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African Journal of Contextual Theology

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TITLE: *Consecrated: A Vision of the Religious Life from the Viewpoint of the Sacred.*

AUTHOR: MarySylvia Nwachukwu, DDL

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From the very beginning of the Church, there were men and women who set out to follow Christ with greater liberty and to imitate him more closely, by practicing the evangelical councils. These, the Church by virtue of her authority, gladly accepted and approved. And have since then continued to drink from the wellspring of their consecration.

It is against the background of an exposition of the identity and contextual relevance of this consecrated group: the Religious, that one can rightly appreciate MarySylvia Nwachukwu's book: **Consecrated: A Vision of the Religious Life from the Viewpoint of the Sacred.** In this work, she creatively and professionally develops a common ground for the free interplay of the rare categories of personal experience and scholarship. The book thus joins a spate of writings on the theme of religious life but finds its own niche by concentrating on the foundational concept of consecration, armed with an energy that situates it within the circumference of the initiative and call of God. This certainly equips the religious to abate the challenges of secularisation, especially at a time like ours when secularism seems to be threatening the identity of the religious.

With a remarkable talent for making the complex and ineffable comprehensible and effable, the author analyzes the theological

content of consecration; and as a scripture scholar, it is not surprising that she employs the biblical paradigms of consecration: the Sabbath, the temple, the law and Israel, to show how God in his plan of salvation intends to claim all creation through a greater relationship with its representative parts. This is for the primary purpose of sharing in the life of God, with the secondary objective of apostolic mission.

In an interesting and thought provoking style that combines the capabilities of an artists and an exorcist, the author reflects on consecration within the parameters of the economy of salvation. As an artist, she creates a difficult network of biblical figures as examples of the different aspects of God's holiness to which the religious are called to bear witness. While Abraham stands out as an example of faith, and Moses, a prophetic model in the bearing of the word of God, David stands out as an agent of historical change. As an exorcist, the author professional employs these models as instruments for conjuring the mortified spirit of the religious to tread on new grounds.

In her characteristic genius of assembling a wealth of ideas and configuring them into something new, the author proposes the evangelical vows of chastity, poverty and obedience as the concrete way by which the religious bind themselves to God. This creates a ground for a clearer and better appreciation of the evangelical councils. It further highlights the four dimensions of the religious life: the theological, Christological, Pneumatological and ecclesial dimensions, which also shows how the religious share in the life of Christ and serve in the economy of salvation through the evangelical councils.

Nwachukwu has incensed the scholarly and spiritual worlds with

a work that is destined to be the corner stone for studies in the religious life. It is a work of great erudition and ingenuity. The book ranges over a multitude of issues upon which a short review can hardly be just, and the fertility of Nwachukwu's mind brings a welcome freshness to the subject.