



Consecrated Persons and the Prophetic Voice in Nigerian Socio-politics: An Imperative for Nation-building

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Abstract

Faced with the evils of corrupt socio-politicking and the ills of postmodernity, most consecrated persons in Nigeria are blindsided in their approach to critiquing the various socio-political, cultural, and philosophical worldviews that have continuously destroyed the dignity of human life. They have either remained complacent or lack the morality and religious impetus to condemn the prevailing socio-political ills of our time. Hence, these deficiencies place a question mark on their identity as consecrated persons and importantly the place of consecrated persons in Nigeria. In a remarkable turn of events and generations, consecrated persons have continuously struggled to discern and engage the prophetic nature of their religious calling following the re-occurring maladies of socio-politicking in Nigeria. How have we arrived at a world that dismisses prophetic witnessing as a mark of religious witnessing? What use are consecrated persons if they remain cavaliers in the face of such socio-political ills? How would consecrated persons exercise their prophetic force and identity as signs of contradictions if they dance to the piper's tune and empty promises of greedy socio-political urchins? To respond to the challenging situation, this work seeks to unmask the socio-problems that challenge the foundation of our religious beliefs. To define the place of consecrated persons in Nigerian socio-politics; to exercise their prophetic voices as signs of contradictions and imperative for nation building.

Keywords: Consecrated persons, Prophetic voices, Politics, Nation-building.

Introduction

The place of consecrated persons and the prophetic voice in Nigerian socio-politicking; is an imperative for nation-building, apart from being an intellectual curiosity, it is the outworking of experiential and practical considerations from consecrated persons in Nigeria in relation to politics. The effects of socio-politicking as a noble art of a particular postmodern nation/society are felt by all irrespective of one's class or status.

The practice of politics underscores a moment that travels a little back in time with the intention of revamping the amiable wishes implicit in the obscure labors of a people's forebears, alongside the hope of translating these wishes to the present, and for the betterment of the future.¹

The art of socio-politicking in Nigeria is quite shifty and horrendous. Its rhythm has shifted from its positive ideal to a Niccolo Machiavellian (1469-1527) kind of politicking where morality is completely expunged from politics, the virtuous are either exterminated or compensated in the bid to out-smart opponents on a platter of deception, shrewdness, crafty and arrogance. The narrative of such political intrepid; dangerous to the dignity of human life has to be changed. Thus, on the spur of the moment, consecrated persons in Nigeria fit well into answering the reoccurring existential questions of; who would bail the cat? Who would speak boldly to powers and authorities so as to revive the hope of the people? Such

¹ Emmanuel Ukata., *In the Company of a Legend* (Enugu: Claretian Publications, 2002), 89.

intrepidity underscores in a lucid and elegant manner the identity of consecrated persons, the prophetic voice, and their place in the Nigerian socio-politicking as imperative for nation-building.

The lives of some consecrated persons in the postmodern nation/society such as Nigeria are nothing to compare with the identity of consecrated life nor models of prophetic voices. In the biblical tradition, there are models of prophetic voices who stood against especially socio-political ills at the time they existed. On the contrary, some consecrated persons do not mingle in politics; their voices are silent in the face of obvious socio-political deficiencies, some in seeking favors, political appointments, and rewards have been compensated, and become cavaliers that we do not know where they belong. Consequently, these instances create a huge lacuna and show how consecrated persons in Nigeria are dealing with it as a challenge.

Definition of Key Terms

i. Consecrated Persons

The term consecration is derived from the word 'holy' or 'holiness' which translates the Hebrew word 'קֹדֶשׁ - *qadosh*' and its Greek equivalent 'ἁγιάζω - *hagiozo*' 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".² Thus, consecrated persons are those who, out of their own volition are separated and dedicated to the service of; in sequela Christi through the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience.

² Simeon Nwobi., "Consecrated Life in Nigeria and the Call to Wake Up the World," *The Catholic Voyage: African Journal of Consecrated Life* 18, no. 1 (January 2021): 211.

ii. *Prophetic Voice*

The word ‘προφήτης - *prophetes*’ is a Greek word that connotes ‘one who speaks for, before or in favour of’.³ Thus, a prophet could be understood as a person with divine or supernatural insight, foresight, or inspiration received from God to act as an intermediary between the divine realm and the human realm.

From the etymological meaning, a prophet does not only involve himself in divinely related issues but also the sociological welfare of the people he represents. This is why according to Rahner, the figure of a prophet, in various modifications, is a phenomenon in the history and sociology of all religions which are constituted within a major cultural potential; he is an envoy of God who is always a revolutionary critiquing the society in the name of God.⁴

The prophetic voice is the spoken word of the prophet, constitutive of the prophet and his task. It is not just a neutral record says Rahner but a criticism of religion and society and an interpretation of historical events.⁵ The prophetic voice is imperatively translated into real action as a leader and organizer of both religious and social change.

iii. *Politics*

The term politics is derived from two Greek words ‘πόλις - *polis*’ meaning city and ‘τέχνη - *techne*’ meaning an art, skill, craft or method. Politics therefore is the act of governmental regulations of the relationship among the individual members of a society.⁶

³ Irene Nowell, ‘Prophet/Prophecy’, in the *Collegeville Pastoral Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Carroll Stuhlmueller (Bangalore: India: Liturgical Press, 1996), 784.

⁴ Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise *Sacramentum Mundi*, s.v., “Prophetism.”

⁵ Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise *Sacramentum Mundi*, s.v., “Prophetism.”

⁶ Appadorai Arjun. *The Substance of Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 3.

iv. Nation-Building

Nation-building is a process of constructing or structuring a national identity and well-being with the aim of unifying the people within a particular nation, its political stability and viability in the long run. In a functional understanding of nation-building, both the economic and social-political factors are seen as influential.⁷

A nation like Nigeria drenched in corruption needs prophetic agents to constantly remind the powers that be, the submission of Alberto that a nation stay together when citizens share enough values and preferences and can communicate with one another.⁸ Homogeneity amongst people is built not by outsiders if that means creating or repairing all the cultural, social-political and historical ties that bind the people together as a nation.

The Objective Ideal of Politicking

The art of politics is not evil in itself rather it involves the art of organizing men in a society to live and interact with each other to the full realization of their social nature. In a remarkable turn of events, perhaps before the institution of a state, men had always expressed their affairs oftentimes in an exclusively selfish and lawless manner. This way of life necessitated a number of political theories right from the Golden Age. Plato (427-347 BC) developed a political theory connected with his ethics whereby goodness is acquired not in selfish

⁷ Harris Mylonas & Maya Tudor, "Nationalism: What We Know and What We Still Need to Know." *Annual Review of Political Science* 25, no. 1. (May 2021), 109. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Nationalism%3A-What-We-Know-and-What-We-Still-Need-to-Mylonas-Tudor/b55431510dee3592b02553e4917b33923ca2b53a>

⁸ Alberto Alesina and Bryony Reich, *Nation-Building: Working Paper*, Department of Economics, Harvard University, (February 2015), 1. <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:dash.current.terms-of-use#LAA>

isolation but in a group. Aristotle on his part holds that political society exists for the well-being of its citizens.⁹

Thomas Hobbes affirms the selfish nature of man when he stated that man lived in a state of natural warfare, a state of *homo homini lupus*; a condition under which man is a wolf to his fellow man. Thus, he understood the objective of politics as a process whereby man entrusts his rights and power to a sovereign he classed as the great Leviathan, a mortal god who acts like the Hegelian Absolute. However, the bone of contention looming large in the political theories aforesaid, is the objective ideal of politicking that is, the well-being of human existence.

1. A Historical Glance at the Nigerian Politics

A cursory glance into the history of politics in Nigeria though not exhaustive, reveals its complex nature and the various phases that form its characteristics such as the pre- cum colonial rules, independence, military dictatorship, and democratic governance. During the Pre-Colonial era (16th – 18th C), Nigeria was home to several kingdoms and empires such as the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo societies, each with its distinct political systems, governance structures, and cultures.¹⁰ These societies had well-established political hierarchies and systems of administration.¹¹

⁹ Aristotle, Politics, Book 1, Section 1253a.

¹⁰ Ajayi Jacob Festus and Ikara Bashir, "Introduction: Nigeria's Evolutionary Political Culture: Issues and Processes," in *Evolution of Political Culture in Nigeria*, ed., Jacob Festus Ajayi & Bashir Ikara, (Ibadan: Nigeria, Ibadan University Press, 1985), 2-3.

¹¹ Osadolor Osarhieme and Leo Otoide, "State Formation in Precolonial Nigeria: A Historiographic Assessment." In *Pre-Colonial Nigeria: Essays in Honor of Toyin Falola*. Ed. Falola Toyin & Akinwunmi Ogundiran, 159-172. Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press.

However, Nigeria became a British protectorate in the late 19th century with various regions and ethnic groups falling under British control; a colonial administration that implemented indirect rule in specific areas using traditional rulers to govern while in other regions, a direct colonial rule was established.¹²

In the historical track of events was the struggle for independence which gained momentum after the World War II. Nigerian nationalists such as Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo and Ahmadu Bello advocated for self-rule. Hence, in 1960, Nigeria gained independence from the British colonial rule with federal system of government and a parliamentary system.¹³ The independence birthed the first republican government (1960-1966) characterized by regionalism, ethnic tensions and power tussles between political parties, political instability, and a 'military coup'¹⁴ in 1966.¹⁵ A series of military coups led to a prolonged period of

¹² Adiele Afigbo, "Background to Nigerian Federalism: Federal Features in the Colonial State," *Publius*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (1991), 13.

¹³ Martin Meredith, *The Fate of Africa: A History of Fifty Years of Independence* (New York: Public Affairs Publishing, 2005), 195.

¹⁴ A coup d'état began in Nigeria on 15 January 1966, when rebellious soldiers led by Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu and Adewale Ademoyega killed 22 people including the prime minister of Nigeria, many senior politicians, many senior Army officers and their wives, and sentinels on protective duty. The coup plotters attacked the cities of Kaduna, Ibadan, and Lagos while also blockading the Niger and Benue River within a two-day timespan before being subdued. The General Officer Commanding the Nigerian Army, Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi, was compelled to take control of the government of a country in upheaval, inadvertently putting Nigeria's nascent democracy on hold. His ascendancy to power was deemed a conspiracy by the coup plotters, who were majorly Igbo Majors, to pave the way for General Aguiyi-Ironsi to be the first Military head of state of Nigeria. Consequently, the retaliatory events by Northern members of the Nigerian Army that led to deaths of many innocent Igbo soldiers and civilians caused the Nigerian Civil War.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1966_Nigerian_coup_d%27%C3%A9tat

¹⁵ Martin Meredith, *The Fate of Africa: A History of Fifty Years of Independence*, 198.

military rule. General Yakubu Gowon took over power after the 1966 coup and led Nigeria through the civil war (1967-1970) sparked by the secession of the Republic of Biafra. The conflict resulted in millions of deaths. However, Gowon was later overthrown in a coup by General Murtala Muhammed in 1975, who was succeeded by General Olusegun Obasanjo.

In 1979 a dawn emerged, a new constitution was introduced leading to the return of civilian rule in what is called a second republic. This new turn in history could not bring to an end the socio and political maladies in the Nigerian socio-political landscape. It was marked by economic challenges, allegations of corruption, and political instability which led to another military coup in 1983 up until 1999.

The shifty nature of the political system in Nigeria transitioned into a fourth Republic in 1999; the longest period of democratic governance in Nigeria. Thus, the civilian-led government failed to improve the living standards of average Nigerians. Bridled with unemployment, inflation, and corruption, Richard observed that Nigeria is presently one of the world's most impoverished countries. It is further plagued with insecurity in the forms of terrorism, kidnapping, armed robbery, and violent conflicts. In the political sphere, election fraud and gross indiscipline are pervasive.¹⁶

The intermittence in the historical trajectory of Nigerian politics is supposedly driven by the motive of nation building as an ideal objective of politics. On the contrary, socio, cultural and political ills aggravated, innumerable lives became impoverished and the dignity of human life is trampled underfoot. The political environment in

¹⁶ Richard L. Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties: Power in an Emergent African Nation*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963), 73.

Nigeria has featured severe contestations among the country's diverse ethnic groups. This legacy of contestations has created a multi-layered and multi-faceted political structure that is peculiar to Nigeria. The presence of incompetent, unpatriotic and corrupt leaders has hindered the development of politics and Nigeria as a nation right from her political inception to the present dispensation. As a matter of fact, the corrupt political mantra in the just concluded election was "Grab it, snatch it, and run with it." Consequently, both the INEC and the Judiciary system have been grabbed, snatched, and reduced to agents of one political party.

2. The Ignoble Shenanigans of Nigerian Politics

The ideal objective of politics has been dethroned as far as Nigerian politics is concerned. The derogatory and pejorative appellation given to politics as a 'dirty game' mirrors the demeaning of the noble art and a severe avalanche of political anomaly in Nigeria. The politics in Nigeria has no doubt been influenced by the Niccolo Machiavellian notion of politics whereby morality is extricated completely from politics, making politics a game in which the virtuous are excluded and politicians in similitude believe that politics is a game in which the smartest out-best their opponent. The only means politicians could survive in the precarious art of governing, Ukata blithely observes is by being shrewd, crafty, arrogant, and deceptive.¹⁷ Thus, like Machiavelli, the end of anything justifies the means whether the means are fair, foul, or gory. Nigerian politicians without an iota of conscience robe themselves in corruption as in vices such as greed, nepotism, lack of patriotism and true spirit, partisan sentimentalism, godfatherism, etc. This

¹⁷ Emmanuel Ukata, *In the Company of a Legend*, 92.

synchronizes with Onyeocha's submission when he said that Nigerian politics is one of acrimony, dissension, division, sectionalism, and political sleight of hand...Nigerian politics has as its permanent feature, the unwholesome and unsavory epilogue of vitiation and vilification for anyone who ever dared to participate in it.....it is quite an interesting speculative question whether at all it is possible to foster democratic principles in Nigeria.¹⁸

Another dark turn in the Nigerian socio-political culture is the lack of respect of human dignity. Most political leaders in Nigeria see themselves as lords thereby placing no value to the lives of their subjects. Many Nigerians suffer from dehumanizing living conditions by being depersonified and treated as objects. The practice of coopting the youths for political thuggery and unrest shatters the lives of many youths who supposedly should stand for and advocate for sane politicking. A quintessential reference to the just concluded 2023 general election in Nigeria mirrors the starless midnight of political quagmire and rascalism; thugs denying law abiding Nigerians from exercising their political franchise, grabbing, snatching and running away with ballot boxes.

The pitiable condition of the socio-political culture in Nigeria is like a woman crying in travail panting and miming the aid of a midwife. The prevailing civilian dispensations and that of the lay faithful are still far from ameliorating the horrendous socio-political series, yet, the immutable deceits, lies and fake promises of Nigerian politicians have been extended to the Church pulpits constructed on cancerous and pretentious spiritual foundations and spurious

¹⁸ Marcel I. Onyeocha, *Power and Authority in Our Culture*, (Orlu, Chimavin Productions, 2005), 69.

political carriages where consecrated persons are present in their immaculate robes and habits.

Even though one grieves over the dismal and bleak socio-political condition in Nigeria, all, especially consecrated persons who are insignias of socio-justice and at the service of God and humanity must contribute to restoring her sanity. Consecrated persons are more or less the hope of a nation like Nigeria to speak fearlessly to the brood of vipers littered within the space of Nigerian politics. The second Vatican Council is apt when she asserts that ‘the consecrated life has the prophetic task of recalling and serving the divine plan for humanity, as it is announced in Scripture and as it emerges from an attentive reading of the signs of God's providential action in history.’¹⁹

3. The Place of Consecrated Persons in Nigerian Socio-Political Landscape

In the postmodern complexities of human life, an inordinate desire for political positions is the bane for the deterioration of the socio-political structures in Nigeria. A pestilential phenomenon that has resulted in other vices such as ethical relativism, social relativism, cultural relativism, political relativism, etc. many Nigerians have suffered from the ignoble shenanigans of Nigerian politics which disregard the supreme value of human life. Nigerians live in fear and are hopeless about the future. We live in a state of flux, a state of *homo homini lupus* and serial political assassination, etc.

In a nation such as Nigeria where objective political ideal is far from its realization, where do consecrated persons stand? The place of consecrated persons in the Nigerian socio-political landscape

¹⁹ Vita Consecrata, no. 73.

instigates random inquisitions if consecrated persons are allowed to participate in politics. Do they have any business with politics and political participation putting into consideration how politics is practiced in Nigeria inundated with intrigues and all kinds of anomalies? While some scholars uphold the position that consecrated persons have no business with politics and political participation for it is against the backdrop of their calling being completely dedicated to God with the goal of pursuing perfection in charity by faithfully embracing the evangelical counsels, on the contrary, there are some others who propose that consecrated persons should be actively involved in politics and participate effectively. In as much as these opinions look rather conflicting, there is reconciliation which strikes a balance.

In the introductory part of his article, Ofuani carefully made a reference to the position of the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria as regards priests and partisan politics. The communique at the end of their second plenary meeting held in Sokoto (North-West Region) between 6th to 14th September 2018 charges priests to avoid partisan politics through endorsement of candidates.²⁰ This is however, coterminous to the Church's law in the 1983 Code of Canon Law as regards Priests and Religious and their participation in partisan politics.²¹ In interpreting the positions of the Nigerian Bishops and the Church's own Law, Ofuani diplomatically asserts that it is however good to note that they did not ban priests and religious to be ignorant of the political terrain they live in. Because the human

²⁰ Jude Ofuani, "Consecrated Persons and Witnessing in Nigeria political Context," in *Consecrated Life and Politics: Drawing the Line and Making the Connections*, ed. Anthony Kanu, (Jos: Fab Anieh Nigeria Limited, 2019) 129.

²¹ Code of Canon Law, 285 § 1-3.

person as we know, is a political being, no one can claim to be totally apolitical. That would be a conscious deception of natural facts.²²

However, such diplomacy, in a subtle and modest manner not only proposes that consecrated persons should be concerned with participation in politics but also requires the definition of the true meaning of political participation not undermining new convictions in an attempt to conceptualize the subject matter. According to Aliba, political participation is the involvement of every member, organization, and group in a nation in the entire political process. It is also the process through which the individual plays a role in the political life of his society and has the opportunity to take part in deciding what common goals of the society are and the best way of achieving these goals.²³ Hence, the consecrated persons fall within this degree of political participation *sine qua non* to good governance in the society because they form the core aspect of the society in which they live to decide the national values.

On the flip side is another level of political participation which expresses the desire to govern the people. This level of participation shapes the perspective of Awolowo and Aluko's submission who opine that the essence of political participation in any society, either civilized or primitive, is to seek control of power, acquisition of power, and influence decision-making.²⁴ This is the level of

²² Jude Ofuani, "Consecrated Persons and Witnessing in Nigeria political Context," 129.

²³ Samuel Aliba, "Consecrated Persons and Political Participation" in *Consecrated Life and Politics: Drawing the Line and Making the Connections*, ed. Anthony Kanu, (Jos: Fab Anieh Nigeria Limited, 2019), 145.

²⁴ Dare Arowolo & Olukemi Aluko, "Democracy, Political Participation and Good Governance in Nigeria" *International Journal of Development and Sustainability*, vol. 1, no. 3, (2012), 802-803. <https://isdsnet.com/ijds-v1n3-13.pdf>

participation the Church prohibits for priests and consecrated persons.

Thus, from the above expositions on the various degrees of political participation, the place of consecrated persons does not seek desire for power and political control, but the common goals of the society and the best way to achieve them. By implication, consecrated persons cannot be completely uninvolved in the socio-political affairs of the nation but there is limitation and moderation to the extent they are involved. Consecrated persons as Aliba asserts are firstly citizens of the world destined and working earnestly to become citizens of Heaven after their earthly pilgrimage. Thus, they must be involved in the positive human endeavors that would foster the establishment of God's kingdom on Earth.²⁵

While our modern society is experiencing a systemic, demonic, and barbaric political scheme, how consecrated persons would handle it determines the place of consecrated persons in the Nigerian socio-political space; a position which I suggest should be an imperative for nation-building in order to build a nation by authentically applying the gospel values to the signs of time in a nation already disintegrated due to unhealthy political ambitions. As important figures in the society, consecrated persons must not claim ignorance of the venom from the ignoble political practices in Nigeria nor should they stand by the fence as cavaliers. Instead, they should involve themselves more in the challenges of the Nigerians and out of compassion promote core sociological values in the society.

From the Nigerian treasury of prophetic excellence reprimanding poor political governance are the likes of John

²⁵ Samuel Aliba, "Consecrated Persons and Political Participation", 149.

Cardinal Onaiyekan; former Archbishop of Abuja Diocese, Bishop Matthew Kukah; current bishop of Sokoto Diocese, etc. Onaiyekan spoke against political corruption and social injustices in Nigeria. He has addressed issues of governance, political accountability and the need for ethical leadership in the country one time too many. His prophetic voice is like the voice of John crying in the wilderness (Mtt. 3:3) to stop corruption perpetrated by corrupt leaders with impunity.²⁶ Another prided Nigerian prophetic figure is Kukah. In his homily during the celebration of his forty-five years of priesthood and ten years of episcopacy said, “Keeping quiet in the face of injustice and bad governance is nothing but corruption.” He recalled with nostalgia how he took the vow to keep preaching the gospel with fidelity and constancy not minding whose ox is gored. In keeping to his vow, he asserts that some might construe constant criticism of government as causing trouble. However, he did not promise to serve the president, governor, politician, businessmen or individual but preach the gospel with fidelity and constancy.²⁷ Hence, these noble and illustrious men constitute not just prophetic voices but mirror in an emphatic manner the place of consecrated persons in the socio-political landscape of Nigeria.

Speaking on consecrated persons as witnesses in political Nigerian society, Ofuani avouched that consecrated persons should promote love and peace in the face of ethnic conflicts, tolerance amidst religious crisis, and intolerance. They should be prophetic in

²⁶ Soni Daniel. & Innocent A., “Stop Corruption with Impunity,” *The Vanguard*, April 17, 2013, accessed 24, November, 2023, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2013/04/stop-corruption-with-impunity-sultan-onaiyekan-tell-jonathan/>

²⁷ Emmanuel Ankeli, “I won’t stop Speaking Against Injustice, Bad Governance,” *The Vanguard*, December 20, 2021, accessed November 24, 2023, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/12/i-wont-stop-speaking-against-injustice-bad-governance-kukah/>

speech and action by standing always for truth by speaking out with regard to credibility in government dealings. They should promote right conduct in elections and the Nigerian society at large, especially as we are in a system that engages in embezzlement/corruption and lack of transparency with public funds.²⁸ In the face of such socio-political malaise, the place of consecrated persons must mirror them as signs of contradiction, persons with prophetic voices, consecrated for mission at the service of God and humanity. These are determinants of the place and the primary task of consecrated persons.

4. Consecrated persons as signs of contradiction

The presence of many political leaders in Nigeria is dictatorial in nature. Their emergence and presence are orchestrated in not just a flamboyant manner but also terrifying to their subjects. On the flip side, the emergence of an All-powerful God; the incarnated WORD is robed in humility, littleness, and fragility of human nature. Such heroic incarnational presence is contradictory to the display of power by many political leaders in Nigeria.

The vocation of the consecrated persons is to imitate the incarnate Word of God.²⁹ The incarnate Word of God begets an incarnate presence of the same Word of God in whom consecrated persons are modeled. The idea of an incarnate presence contradicts the human presence and human display of power especially in the world of politics. Consecrated persons make themselves present in

²⁸ Jude Ofuani, "Consecrated Persons and Witnessing in Nigeria political Context," in *Consecrated Life and Politics: Drawing the Line and Making the Connections*, ed. Anthony Kanu, (Jos: Fab Anieh Nigeria Limited, 2019) 133.

²⁹ Anthony Akinwale, *Charism and Contradiction: Theological Reflections on Consecrated Life* (Ibadan: St. Paul Publications), 2013, 31.

the weak, the vulnerable, and the malfunctioning socio-political structures in Nigeria with the aim of correcting every anomaly through their prophetic voices.

The presence of consecrated persons must synchronize with the incarnate presence of the incarnate Word. Without such synchronization, consecrated persons cannot be signs of contradiction. Consecrated persons attached themselves to the Gospel which is Christ; the fundamental motivation of consecrated life. By consecration they are set apart for the sake of the Good News and for the sake of Christ; a kind of followership more mysterious and elusive. The Good News is the crucified Christ. It contains a radical contradiction of the values of the world. Consecrated persons represent this radical contradiction as witnesses to the marvels wrought by God to frail humanity. This submission corroborates Pope John Paul II's opinion that "the first duty of the consecrated life is to make visible the marvels wrought by God in the frail humanity of those who are called. They bear witness to these marvels not so much in words as by the eloquent language of a transfigured life, capable of amazing the world..."³⁰

5. The Prophetic Voice of Consecrated Persons

Ever since Max Weber elaborated his sociology of religion, sociologists have been studying priestly and prophetic voices within religious organizations and institutions. These studies have added to and modified Weber's original notions of the category of a prophet (Hill, 1973; 168-172), but there still remains the assumption that the prophetic voice calls those within the nation or institution to account for various injustices, wrongful deeds and or corruption of the

³⁰ Vita Consecrata, no. 21.

original spirit.³¹ The prophetic experience is the sense that one is serving as the agency for a challenge to an evil social order in the name of the ultimate standard (Yinger 147).

The prophetic dimension of consecrated life is a core aspect of consecrated life. This reality is essential that the prophetic character has arisen not just from self-reflections as consecrated persons, but constitutes the dominant image used for consecrated persons in many important documents from recent institutional teaching and scholarly writings in relation to the role of consecrated persons. In other words, consecrated persons are mirrors of prophetic voices, especially of Old and New Testaments prophetic figures who spoke against socio-political ills in society.

The place of consecrated persons represents for them a prophetic imperative that does not entertain any form of shady and compromising principles. Like the voice of the Old Testament prophets, consecrated persons in Nigeria are the mouthpiece of God which must reprimand political leaders who fail in their duties towards the people. Their prophetic voice must replicate the voice of John the Baptist in the wilderness calling for repentance, the prophetic excellence in Onaiyekan and Kukah from the venomous and horrendous politicking in Nigeria; a mission of active presence necessary for our times.

³¹ Patricia A. Yeaman, "Prophetic Voices: Differences between Men and Women." *Review of Religious Research* 28, no. 4 (1987): 367–76. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3511641>.

6. Consecrated for Mission

A cursory glance at the theology of consecrated life reveals that at the heart of consecrated life is the sense of mission. Pope Benedict XVI while giving an audience to the Superior Generals in 2011 reminded them saying, “The mission is the route to being part of the Church and, through it, part of the consecrated life; it is an element of your identity.” The task of devoting to “mission” is included in the very call of the Consecrated persons.³² This suggests that every consecrated person both those dedicated to the active and contemplative life must have a sense of mission as an essential tool in consecrated life. Consecrated persons receive the grace of unifying mission and consecration joined in deep reciprocity. The consecration received is for a mission in the Church according to the specific nature of each institute.

More so, John Paul II’s intervention is quite interesting when he expressed how consecrated persons are deeply rooted in mission through a form of conformity to the Blessed Trinity. He avouched that consecrated persons live life completely devoted to the Father (Lk. 2:49; Jn. 4:34), held fast by Christ (Jn. 15:16; Gal. 1:15-16) and animated by the Spirit (Lk. 24:49; Acts 1:8; 2:4). They cooperate effectively in the mission of Christ (Jn. 20:21) and contribute in a particularly profound way to the renewal of the world.³³ He defines the presence of consecrated persons in the world as *servitium caritatis* and the manifestation of God’s love in the world.³⁴

The tasks of renewing and the manifestation of God’s love in the world encompass the socio-political conditions of the Nigerian

³² Vita Consecrata, no. 72.

³³ Vita Consecrata, no. 25.

³⁴ Vita Consecrata, no. 72.

society. Consecrated persons devote themselves to mission which is a major aspect of their call. By mission, consecrated persons conform themselves to Christ and consequently make Christ more present and active in the world for the salvation of all. Such missionary presence underscores the fact that consecrated persons are on a mission to promote and advocate the core values of the One (Christ) who called and sent them on a mission in contradistinction to socio-political vices dangerous to human life existing in the Nigerian political landscape.

7. At the service of God and Humanity

The consecrated life has the prophetic task of recalling and serving the divine plan for humanity, as it is announced in Scripture and as it emerges from an attentive reading of the signs of God's providential action in history.³⁵ As a sign of the manifestation of God's love, the quest for divine beauty impels consecrated persons to care for the deformed image of God on the face of man, faces disfigured by hunger, and faces disillusioned by political promises, political unrest, and violence in Nigeria. Since consecrated persons are representatives of Christ who came into the world to serve and not to be served (Mtt. 20:28), of what use are consecrated persons if not to serve humanity? The involvement of consecrated persons in political affairs should be geared towards the development of the lives of the people. Such participation underscores a compassionate sense of service to humanity.

³⁵ Vita Consecrata, no. 73.

8. Consecrated Persons; A Fitting Postscript and Imperative for Nation-Building

The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle defines man as *homo et sociale et politicum*. The dual anthropological and sociological characteristics of ‘social’ and ‘Politics’ are natural to man. However, the pride in these natural attributes of man is not geared towards a selfish end but towards a common good and in turn for building the nation. From this backdrop, Consecrated persons possess not just the dual attributes, but attributes weaved with the consciousness of being representative of the Church’s vitality, their roles, and duties to serve the good of the nation. Hence, they are fitting postscripts and imperative for nation-building.

Christ and the prophets confronted the perpetrators of injustice, the lawyers, Pharisees, scribes, etc. during their time. By implication, both Christ and the prophets shared the political conditions of the society they lived, they participated not vying for political powers and position but in view of the common good. They never shy away from such socio-political concerns. Hence, consecrated persons, in discovering their place should not claim ignorance of the socio-political malaise in the society rather, they should get involved in building the nation through their prophetic presence; condemn what is condemnable and reprimand what needs to be reprimanded, speak and stand always by the truth in relation to the credibility of governance to enhance the growth of the society.

The presence of consecrated persons must not seek personal political ambition. The limits of participation for consecrated persons in politics and political affairs should largely exclude endorsing any political candidate or party publicly or from the pulpit. This is in no way prophetic. They have the prophetic mandate and

responsibility to be transparent, stand for the truth, expose fowl and ugly situations through constructive criticisms, point the way forward, serve as the moral compass of the society, help make informed choices, and avoid actions that betray their calling and state of life.³⁶

9. Conclusion

The Nigerian socio-political landscape remains sloppy, contested, ill and conflict-infected. Since independence, Nigeria has been struggling to survive not only in managing society but also in improving the socio-economic conditions of the people. The political sphere has been inundated with military interventions and unhealthy inter-ethnic competition. To a large extent, these incidents have shaped how we can understand the different forms and dynamics of politics in Nigeria today. They have influenced democratic practices, the degree of peace and tranquility, and Nigeria's development trajectory. While consecrated persons live in a nation like Nigeria, they have the prophetic mandate to speak against such reoccurring and pestilential socio-political ills.

Although expressed differently, the consecrated life primarily undertakes the mission of making Christ present in the world for the salvation of all. Consecrated persons, both contemplative and active unite contemplation and action in bearing prophetic witness to the love of Christ to humanity because prophetic voice is imperative within the framework of Ecclesiology and the prophetic dimension of consecrated life as a form of life. The mission of consecrated persons in Africa is prophetic and by being prophetic, they are impelled by being in communion with Christ and gospel values; they

³⁶ Samuel A., "Consecrated Persons and Political Participation", 151.

passionately bear witness with ever-growing vigor and identity typified and modeled in Christ the prophet per excellence.

In point of fact, Christ did not bequeath to the Church a mission in the political, economic, or social order; the purpose he assigned to it was a religious one. Hence this religious mission can be the source of commitment, direction, and vigor to establish and consolidate the community of men according to the law of God.³⁷ Therefore, consecrated persons must help in grooming a well-ordered society through religious admonitions and adequate prophetism.

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³⁷ Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 42.

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