. MINISTRIES FOR LAY PEOPLE IN NIGERIA: POLICIES AND PRACTICE

Nigeria is an African country with thirty six dioceses and two missions *sui iuris* in a landmass of 923,768 sq. km. Its population is 88.5 million. Some dioceses have many Catholics and comparatively many priests. The Archdiocese of Onitsha in the south-eastern part of the country, for example, had a Catholic population of 652,670 and 142 priests in 1988. Some of the other dioceses have very few Catholics and fewer priests. This means that the situation of the particular churches, in terms of landmass, ratio of Catholics to the whole population and ratio of priests to lay people, differs considerably. Even though the ecclesiastical circumscriptions differ in many ways, common policies and norms are still possible through the instrumentality of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN). The CBCN has the competence to give, by decree, the requirements for people who are to be installed in the stable ministries of lector and acolyte. We will, therefore, review the particular laws made by the Bishops' Conference in this matter before examining how the universal and particular laws are actually implemented and what the factors responsible for them are.

II. 1 THE PARTICULAR LAW ON MINISTRIES FOR LAY PEOPLE IN NIGERIA

In the wake of the promulgation of the 1983 Code of Canon Law, the CBCN had to make provision, in accordance with Canon 230, 1, for the implementation of the norms for the ministries of Lector and acolyte for the lay members of Christ's faithful. The CBCN in its decree specified the requirements for the candidates for these ministries. The Candidate must have a good reputation in the community, must be properly married and, if single, must be a fully mature adult. There was no definite minimum age but the upper age-limit was 60 years (8). The decree gave other requirements for those to be installed as lectors and for those to be installed as

acolytes. For the lectors, the ability to speak or read the English Language is not an absolute requirement. They must, however, have enough education to read the language in use in the place they must possess a singing voice; and they must be able to instruct others (9). Catechists are natural candidates for the order of acolyte (10).

The decree went on to give some of the functions to be entrusted to the acolyte, and to determine the liturgical roles and dress of the installed acolyte. His role must be more prominent and intimate, in the Eucharistic celebration, than that of the Mass servers and he should wear a distinctive garb. He may be called upon to help in distributing Holy Communion to lessen the overall time of the celebration; and he can be called upon to expose the Blessed Sacrament for adoration but without giving the blessing (11)

The CBCN has made the necessary legislative provisions for the establishment of ministries for the laity in Nigeria. Some provisions are not specific. The minimum age is given as a fully mature adult, a criterion that is relative. Secondly, even though the new Code does not contain the faculty for episcopal conferences to apply to the Apostolic See for new ministries, it is certain that the faculty given *Ministeria quaedam* is still there since the CBCN has not made any proposals for new ministries for lay people, diocesan bishops in Nigeria can, install lay men only into the two ministries established by the universal law. We will soon see how far they have done so.

II.2 THE SITUATION AS REGARDS MINISTRIES FOR LAY PEOPLE IN THE CHURCH IN NIGERIA

A survey of the situation as regards ministries for lay people in the various dioceses in Nigeria was undertaken by means of a questionnaire which I sent to all the diocesan bishops, to the Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria. The response was sufficient to give a general picture of the situation in the Church in Nigeria as regards ministries for lay people. The overall picture is that nothing much has happened in the country in this area. Bishop John Onaiyekan summed up the situation very well when he wrote:

If little or nothing has happened in the area of lay ministries, it is certainly not because Rome won't allow us (12)

Most dioceses reported that no one had been installed in the ministries of lector and acolyte. Bishop Makozi installed ten lay men as lectors when he was the Bishop of Lokoja. It was reported that five people were installed as lectors in the cathedral in Maiduguri while ten men were made extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion. The diocese of Oyo has some installed lectors, acolytes and extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist. Many dioceses permit major seminarians and male religious to distribute Holy Communion. The case of religious women is different. Only in some diocese in the North and the West are they allowed to distribute Holy Communion.

From the replies, most lay people would like more lay people to help as extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist. This is one area where the situation of emergency and chronic necessity as envisaged by John Paul II demands urgent attention and consideration. In some churches, priests spend over 45 minutes distributing Holy Communion at Sunday Masses, if there are no major seminarians or religious Brothers available.

While some diocese have done something in the area of ministries for lay people, most of the diocese, especially in the South eastern part of the country, have shown no interest in the matter. I will examine the factors responsible for this situation.

III. FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SITUATION

Many factors are responsible for the general lack of interest and action in the area of ministries for lay people. Some of the factors mentioned by those who responded to the questionnaire are: prevalence of non-formal ministries, clericalism, conservatism and fear of further stratification of the Catholic community. I will analyse these factors.

III.1 Prevalence of non-formal ministries

Among the responses, the major reason given was the abundance of "non-formal" ministries. The laity in Nigeria have been very active in the Church. Fr. Vincent Nwosu concluded from his study that the contribution of the laity to the growth of the Christian churches, especially the Catholic Church, was greater and more

complex than had hitherto been realized or acknowledged, and he projected that the future role of the laity would continue to be very important, if not crucial, in Nigeria¹³. Bishop Onaiyekan stated as much:

Our country has a good record of lay participation in the inner life of the Church...In many communities, especially where priests are not available, it is normal that the laity lead public worship, administer emergency baptism and conduct ritual services like burial and blessings¹⁴.

It is evident that lay people in Nigeria have performed and continue to perform, the functions of readers, Mass-servers, organists, choristers, ushers, church wardens, leaders and conductors of Sunday services and funeral services, and teachers of Christian doctrine. These and other services regarded as non-formal ministries have been carried out by lay people without any special installation. It is accurate to say that many Catholic communities live, work, worship and pray under the guidance of lay people without any ecclesiastical deputation or installation. The catechists are virtually pastors of their communities like the *Mokambi wa paroisse*, lay parish moderators/animators in the archdiocese of Kinshasa, Zaire¹⁵.

Readers, either ad hoc or members of Readers' Associations, abound and perform satisfactorily. Sacristans, and Mass-servers who have a National Association of Altar Knights, perform most of the functions of an acolyte. So, there is little incentive to install people into the stable ministry of either Lector or acolyte. It would seem that most Catholics in Nigeria do not think that the ministries for lay people are of pastoral necessity or urgency. Bishop Onaiyekan brings out this attitude from the point of view of bishops:

I imagine the question is whether we consider them (ministries) necessary or very useful – a question of pastoral necessity or convenience—which is not always easy to resolve¹⁶.

A lay person, however, stated that there was no need for lay people to be installed as ministers because there was a sufficient number

of the clergy to do work (in their place). This position is far from realistic. The average priest-to-lay person ratio in Nigeria is 1:5000. In some dioceses the ratio is more alarming. A priest in Yola diocese looks after 49 mission stations, some over 100 kilometres from the parish centre. The insufficiency of ordained ministers is the rule rather than the exception in Nigeria.

III.2 Influence of clericalism

Another reason given for the relative inaction on this point is the effect of the clericalization of ministries in the Church. Both the clergy and the laity in Nigeria are accustomed to the view that Church ministry is the preserve of the ordained. The Church itself is called "Father's Church" or "the priest's church" ("Uka Fada" in the Igbo language). This mentality constitutes an effective blockage to the extension of formal ecclesiastical ministries to lay people. In his reply to the questionnaire, a diocesan secretary (who is a priest) wrote:

There is a high degree of inhibition to let lay people into an area that is prejudicially looked upon as a preserve of people set apart for the service of God.

While this attitude may account for the reluctance at making lay people extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist, it is harder to see why there is any inhibition about installing lay men as lectors and acolytes, since lay men and in some cases lay women are already performing some of the functions of lectors and acolytes. Perhaps history can shed some light on this issue. The ministries of lector and acolyte are successors to minor orders, which were reserved to clerics. It obviously takes time for both the clergy and the laity to extricate these ministries from their clerical matrix.

Clericalism manifests itself in various forms. On the part of the clergy, it can constitute an obstacle to the admission of lay people into areas of church ministry and apostolate traditionally reserved to the clergy. The clergy, jealous of their prerogatives, would see the installation of lay people into official ecclesiastical ministries as the first stage of an invasion strategy by the laity into the preserves of the clergy.

On the other hand, clericalism can affect the laity in a negative way. They would want to remain at a safe distance from sacred things, leaving it to the priests and other people set apart to handle those sacred things. Lay people are not expected to handle them. In many places in Nigeria, lay people are not allowed to handle sacred vessels. They have to use white cloth to carry them if they have to handle them. This may in part explain the diffidence of many lay people in Nigeria to accept a call to ministry. A bishop reported that the laity refused to co-operate when he wanted to introduce ministries for lay people in his diocese.

The effect of the clericalization and sacralization of ministries in the Church is most felt in the question of making lay people Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist. Even though many lay people who responded to the questionnaire wanted lay people to be commissioned to distribute Holy Communion, they themselves reported that lay people did not want lay people to distribute Holy Communion. They would rather not receive Holy Communion from fellow lay persons. The reason given was that the lay person was considered to be contaminated with the evils of the society and was, therefore, unworthy to touch the Communion, let alone give it to others. This reasoning betrays a rather negative self image on the part of the lay person. The real issue, however, is not the holiness or sinfulness of lay people. It is rather, that the clergy and all those who put on clerical garb, such as major seminarians and religious men, are regarded as people set apart for sacred things. These can give Holy Communion to the people.

The attitude to religious women is mixed. In the early '70s, the attempt to permit religious women to help in the distribution of Holy Communion in the then Archdiocese of Onitsha met with stiff resistance. The people of Adazi Parish, which was selected as the experimental area, led a delegation to the Archbishop of Onitsha calling for the immediate stop to the experiment. The opposition stemmed more from cultural factors than any other factor. In African Traditional Religion, women are not given cultic functions in community celebrations. There are priestesses; but they performed their functions in religious ceremonies strictly reserved for women (17). The exclusion of women from cultic functions in ceremonies in which men participate may not be completely ex-

plained by the inferior position of women in the male-dominated Nigerian traditional society. A more compelling reason is the cultic taboos attached to womanhood in some parts of the country, especially in Igboland (18). Some Catholic dioceses in the West and North (especially Yola and Maiduguri) allow religious women to function as Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist.

III.3 Conservatism in the Church in Nigeria

Another problem that has hindered the implementation of the canonical provisions for the stable ministries of Lector and acolyte and the Extraordinary Ministry of the Eucharist is conservatism. It is true that the line between courageous initiative and pastoral irresponsibility is often difficult to draw, (19) but some bishops in Nigeria are not prepared to take any risk at all for fear of the accusation of novelty and the disruptive effect of change. The normal excuse is that the people are not yet ready or mature enough for the initiative or innovation. Lay people, especially in the dioceses in south-eastern Nigeria normally resist changes in the Church. Many of them would want the Church, its liturgical services and organization, to continue to be as they were during the days of the early white missionaries. Many of them mourn the loss of the glory of the church because of the change from latin to the vernacular. This attitude of the hierarchy and lay people towards change has affected the fortunes of inculturation, for example, of liturgical rites in Nigeria (20).

III.4 Fear of creating classes in the Church

Another factor responsible for the relative inaction of the bishops in the matter of ministries for lay people is the fear of further stratification in the catholic community. It is clear that with installation as ecclesiastical ministers, lay people so installed will have a prominent place in the community. Given the people's penchant for status and titles, the installation may be perceived as similar to the conferment of a chieftaincy title, which confers honour, prestige and prominence on the recipient. This might create a class within the local community, a class whose identity would be hard to define. It is, perhaps, this danger that made two Nigeria bishops, Archbishop

Peter Jatau of Kaduna and Bishop John Onaiyekan, sound a note of warning. According to Bishop John Onaiyekan.

I think it is necessary to stress that lay ministries are lay ministries, for lay people. It does not make clerics out of them, or remove them from the ranks of the laity. It should be clear that these ministries are conferred not as honorary titles or rewards for good deeds but rather to give official recognition to and promote roles of lay service (ministers – to serve) within the Church²¹.

The fears are real. The special status claimed by the knights, both papal and ordinary, life members of the Catholic Women Organization, the complex and now controversial positions of *Baba Ijo* and *Iya Ijo* (Father and Mother of the Church respectively, as marks of honour and distinction to a man and woman in the Yoruba Catholic communities) make real the fears of the bishops. Installation into stable ministries may create a class of lay men who regard themselves as mini-clerics or super laymen, with the frustration which that will bring to those concerned – confusion in the Catholic community and conflicts in Church organization. This is a real problem but it is not insurmountable as we will see later.

IV PROSPECTS OF MINISTRIES FOR LAY PEOPLE IN NIGERIA

The present situation of ministries for lay people in Nigeria and the problems associated with them seem to weigh heavily against their development. However, changes are taking place in the Church in Nigeria which will definitely alter the situation. We will note the changes in the understanding of the Church and in the formation of the laity in Nigeria as important factors that make one confidently predict the coming of age of a Church with a variety of ministries and services open to lay people.

IV.1 New understanding of the nature of the Church

The Church in Nigeria is coming of age. It is over 100 years old, and the trend in most dioceses is that the particular churches are

moving from makeshift and ad hoc structures and organizations characteristic of mission churches to stably constituted organisations. Many of the dioceses have established Pastoral Councils, Finance Committees and Laity Councils at both the diocesan and parish levels.

These developments raise the hopes that the Church in Nigeria will come to appreciate the necessity of lay people sharing fully in a ministerial way, in the communion of the Church, a communion which, in the words of John Paul II is:

characterized by diversity and complementarity of vocations, and states of life, of ministers, of charisms and responsibilities. Because of this diversity, every member of the lay faithful is seen in relation to the whole body and offers a totally unique contribution on behalf of the whole body²²

It is quite true that lay people without the stable ministries are already contributing to the growth of the Church. However, the installation of lay people as ministers according to the needs of the Church will bring out the participation of the laity in the ministerial community which is the Church.

It is important to point out that the need of the Church is not to be identified with the need of the clergy. If the need of the Church is limited to the need of the clergy, lay people will be installed as ministers when the clergy need their help. For supply and by *ad tempus* deputation of lay people in liturgical celebrations, that may be the case. But that should not be the case for stable ministries. The need of the Church as a community – the living, worshiping community – is to be taken into account. The Church in Nigeria needs officially-installed lay ministers to work hand in hand with the clergy to bear eloquent testimony to the diversity and complementarity of roles and ministries which characterize the Church as a communion.

The installation of stable ministers will not do away with non-formal ministries. Rather it will ensure that qualified and trained personnel, who are so installed, are available to coordinate and oversee the services rendered by non-formal ministers. The decree

of the CBCN provides that the installed Lectors have the responsibility of conducting teaching sessions for those appointed to read on an ad hoc basis, while the acolyte will be in charge of training mass servers²³. The advantage is that the community will have reliable lay people who are in charge of those services and who have been formally trained to render them.

IV.2 Formation of the Laity

The laity in Nigeria are becoming aware of the need to know more and more about the Church—its teachings, law and organization. The Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria has embarked on a programme to liberate the laity in Nigeria from ignorance, apathy and marginalization. The council accepted the concept of MOBILAITY (Mobilization of the Laity) because it realized that a lot of talents and other resources among the people of God in Nigeria are at present not adequately harnessed²⁴. This has resulted in the programme for the mobilization of the laity for intelligent and active participation in Church life.

The programme involves, first and foremost, the doctrinal formation of the laity. Lay people are now taught not only the mysteries of the faith but also canon law. The dispelling of ignorance goes hand in hand with the removal of prejudices and the building up of a strong, confident body of lay men and women who know their place and role in the ecclesial communion. The anticipated result would be a greater awareness on the part of lay people of the genuine equality of dignity and action which they enjoy in the Church and which empowers them, according to canon 208, to contribute, each according to his or her condition and office, to the building up of the Body of Christ. This awareness is expected to lead to *metanoia*, not only on the intellectual level but also on the level of attitudes. And this will definitely affect their diffident attitude towards ministry by fellow lay people and their uncomplimentary and discriminatory attitudes towards women.

Proper catechetical formation of the laity on the meaning of ecclesiastical ministry will go a long way to inculcate a proper understanding of Church ministry as service, after the image of Christ who came to serve and not to be served²⁵. This will help them to understand that installation as a minister is not a title to any-

thing but to the service of the community.

IV.3 Prospects for new ministries

The Canon Law Society of Nigeria in its concluding statement at its annual Conference wrote:

*There is need for the Church in Nigeria to make more use of existing ministries and no longer shy away from actually bringing in and installing the laity to those ministries which are allowed by Canon Law. If possible, the Church in Nigeria should take steps to establish more ministries, like the ministry of Catechists*²⁶

The case for the ministries of lector and acolyte already established by universal law and complemented by the provisions of particular law has been sufficiently made. What is needed now is action by the diocesan bishops in their various dioceses to implement these provisions as the need of the Church dictates and for the good of ecclesial communion.

Even though these established ministries are not yet generally implemented in Nigeria, we still have the prospect for new and varied ministries for the Church in Nigeria. The report of a study-committee set up by the CBCN called for the establishment of the stable ministries of Holy Communion, readers, sacristans and leadership of community service²⁷. The Canon Law Commission of the CBCN made a proposal for the installation of catechists into a canonically recognized ministry²⁸. These recommendations show that new ministries are needed in the Church in Nigeria. These recommendations are no mere academic exercise but reflect the pastoral needs of the people of God.

We can see how the pastoral needs of the community determine the call for new ministries. The pastoral experience of Marcel Boivin in the diocese of Rulenge, Tanzania, for example, led him to give the following tableau of both the communities' Christian needs and of the ministries which should come into existence to answer them:

1. Prayer — Prayer-leader, (in Swahili: *Msalishi*)
2. Education — Education-animator (*mlezi*)

3. Material Welfare – Provider
4. Spiritual life – Spiritual Counsellor (*Mhuishi*)
5. Fraternal love – Peacemaker (*Mjima*)
6. Marriage – Matrimonial adviser (*Mnyumba*)
6. Unity – Servant (*Mtumishi*)²⁹

This table shows how the needs of the community determine the ministries to be established for it. Secondly, it provides for the pastoral involvement of the lay people in all the major areas of the life of the Christian community.

In Nigeria, scholars have proposed various ministries to meet the needs of the Catholic communities. Rev. Fr. Ben. Etafo advocated the establishment of the new ministries of community leaders, evangelizers, and of those who give humanitarian and social services³⁰. Bishop Gbuji, a canonist and the Chairman of the Canon Law Commission of the CBCN called for the creation of the following ministries in response to the needs of the New Era of evangelization in Nigeria: coordination, evangelization, worship, teaching and service³¹.

The ministries suggested above reflect the needs of the Church in Nigeria. I wish to make a special case for two new ministries which to my mind demand most urgent attention in the Church in Nigeria today. These ministries are those of catechists and healers/exorcists.

IV.3.1 The ministry of Catechists

Catechists were, are and will continue to be the workhorses of the Church in Nigeria. Unfortunately, their role is not uniformly appreciated. In some parts of the country, they are not given adequate training and recognition. Most of them work without any sort of training. Many of them are part-time catechists, and in most cases they work in mission stations where there is no resident priest. The result is that most catechists do a lot of work but still function inefficiently because they lack adequate training and incentives.

The diocese of Yola however, provides a happy example of how catechists are properly employed, trained and deployed. The diocese

has employed two hundred and sixty catechists on full-time basis. They were given formal and informal training before they were formally installed. While this installation does not confer ecclesiastical ministry properly speaking, it gives catechists and the catholic community a heightened sense of the mission of the catechists in the communion of the Church.

In my opinion, the formal establishment of the ministry of catechists is a crying need for the Church in Nigeria. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria should apply to the Apostolic See for its establishment. The candidates for this ministry should be carefully selected from men and women of good repute, who are prepared to devote themselves to the work of teaching, instructing, organizing and animating in the Catholic community. They should undergo an appropriate course, for a suitable length of time, in Christian doctrine, Church law, Church administration and catechetics before they are installed. After their installation, the catechetics should proudly exercise their ministry of teaching and pastoral care with the full public authority conferred on them by the Church.

The establishment of the stable ministry of catechists will ensure that a crop of dedicated, well-trained and properly motivated lay people is at the service of the Church to carry on the work of evangelization and catechesis. This will also provide for needed pastoral leadership in the Catholic community. Unlike lectors and acolytes, the ministry of catechists should be open to men and women. And for the catechists to be completely devoted to their work, they should be adequately remunerated, since the labourer is worthy of his hire.

IV.3.1i The ministry of exorcists/healers

The concern of the people in Nigeria with spiritual or faith-healing has been highlighted in many studies³². This concern has led to the proliferation of "Healing Homes" and "Prayer Houses" outside the Catholic Church and to the rise of Catholic Prayer Ministries for people with problems. People are plagued with real and imagined attacks of evil spirits, demonic possession, obsessions, influences of unclean spirits, satanic powers, infernal invaders, wicked legions, assemblies and sects, mermaids, mammy water and reincarnation, etc.³³. This phenomenon cannot be dismissed with a

wave of the hand as imagination, superstition and ignorance. It represents actual fears and concerns of the people and therefore demands a pastoral response.

Traditional-healers and faith-healers abound. Like the professional religious functionaries of traditional religion (34), priests are generally the healers and leaders of the Catholic Prayer Healing Movements (35). Even though there are lots of controversies over the practices of some Catholic priests in the healing ministry, ranging from their theological perceptions of the problem to their actual practices, which some see as either superstitious or encouraging superstition, the aspect which interests me here is the participation of lay people in the healing ministry.

Many lay people both in and outside the Charismatic Renewal Movement, have the charism of healing and, when not given a free hand, often leave the Catholic Church to be free to engage in their own faith-healing ministry. The Church needs to intervene in order to provide guidelines that respect personal charisms among the faithful, whether priests or lay people, and at the same time put order in the community so that healing will not be a free-for-all scramble. The establishment of the ministry of healer/exorcists among lay people who manifest this charism will be a response to the need of the community for deliverance and healing. At the same time, the activities of healers, both clerics and lay people, will be brought under the vigilance and control of the Church. Hence I strongly recommend that the CBCN should study the case for a healing/exorcist ministry and request its establishment for the Church in Nigeria.

V. CONCLUSION

I have presented the situation of ecclesiastical ministries in the Church in Nigeria. We have seen that the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria has made the necessary provisions required by universal law for the ministries of lector and acolyte for lay men. In practice, however very few lay men have been installed in any ministry. There is reluctance on the part of the bishops and the lay people themselves towards deputing lay people to act as Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist. There is even greater prejudice against allowing women to distribute Holy Communion.

The demands of ecclesial communion and the pastoral needs of the community of faith and worship make the installation of lay men to the ministry of lector and acolyte and the deputation of lay men and women to act as Extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist a necessity. Education of the laity in faith and church discipline is needed to conscientize them on their dignity and responsibility in the Church and to remove their spirit of diffidence with regards to accepting the ministry of lay men and women.

I believe that the Church in Nigeria has a prophetic role to play in the education of the people regarding their attitude towards women. Even though the cultural bias against women in the traditional Nigerian society seems to correspond to the exclusion of women from sacred ministry and from the stable ministries of lector and acolyte in the Church, the Church needs to review its attitude towards women in the Church in order to be truly "the light of the nations". It is difficult to sustain, on theological grounds, the exclusion of women from the ministries that are open to non-ordained people since these ministries are no longer linked necessarily with Holy Orders (which are still reserved to men).

The National Laity Council of Nigeria aptly brings out the need to integrate women fully into the Church's ministry. according to the Council.

*Since women constitute a significant majority of the church, and since they have their distinctive talents and gifts, the Church would be poorer without their active and full participation*³⁶.

By giving women equal access to ministries, offices and functions that are open to non-ordained people, the Church will be "teaching the nations" the equality of men and women before God. Such teaching will help the people of Nigeria to overcome the negative socio-cultural attitude to women in Nigeria and dispel the ignorance that originality generated the cultic taboos surrounding womanhood.

Finally, with the laity in Nigeria given the opportunity to exercise the ministries open to them-not in parallel service but in close collaboration and communion with the sacred ministers - and with

new ministries established according to the needs of the people of God in Nigeria, the Church in Nigeria will show itself a ministering complementarity community characterized by diversity and complementary of vocations, functions and roles in the building up of the Body of Christ.

REFERENCES

1. Paul VI, *Motu Proprio*, 'Ministeria quaedam', 15 August 1972 in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 64 (1972), pp. 529-534.
2. See Elissa Rinere, 'Conciliar and Canonical Applications of ministry to the Laity' in *The Jurist*, 47(1987), pp. 204-227.
3. Paul VI, 'Ministeria quaedam', nos. 1 & II.
Paul VI, 'Ministeria quaedam', no. III.
5. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, 'Christifideles laici', 30 December 1988.
6. 'Christifideles laici', no. 23
7. See Marcel Boivin, 'New Ministries: From Dream to Reality', in *African Ecclesiastical Review (AFER)*, 23, no. 5 (October 1981), pp. 260-264; 'Laity in the Renewing Church: Visions and Opportunities', in *The Jurist*, 47(1987), p. 7
8. CBCN, *Particular Complementary Norms to the Revised Code*, pp. 4-5. Particular Norms. This is a summary of the norms.
9. CBCN, *Particular Norms*, p. 6
10. CBCN, *Particular Norms*, p. 6
11. CBCN, *Particular Norms*, pp. 6-7
12. Bishop John Onaiyekan, 'The Laity and the Priesthood in the Church', A Keynote address at the National Canon Law Conference, Ibadan, 26 March 1987 (Unpublished), p. 10.
13. Vincent A. Nwosu, *The Laity and the Growth of the Catholic Church in Nigeria, The Onitsha Story 1903-1983*, African-

FEP Publishers Ltd, Onitsha, 1990, p. 146.

14. Bishop Onaiyekan, cit., p. 10
15. See Salvatore Coppo, 'A Truly African Church Structure - Lay People's Participation', in *Spearhead*, no. 99, Gaba Publications, December 1987, pp. 3-9. The Mokambi directs parish life and is completely in charge of the parish.
16. Bishop John Onaiyekan, cit.
17. S. I. Bosah mentions the priests and priestesses of Udo shrine in Onitsha in *Groundword of the History and Culture of Onitsha*, Onitsha, p. 168.
18. According to G.T. Basden, menstruation is a source of ritual uncleanness. See G. T. Basden, *Niger Ibos*, Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1966, p. 61. Mary Douglas reported the same taboos among the Lele of Kasai. A strict ritual exclusion of women from men on so many occasion was explained thus: 'sexual intercourse and menstruation are dangerous to all male activities...As women are both highly vulnerable and highly polluting some separation of male and female spheres is indicated, Daryll Forde, ed., *African Worlds*, University Press, Oxford, 1954, p. 7.
19. Bishop John Onaiyekan, cit., p.11
20. See Ikenga R. A. Ozigbo's scathing criticism of the record of the Church in Nigeria in liturgical innovations, indigenization of Catechetics, Liturgy and the Christian message, in Ikenga R. A. Ozigbo, *Igbo Catholicism, The Onitsha Connection 1967-1984*. pp. 32-35, 116-118. See also more sober assessment in Basil Kanayo Nwazojie, 'The Nigerian Hierarchy and Liturgical Inculturation in the Nigerian Church', in *Inculturation in Nigeria*, Proceedings of Catholic Bishops' Study Session, November 1988, pp. 68-69.
21. Bishop John Onaiyekan, op. cit., p. 11; See also Archbishop Peter Y. Jatau, 'Pastoral Approaches to the Formation of Laity Leaders', in G. A. Ojo and D. M. Nwadike, eds., *Laity Mobilization, Training and Formation*, Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria Publication, 1990, p. 45.

22. John Paul II, 'Christifideles laici', no. 20
23. CBCN, *Particular Norms*, p.6
24. G. A. Ojo and D. M. Nwadike, eds., *Laity Mobilization, Training and Formation*, cit., p. 78.
25. Mark 10:45
26. Canon Law Society of Nigeria, *Newsletter*, vol. 2 No. 2(December 1991), p. 13, 23.
27. See C. U. Ogu, 'Training for lay Ministries in Nigeria', Unpublished, p. 2.
28. See CBCN, *Particular Norms*, p. 7.
29. Marcel Boivin, 'New Ministries: From Dream to Reality', in *AFER*, 23, no. 5(October 1981), pp. 261-262.
30. See Ben Etafo, 'The Triplex-Munera of the Laity in Praxis: A canonical perspective', unpublished paper presented at the National Canon Law Conference, Ibadan, pp. 14-15.
31. See Bishop Anthony Gbuji, 'Ministries in the service of the New Era of Evangelization', unpublished paper at the 1991 Canon Law Conference at Abuja, pp. 23-24.
32. See G. Ikeobi, 'The Healing Ministry and Igbo Christianity', in E. Uzukwu, ed., *Religion and African Culture*, Spiritan Publications, 1988, pp. 191-201; E. Milingo, *The World in Between*, Christain Healing and Struggle for Spiritual Survival, Daystar Press, Ibadan, 1986.
33. See N. Ndiokwere, *Prophecy and Revolution*, Speck, London, 1981, pp. 114-122; Adrian Hastings *African Christianity*, Geoffery Chapman, London and Dublin, 1976, pp. 60-76; G. Ikeobi, 'Catholic Response to the Challenge of Prayer Houses - The Origins of Tuesday Prayers in Onitsha', in V. A. Nwosu, ed., *The Catholic Church in Onitsha, People, places and events 1885-1985*, Etukokwu Press Ltd, 1985, pp. 261-275; N. Ndiokwere, *Search for Security*, Freedom from sinister Forces that threaten Life in African Society, 1990, p. 28, 39-53; *A Notebook on the Devils and Exorcism*, Lead-

way Books Ltd; Emmanuel Eni, *Delivered from the Powers of Darkness*, Scripture Union Press, Ibadan. The phenomenon is not surprising because the traditional religion has a myriad of spirits and deities that must be appeased - See S. I. Bosah, op. cit., pp. 123-141; A. Shorter, *African Culture and the Christian Church*, Geoffery Chapman, London, 1973, pp. 23-24, 134; E. Ikenga-Metuh, *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions*, Inico Publishers, Onitsha, 1987, pp. 161-177; G. T. Basden, *Niger Ibos*, cit., pp. 59, 61, 193, 413.

34. See G. T. Basden, op. cit., pp. 54-55; E. Ikenga-Metuh, *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions*, cit., pp. 213-141.
35. The most famous ones are Fr. Godwin Ikeobi at Onitsha, Fr. Emmanuel Ede at Elele, Fr. Osigwe at Lagos. There are many upcoming ones too numerous to list here.
36. G. A. Ojo and D. M. Nwadike, eds., *Laity Mobilization, Training and Formation*, cit., p. 79.

Rev. Dr. Hilary Okeke is a lecturer at the Catholic Institute of West Africa, Port-Harcourt, Nigeria.