

The Teaching of Consecrated Life in Major Seminaries in The African Context: Its Needs, Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract

The gift of consecrated life to the church going back centuries, maintains its uniqueness and intrinsic values right from the era of Christ, through the era of Christian monasticism till the present age. Albeit consecrated life is countercultural, it contributes immensely to the span of cultures found in the world. As such, the African culture is not left out. Thus, is there a synergy between consecrated life and African culture? Can consecrated life be taught in the African context? Is the major seminary a fitting place to teach consecrated life? What are the needs, challenges, and prospects of teaching consecrated life in major seminaries in the African context? These are not just mind-boggling questions but also status questionis to be developed within the academic system and curriculum framework, especially in the major seminaries.

In light of the richness of consecrated life, are the major seminaries undoubtedly platforms through which the importance and richness

embedded in consecrated life in the African context are preserved and consecrated persons formed as pilgrims of hope on the path to peace? While so many works have been written on consecrated Life as a unique form of life, less attention has been given to teaching this form of life in major seminaries in the African context. Arguably, to address this lack, this work of art seeks to establish and underscore the need to teach consecrated life in the Major Seminaries in the African context, the challenges and prospects involved.

Keywords: Consecrated Life, Major Seminary, and Africa.

Introduction

A Major Seminary is an educational institution whereby candidates are formed for the Sacred Priesthood and consecrated life. The seminary formation of candidates to the priesthood and consecrated life in the Catholic Church is a tradition going back centuries to the era of Jesus and his College of Apostles. Thus, Jesus could be said to be the first Vocations Director and formator, then the apostles as the seminarians.¹ What use to be an apprenticeship in the early centuries was transformed into a former and well-organized institution called the ‘Seminary’ by the council of Trent in the 19th century (1545-1563). The *modus operandi*, policy in admission, curriculum, and training recommended by the Council of Trent are periodically updated to meet the challenges of the time suitable for the priesthood and consecrated life respectively in the various continents. In line with this flexibility, the teaching of consecrated

¹ Habila T. Daboh, “The Evolution of Seminary Formation from the Apostolic Era to the Council of Trent,” *Journal of Religion and Society*, vol.10 (June, 2020): 137, <https://acjcol.org/index.php/joras/article/view/2064/1977>

life in the African context needs to be included in the periodic update of the curriculum in the major seminaries in Africa.

Benezet Bujo; an African theologian identifies one tendency in the African Theology today which dwells exclusively on the African cultural heritage. He asserts that this heritage must be one aspect of a genuinely African Theology and that any attempt to incarnate the Christian message in African culture must be considered.² This tendency seeks the understanding of the faith without any reluctance to the African cultural values. However, Pope John Paul II, in his Post-Synodal apostolic exhortation '*vita consecrata*', draws our attention to the teaching of the Church that says consecrated life is deeply rooted in the example, and teaching of Christ; a gift of God the Father to his Church through the Holy Spirit,³ it is undoubtedly lived amidst the various cultures in the world of which Africa becomes a bone of contention in this matter. We could vividly say, the seed of the Word of God is sown in the African culture thus, making the culture become one with the Gospel of Christ; who lived a life of consecration and total dedication to God. In *ratio cohaerens*, Africa becomes a seed ground for consecrated life and consecrated persons as agents of hope and evangelization.

The approach towards, and understanding of Consecrated Life in the Church in Africa has a record of poor statistics. Thus, the reflection and information contained in this article are *ad rem*. It is important to know that, Africans who respond to the call to consecrated life must first of all be taught the ideal principles of this unique form of

² Benezet Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context* (Nairobi, Pauline Publications Africa, 1999), 15.

³ Pope John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, no. 1.

life, and importantly be formed in a manner whereby the positive characteristics in the African culture would not just be appreciated but also serve as *Instrumentum laboris* to the effective witnessing of a life consecrated to God on the African continent. *Sine sensu*, why should consecrated life be contextualized in Africa? What is unique and valuable in the African cultural milieu? Why should consecrated life, Africanized be taught in the major seminaries? Should there be prospects and challenges in fusing this ingenuity into the seminary curriculum, what are they? Thus, these are the key questions this article seeks to address in its novelty as a wise pedagogue for the uninitiated and scholars alike.

Identifying the African Cultural Values

Africa is a vast continent; the second largest in the world, multiracial and multicultural. Looking at African ethnicity, there are over 3,000 ethnic groups in Africa with over 2,000 languages and rapid cultural variations that collectively contribute to a cohesive sense of African identity and social cohesion. However, the cultural values in the various cultures have both the noble and ignoble sides of them. The nobility of the African culture is valued immensely on African soil and around the globe despite the nefarious machinations against its values.

To cut to the chase, a chunk of these values corroborates with other cultural and traditional values not undermining the obvious differences based on the different regions and ethnic groups. They can serve as lenses through which one sees and comprehends the ideals of the various aspects of human life. Some of the core values shared across many African cultures include the sense of community living and shared humanity, respect for elders, extended family, and

kinship ties, respect for nature and environment, spirituality and religion, oral tradition and storytelling, work ethics and diligence, hospitality and generosity, art and aesthetics, cultural continuity, adaptability, and ethical values, etc. The submission that Africa is blessed with multifaceted gifts that cut across every sphere of her life as a continent is no fluke on the premise that the richness of her cultural heritage is a proof that God inspired all cultures. Despite the depravity in the African culture which has led many Anti-Africans to denigrate the African cultural value system, John Paul II; a pure Latitudinarian whose papacy endeared humility and gravitas, condemned the denigration, especially by the Western world of the pangs and stigma of slavery, racism, a poor democratic system, inability to reason, inadequate health facilities plagued on African cultural system and traditional values.⁴ These denigrations which became *jus ad rem* to the first special African Synod in 1994 are not enough to suppress the values in the African culture.

In addition, these values do not just have sociological importance as their central cohesive source of stability but, according to Pope Paul VI the Church sees in them the providential basis on which to transmit the evangelical message and start the construction of the new society in Christ. He added that the teaching of Christ and its redemption constitutes the fulfillment, renewal, and perfection of everything good in human tradition. This is why when an African becomes a Christian takes up the ancient values of tradition in spirit and truth⁵ because the Christian life is anchored in hope. Therefore, consecrated life as a form of life rooted in Christ does not deny cultural values but studies them to discern the noble values, and

⁴ Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 14.

⁵ Pope Paul VI, *Africae Terrarum*, no. 14.

adopts them like crude to be refined in the refineries of consecrated persons to give them a new dimension. From this backdrop, consecrated life can be thought of from an African perspective.

The Consecrated Life; A cursory Glance from The African Perspective

The term consecration is derived from the word ‘holy’ or ‘holiness’ which translates the Hebrew word ‘*qadosh*’ and its Greek equivalent ‘*hagiozo*’ are translated as “to consecrate, to make holy or to sanctify”. Consecration, therefore, relates to ideas like “total dedication” to God, and “separation for God’s service”.⁶ Equally profound, Consecrated Life according to the code of canon law is described as a stable form of life by which the faithful, following Christ more closely under the action of the Holy Spirit, is dedicated to God who is loved most of all, so that, having been dedicated by a new and special title to his honour, to the building of the church and the salvation of the world, they strive for the perfection of charity in the service of the kingdom of God and, having been made an outstanding sign in the Church, foretell the heavenly glory.⁷

From a historical perspective, this form of life was embraced by the early African ascetics such as Anthony of Egypt, Pachomius, etc. Knowing that early Africans embraced this form of life is a pride that sets the African continent on a pedestal of legacy and honour. They were the 3rd-century ascetics who are considered the heroes of the origin of Christian monasticism. In other words, they responded

⁶ Simeon Nwobi, "Consecrated Life in Nigeria and the Call to Wake Up the World," *The Catholic Voyage: African Journal of Consecrated Life*. Vol. 18, no. 1 (January 2021): 211.

⁷ *Code of Canon Law*, 573 § 1.

radically to Christ's invitation to follow him (Matt. 16:24) by living an anchoritic and coenobitic lifestyle in the desert.⁸ They are described as wandering ascetics who wandered in the desert for the love of God. In contrast, this form of life uniquely differs from other forms of life in the Church by the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience professed by consecrated persons.⁹

A cursory glance at the African tradition and cultural milieu reveals that Africa practices some purification rites for mystical experiences. These mystical experiences are a quintessential part of the cultural heritage of the traditional Africans. Such experiences form part of formative encounters that influence their worldviews and general orientation about life done through some sacred phenomena understood to be consecrated or made sacred. Before the emergence of Christianity, the idea of separation, sanctifying, and the offering of a thing, person, animate or inanimate objects, place, and time to a deity already existed in primitive African cultures. Thus, both in consecrated life and in the African culture, the setting apart connotes exclusively a withdrawal from profanity to the state of purity. More so, the synergy between the African consecration and the religious consecration lies in the purpose for which phenomena are set apart and the conscious reverence for the sacred. While consecrated life emphasizes on the call to holiness of life, Africa also prime the idea of 'Sacred' which spur mystical experiences and call for holiness.

⁸ Isaac Padinjarekuttu, *Consecrated Life through Two Millennia* (Mumbai: Bandra: Pauline Pub., 2008), 8-9.

⁹ Pope Paul X, *Perfectae Caritatis*, no. 1.

Consecrated Life and The African World

The word vocation is from the Latin word ‘*vocare*’ which means to call. The theology of vocation begins with a God who calls and the consequential logic is a response from the one called. This interplay makes it a divine encounter that involves a Superior Being who initiates the calling; the Supreme is the Subject while the recipient; a finite being who receives the call is the object. The call is geared towards embracing any of the three states of life in the Church¹⁰: the Laity¹¹ (married or single), Priesthood¹², and Consecrated Life¹³.

As sagacious as many traditional Africans are, most Africans avidly perceive the consecrated life as a namby-pamby, and strange lifestyle reserved for the Western world. In this ill and sentimental perception, they discourage the vocation to the consecrated life and even the priesthood. The church’s reaction to this disposition is not hostile rather in her wisdom, she encourages and calls for the Africanization of consecrated life by inculturating authentic and noble African values to prove that Africans can also embrace this form of life. Interestingly, the Congregation for Institute of Consecrated Life and Society of Apostolic Life asserts that the Africanization of consecrated life with no staggering authority requires that the consecration to God is lived in the social-cultural

¹⁰ Cf. *Canon Law*, no. 207 § 1.

¹¹ Pope John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici: On the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World*, no. 1.

¹² Vatican Council II, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, no. 1.

¹³ *Vita Consecrata*, no. 1.

context proper to Africa and that it may be seen by those around as a manifestation of real love of God and neighbours.¹⁴

From a lucid study of Africans and their consciousness of the Divine, Africans truly understand that human life is a gift from God and that what they do with their life is an appreciation back to God. With a deep connection to the Divine, Africans believe that human life has a purpose for which it is created. While Africans feel the nudge of what God wants of them in human society, God calls them to participate in life beyond them, to contribute to the growth of human society, to care for God's creation, and to be life-giving. As such, Africans are not just attached to the inner call of embracing a life of holiness, also Vocation to the consecrated life is flourishing in Africa.

Interestingly, within the purview of the theology of vocation, the vocation to the consecrated life is the willful embrace of a unique state of life rooted in Christ to attain holiness of life and an intimate relationship with God; a course also valued by the Africans. While the Africans attain this through some ancient African cultural tenets, consecrated persons attain this height through faithful adherence to the evangelical counsels and other characteristic traits of consecrated life which are also reflected succinctly in the African culture and tradition.

¹⁴ Congregation for Institute of Consecrated Life and Society of Apostolic Life and the Congregation for the Evangelization of People as *Message to Religious Men and Women of Africa*, October 1976, published 3 June 1978, n.3.

Characteristic Traits of Consecrated Life

The consecrated life is meant to make the characteristic traits of virginal, poor, and obedient Jesus visible¹⁵ which reflect the evangelical counsels. More so, other characteristic traits include community life, mission, charism, apostolate, etc. Definitively, consecrated life in the Church is made by and effected by means of these characteristic traits. Since we are doing an African study, an African view of these characteristic traits would be invaluable and reveals why consecrated life needs to be taught in African context in the major seminaries.

The Evangelical Counsels

The evangelical counsels are the core pillars of consecrated life. By evangelical counsels, we mean the profession of the vows of Chastity, Poverty, and Obedience. They are called evangelical counsels because they pave way to the perfection of charity which according to Aquinas is the end of the religious state.¹⁶ These counsels in the contention of Monica are within a permanent state of life recognized by the Church, and they characterize the life consecrated to God.¹⁷ Lumen Gentium maintains that: The evangelical counsels of chastity dedicated to God, poverty and obedience are based on the words and examples of the Lord. They

¹⁵ Congregation for Institute of Consecrated Life and Society of Apostolic Life: *The Service of Authority and Obedience*, Rome, 2008, 1,

https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccsclife/documents/rc_con_ccsclife_doc_20080511_autorita-obbedienza_en.html

¹⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, secunda secundae partis, Q. 187, art. 2.

¹⁷ Monica Roland, Approach to Deepening the Knowledge and Understanding of Consecrated Life among the Laity in the Church in Nigeria, *The Catholic Voyage: African Journal of Consecrated Life*, vol. 11 (2015): 93.

were further commanded by the Apostles and Fathers of the Church, as well as by the doctors and pastors of souls.¹⁸ They are means through which holiness of life is attained by consecrated persons. The profession of the evangelical counsels constitutes a special consecration rooted in the baptismal consecration of every consecrated person as a fuller expression of it. This gift of themselves to the Church awakens their sense of dedication and service to the Church, fostering the practice of virtues such as humility and obedience, fortitude, and chastity as a way of emptying themselves.¹⁹

The code of canon law acknowledges the profession of evangelical counsels as an act that makes consecrated life a stable form of living;²⁰ an espousal act with absolute restrictions from whatever would affect its stability. As such, authentic African culture and traditional values are not ignorant of rules, laws, regulations, decency, and discipline as regards the sexuality of Africans, obeying elders and authority, moderate lifestyle and their lives generally. Like the evangelical counsels that guard the lives of those consecrated to God, there are also moral norms and customs guarding the lives of Africans. Thus, evangelical counsels reflect the African ethical framework and social norms that guide the behavior of Africans, to be conscious of the Divine and a life of holiness.

Chastity: By the vow of chastity, consecrated persons permanently offer up marriage, physical and sexual intimacy, and procreation, in the imitation of Christ who was chaste and invited those who have

¹⁸ Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 43.

¹⁹ *Perfectae Caritatis*, no. 5.

²⁰ Canon Law, 573 § 1.

been given the grace of the same path to follow. It is total abstinence, sacrifice, and unity of one's will with God permanently.²¹ Across African cultures, sexuality, and chastity have an etch mark on the lives of the young and old in the African society. Before the Western religious introduced the vowed life of chastity to Africa, the life of purity was already embedded in the cultural heritage of Africa which is reinforced by the African belief in morality and tenets of good behaviour²². Thus, the culture protects, nurtures, and reveres the "*traditional*" vow of chastity.

In some African cultures, within the corridors of the palace of the king, in as much as the Church does not support castration, the palace slaves are forced into sexual abstinence by being castrated. This is done to prevent them from sexual promiscuity with any of the king's numerous wives. Betrayal of the throne with sexual interaction between the king's wives and slaves is a taboo and attracts death penalty to the victims. Hence, celibacy and chastity in the palace were by compulsion. From a relatively specific stance, the Yoruba culture values legitimate procreation for the sake of continuity in the family, and the procreation of illegitimate children otherwise known as bastards attracts repercussions in Yoruba culture. Contaminated blood of the royal lineage could bring curses on the community and the lineage. The only way to restrain and control the mingling of the forbidden blood on the future throne is the castration of the slaves. Significantly, the African Eunuch mentioned in (Acts 8:26-40) was a model of African cultural chastity. It is emphatic that African culture had the morals of chastity and enforced them. A eunuch

²¹ Perfectae Caritatis, no. 14.

²² Theresa Olaitan, "African Perspective of Chastity" (Seminar Presentation, Abuja, African Institute of Consecrated Life, 13 February, 2022). Accessed on 15 July, 2024.

castrated for a trusted servitude to a king to prevent sexual activity in the palace is an African tradition that Consecrated life has emulated with novelty highly dignified.

More so, for certain sacrifices to be accepted by the gods and goddesses in some African cultures, they must be offered by virgins. A quintessential example is the age-long Osun Oshogbo festival in the western region of Nigeria which demands that the “*Arugba*”, also known as the 'calabash carrier', has a large calabash on her head that contains the sacrifices of the entire community and those offered by the people in attendance to the goddess of Osun River. Every “*Arugba*” must remain a virgin (Chaste) during her time in the role. Her virginity is sacred and powerful as that could only be worthy of appeasing the goddess for the entire community.²³ The Consecrated persons who imitate the chaste Christ are challenged to appease “God” who invites them to a radical followership of Him with their chaste life by living out the vowed life. The rich cultural heritage of African culture contributes immensely to living out the vowed life of chastity. Consecrated persons in Africa must live out the cultural heritage of chaste life within a life consecrated to holiness. In the contemporary world of homogenization of culture and sexuality, religious must nurture and protect the value of chastity as the bedrock of vowed life in Africa.

Poverty: The Evangelical Poverty embraced in imitation of Christ, who for our sake was made poor, entails a life that is poor in reality and spirit, sober and industrious, and a stranger to earthly riches.²⁴ It is a commitment consecrated persons make to live without the quest

²³ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-49367967>

²⁴ Canon Law, 600

for personal wealth and material possessions. Through this vow consecrated persons imitate the life of Jesus who was born poor in a manger,²⁵ living in poverty had nowhere to lay his head,²⁶ died, and was buried in a borrowed tomb.²⁷ Such life can be summed up as an austere lifestyle suitable as a blueprint for the life of poverty embraced by consecrated persons.

Furthermore, the vow of poverty is not a recession into a state of wretchedness or an irrational denial of some basic human needs by consecrated persons. Rather, the vow of poverty entails a total dependence on God's divine providence, and limitation in the use and disposition of goods according to the law of the institute they belong. The necessity, which is so imperative today, of fraternal sharing must preserve its evangelical value. According to the expression in the *Didache*, "If you share eternal goods, with all the more reason should you share the goods that perish."²⁸ According to Paul VI, poverty lived by pooling goods, including pay, will testify to the spiritual communion uniting them; it will be a living call to all the rich and will also bring relief to their needy brothers and sisters. The legitimate desire to exercise personal responsibility will not only find expression in the enjoyment of one's income but in the fraternal sharing of the common good.²⁹

The contention of Paul VI mirrors not just the benefits entailed in the praxis of the vow of poverty but also in a sublime way points to the African traditional practice of frugality and the communal sharing of

²⁵ New Jerusalem Bible, Reader's Ed., Luke 2:7

²⁶ *Ibid*, Luke 9:58

²⁷ *Ibid*, Luke 23:50-56

²⁸ *Didache*, IV, 8; cf. Acts 4:32.

²⁹ Pope Paul VI, *Evangelium Testificatio*, no. 21

common goods for all. A practice that corroborates Paul's theology of *kenosis*; the self-emptying of Christ who is rich but made himself poor so that we might be rich.³⁰ The traditional Africans have a heart of compassion and looking out for the others, and discomforting themselves for the comfort of others. In the rich tapestry of the African culture, it is believed that a life not shared is a life not lived. This is a grassroot African cultural practice highly valued.

Obedience: Etymologically, the word obedience is from the Latin word *ob-audire* meaning to listen intently or to open one's ear to heed in practice. It designates the willingness to hear others and do their will. It refers to hearing God and obeying the divine will which manifests itself in the will of other persons in authority.³¹ The evangelical counsel of obedience, undertaken in the spirit of faith and love in the following of Christ, who was obedient even unto death, obliges submission of one's will to lawful superiors, who act in the place of God when they give commands that are in accordance with each institute's own constitution.³²

The obedience of Jesus is the core theological foundation of religious obedience. Gerard Nwagwu affirms that the vow of obedience is founded on the "example of Christ who was obedient to the Father until death, death on a Cross (Phil 2:8).³³ Thus, Christ is the model of obedience for all religious institutions as one who serves, as one to whom consecrated persons profess their unalloyed faith, and as

³⁰ 2 Cor. 8:9

³¹ John W. Crossin, "Obedience" in *The New Dictionary of Theology* Joseph A. Komonchak et al (eds) (Bangalore: Theological Publications, 1996) 720.

³² Canon Law, 601.

³³ Gerard Nwagwu, *Consecrated Life in the Church: Discipline and Praxis*, (Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt, 2013) 167.

one to whom consecrated persons offer their free will in obedience. It is so interesting to know that the entire life of Jesus on earth is centered on listening to the Father; his food is to do the will of his Father.³⁴ Like Christ, consecrated persons through a constant saying of YES place their will in the hands of the Father to make a perfect and pleasing sacrifice to him. Thus, obedience is one pillar of consecrated life because it offers valid assistance to live the commandment of love in the daily lives of persons consecrated to God.

Obedience and the loyal submission of one's will to a higher authority is not a strange practice in African culture. It is considered a virtue in the African culture understood in a wider context of respect and obedience to parents, elders, hierarchy, and authority. Obedience in African culture is not meant to be servile. It is marked by a deep sense of moral responsibility and uprightness. Children in Africa are taught to obey and respect their parents, elders and authority from their early stage. They are trained to unconditionally respect anyone who is older than them. Therefore, elders in Africa are regarded equal to authority and as such have to be respected. Africans are taught blind obedience whereby they are not to question nor argue about the decisions, rules, teachings, or dogma shoved into them. An objection to given instruction is considered disobedience to instituted authority and an insult in the African culture. Sequel, African culture produces obedient children who turn into obedient adults who do not have the guts to stand up to authority. This is cultural disability which the evangelical counsel of obedience has illuminated. This is why John Paul II states that "Obedience, practiced

³⁴ John 4:34

in imitation of Christ, whose food was to do the Father's will shows the liberating beauty of a dependence which is not servile but filial, marked by a deep sense of responsibility and animated by mutual trust, which is a reflection in history of the loving harmony between the three Divine Persons."³⁵

Community life

In the first century, the Christian life was largely influenced by two motives in the Jewish culture which are the idea of a shared community living and an outright withdrawal from the world (*fuga mundi*). A section of the history of the early Christians written by the evangelist Luke articulates the communal lifestyle embraced by the Christians as at the time. Luke emphasized that all the believers continued together in close fellowship and shared their belongings with one another. They would sell their property and possessions, and distribute the money among all, according to what each one needed.³⁶ In a remarkable turn of events, some individuals in the early centuries decided to live life of holiness in the bid to pursue salvation by withdrawing into the deserts. These early deserters influenced by the prevailing preexisting hermitic traditions, were from Egypt, and they pursue holiness of life through mortification, fasting, selflessness and meditation. As they grew, there emerge two groups of monks: anchorites and cenobites who led communal lives. The word cenobitic is rooted in the Greek word for community. From this historical trace, community life is an important aspect of consecrated life whereby members of various religious communities share in common some values such as prayer, meals, regular worship, etc. this aspect of their life fosters unity and love

³⁵ Vita Consecrata, no. 21

³⁶ Acts 2:44-45

exemplified in the life of Jesus and his Apostles and the early desert fathers.

Importantly, this idea of communal living is evident in the African culture. The communal nature of the African society has its linchpin on the believe that all human beings are members of one family. This principle brings to the fore the popular dictum of the African philosopher, Mbiti; I am because we are, and since we are, therefore, I am. The place of community amongst Africans has a dignifying place so much so that Africans are mutually supportive and have the natural quest to contribute to the community for their well-being.

The Need of Teaching Consecrated Life in Major Seminaries in the African Context

From the above African overview on consecrated life, the rich treasures imbedded in this unique vocation in the African world can be preserved by teaching this form of life in major seminaries in Africa. This is unarguably a necessity as the seminary is considered a seed ground for nurturing and preserving vocation to the priesthood and consecrated life. The major seminaries which contain both the diocesan and religious seminarians, should meticulously teach and guard the Sacred Tradition of the Church; a gift of God to the Church. This gift includes the gifts of the sacred priesthood and consecrated life.

Speaking on the collaborative ministry, both the religious and diocesans through the teaching of consecrated life in major seminaries would be adequately equipped to promote vocation to the consecrated life especially to Africans who wish to embrace this form of life. It is quite absurd if diocesans have no clue of what

consecrated life entails when aspirants approach them for clarity and accompaniment while discerning their vocation. Since there are both diocesan seminarians and religious brothers studying in major seminaries, there is a great need to foster first of all a healthy relationship between the Diocesans and the Religious for effective collaborative ministry in a more contextualized manner. Such a noble course would improve the unified forces in order to maximize and purify certain aspects of the African culture.

In furtherance, the teaching of the theology of consecrated life in the African context attracts a serious demand since it entails the exploration of the African culture whereby without bias, the noble aspects of the culture are synchronized with the principles of consecrated life. This would pave way to better understand the African culture, her strength and weakness so as to bring in novelties where needed by making the encounter between consecrated life and the ancient African tradition and culture alive and effective. In point of fact, they must imbibe in their lives and the seminary/religious communities all that is true and noble in the African culture that can enrich consecrated life some of which include the adoption of locally made instruments, and musical lyrics weaved with the fabrics of African local dialects to animate the liturgy; the summit through which the activities of the Church are directed³⁷ and those of consecrated persons. More so, the adoption of the African arts as one of the noblest activities of Africans into the liturgy for the Church has always been the patron of the fine arts who seeks their noble ministry, to the end especially that all things set apart for use in

³⁷ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 10.

divine worship should be worthy, becoming and beautiful, signs and symbols of things supernatural.³⁸

The consecrated life eloquently shows that the more one lives in Christ, the better one can serve him in others, going even to the furthest missionary outposts and facing the greatest dangers. Thus, consecrated persons in Africa must realize that by the virtue of their call are at the service of humanity especially in Africa as pilgrims of hope. They imitate Christ on a journey of hope and stretch *ad infinitum* the humanity of Christ who out of love for humanity made himself servant, promote peace, and holiness of life in a broken society like Africa.³⁹ By their call, they encourage works of solidarity and fraternal communion in the society like Africa where hopes are almost dashed into the tin air.

Challenges and Prospects

The seminary structure

In times past, the structure in the major seminaries in Nigeria lacked the teaching of consecrated as a course. The absence of Consecrated Life as a course in the seminary curriculum is serious challenge to consecrated life not just as a course but importantly as a vocation. Such absence has created a huge vacuum, especially in the African Church. Faced with such a vacuum, the valuation placed on Consecrated life as the charismatic dimension of the Church is undervalued by many especially those who are not called to embrace this form of life; clergy and lay faithful alike.

³⁸ *Ibid*, no. 122.

³⁹ *Vita Consecrata*, no. 76.

In this challenge, two things are to be considered. The structure itself and those who define the structure. An existing structure is a picture of those who construct them. It speaks of the wide range experience of those who define them, their flexibility and vision. Thus, consecrated life as a course can be included in the curriculum. The inclusion of this discipline into the structure of the major seminaries in Nigeria would pave way for many prospects in the major seminaries and in the field. Persons define the structure and make necessary adjustments subsequently according to the signs of times. As such, before such inclusion is done, those who define the structure must be open and docile to accepting the richness of this noble discipline without which such innovation will not fester. More so, it will bring about a balanced structure which would be more inclusive.

Trained and qualified personnel

The consecrated life is, and has been approved as a vital aspect of theology in the Church. Thus, it is now a discipline to be studied title ‘The Theology of Consecrated Life’. In this discipline, theologians explore in a profound manner the charismatic nature of the life of Christ and the ascetic lifestyles of the early hermits down to the present century. This exploration includes the proper study of the foundation, nature, and characteristics/properties of consecrated life especially in the African context. This intellectual exploration is a cognitive prospect and add-on in the theological scope of the Church. However, the obvious challenge is that trained personnel in this field of study are relatively scarce to take up the task of teaching the theology of consecrated life in the African context in major seminaries.

As observed, those who take up consecrated life are canonists who have gone through wilder study of the canonical jurisprudence of the Church. Their approach to the sections of the canon law on consecrated life are not in-depth, they are more statutory and juridical. The properties of consecrated life are found in other documents of the Church published specifically on consecrated life which touch the nature and characteristics of consecrated life and the lived experience as a religious is ultimately essential. This gap would necessitates training more personnel in this field.

Cooperation in collaborative ministry

Diocesan priests are to work in collaboration with consecrated persons as pilgrims of hope on the way to peace in every local Church. Time and again, consecrated persons are seen as rivals or competitors in what supposed to be collaborative ministry. In the ecclesial dimension of the Church, a diocese is said to be incomplete without the presence of the consecrated persons. John Paul II emphasized clearly on the fundamental importance of cooperation between consecrated persons and Bishops for the organic development of diocesan pastoral life. The charisms of the consecrated life can greatly contribute to the building up of charity in the particular Churches. More so, a Diocese which lacked the consecrated life would not only be deprived of many spiritual gifts, of suitable places for people to seek God, of specific apostolic activities and pastoral approaches, but it would also risk a great weakening of that missionary spirit which is characteristic of the majority of Institutes. There is a duty then to respond to the gift of

the consecrated life which the Spirit awakens in the particular Churches, by welcoming it with generosity and thanksgiving.⁴⁰

Thus, the teaching of consecrated life in seminary in the African context would foster a healthy relationship between the Diocesan priests and consecrated persons. This healthy relationship should be built right from the seminary formation before they are launched into the ministry. It will spur both consecrated persons and diocesan seminarians as joint forces towards a fruitful missionary witnessing within the local Church as pilgrims of hope especially in the African world.

Conclusion

Africa, *ex novo* is a seed ground for sacredness. Her cultural heritage is woven in a way that she tends toward the Divine. The presence of consecrated persons in a culture richly blessed expects nothing but a life oriented towards God. This is why the Church in Africa is blessed with the presence of many religious and consecrated persons. Bridled with the consciousness of the Divine, consecrated persons in Africa understand that the call to consecrated life is always the fruit of a personal encounter and love with the mystery of Christ; an extension of the baptism in which consecrated persons become more prophetic.

Thus, we have established herein that consecrated Life is unarguably a gift to the Church in Africa. Its nature and characteristics, when faithfully lived contributes immensely to the African culture. The

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, no. 48.

richness of this form of life is best preserved in the major seminaries through the very act of teaching. Such pedagogical necessity in the curriculum of the major seminaries when contextualized in Africa enriches the span of African cultural milieu, invites consecrated persons to promote holiness of life, strengthen faith and fraternal communion within the African Church.

To Africanize consecrated life, consecrated persons must toe firmly the paths of justice and peace, reconciliation and sacramental penance, solidarity in mission, and the joyful experience in the service of God. This form of life, which depicts the charismatic nature of the Church, endears major contributions to both the Church in Africa. Owing to this importance, its inclusion in the curriculum of the major seminaries, that is, teaching it in the African context is ultimately needed.

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