

EDITORIAL

Synodality, formation, and spiritual direction closely relate to Consecrated Life and the priesthood. This edition of *The Catholic Voyage* (TCV-Africa) highlights some important aspects of these themes. It opens with the study of the Vatican's document, *Vademecum for the Synod of Bishops on synodality*. The word "Synod" means "journey together", a journey of the Church-as-family of God. It is often assumed that we, as members of the Christian community, can walk and work together, but the question is asked: *How can we journey together?* The Carmelite Fr. Innocent Igbokwe addresses this question. He notes that the synodality presented by Pope Francis comes with "excitement, misgivings and misconceptions". The fears, anxiety, tensions, joys, and excitement this synod has generated seems unprecedented in the recent history of the Church. While acknowledging that the Holy Spirit is certainly the principle of communion and mission in the Church, and the principle of synodality, the author argues, however, that the processes of this synodality will determine the shape of the future of the Church. Therefore, he explores the virtues and vices that can make or mar the processes and, then, offers some recommendations.

Decision-making in the synodal process is a complex and delicate issue. In the synodal journey of the Church-as-family of God, at some point, decisions must be made, in one way or another, by someone on some matters. A synodal journey is neither aimless nor guideless. Rather, it wants to strengthen communion, participation and mission of members of the family of God. It wants to lead people to life, not death, and walk in truth and charity following the path of Him who is the Way, the Truth and Life (cf. Jn 14.6). In the specific case of the institutes of Consecrated Life, a religious Superior is one who through appointment

or election assumes the responsibility of being God's representative to guide other members of the institute in their commitment to seek, find, and do the will of God. Thus, leadership or exercise of authority in a religious institute is a spiritual reality with a social implication. Reflecting on this issue, Agnes Okoye, DDL, claims that the exercise of authority is a question of service, empowerment of others for maximum utilization of their potentials and talents, and the attainment of the goal of the institute. With Vatican Council II there is a *novum* (newness) in the mode of exercise of authority and decision-making in a religious institute. She explains the newness in the exercise of authority and the process of decision-making from the perspective of canonical legislation and in the light of the principles of the Synod on Synodality. The Synod on Synodality is a call to rediscover the synodal roots, and the deeply synodal nature of the Church. This involves a process of learning together how God is calling us to be and live as Church-Family in our time and place. Moreover, the exercise of authority should be done in a synodal way such that it does not cancel the role of religious superiors as a guide of their brothers and sisters in seeking and doing the will of God in achieving the purpose of their profession of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience, which are the perfection of charity or union with God (cf. can. 573), and the purpose of their living life in common.

Michael Songu's reflection turns attention to consecrated life in the global South of the world. He highlights the call to faithfulness and fruitfulness. Consecrated life shaped many of the Church's efforts in engaging worldly reality. From the earliest centuries, witnessing the Gospel message and promoting the Catholic faith, Institutes of Consecrated Life break newer grounds and provide newer solutions in many areas of society (e.g., Agriculture, education, healthcare, social communications, and charity). However, Consecrated life itself is not insulated from the general currents in the Church and society. Like the

many other Conciliar documents before it, Vatican II documents (e.g., *Lumen Gentium*, *Perfectae Caritatis*, *Gaudium et Spes*) are, in part, responses to social and ecclesial changes. Songu's study focuses on the teaching of Pope Francis concerning effective religious life in the 21st century following the Spirit of Vatican II, especially as it relates to the global south. He presents the context of the Pope's message and re-enforces its relevance. Lessons are drawn from the Papal message itself. Consecrated persons are called to faithfulness and fruitfulness. The commitment to responding to this call ought to involve liberation and inculturation, as well as the adoption of a synodal way of life within Institutes of Consecrated Life.

In seeking faithfulness and fruitfulness in living Christian life, the formation and animation of clergy and lay faithful must recognise the vital role of the ministry or practice of spiritual direction (or accompaniment). This ministry is particularly important and urgent today in the formation or training of priests; in most cases, they are called upon to give spiritual accompaniment. Drawing from a Sudanese background, John Ujang investigates the training of spiritual directors for the effective spiritual development of candidates for the priesthood. He recognises the several objectives of this training. It is important, he suggests, to train spiritual directors before beginning their pastoral assignment. In Seminaries or Formation houses, it is necessary to equip them with the needed skills to help the candidates. In addition to the training of spiritual directors, the spiritual development of candidates for priesthood depends on the personality and experience of Spiritual directors themselves. The choice of who is assigned to be the Spiritual Directors in seminaries and formation houses, therefore, is of critical importance.

Inter-generational dialogue in institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of apostolic life is another critical issue. Wenceslaus Madu, CMF, addresses this matter, in the paper in which he originally

presented at a joint meeting of major superiors (male and female) in Nigeria. He attempts to provide some frameworks for discussion on how consecrated persons could exploit the rich diversity among the different generations in the membership of institutes of Consecrated life. The reflection encourages the building of synergy or collaboration in Consecrated Life, since this can enhance effective witnesses as consecrated persons. Members of institutes of Consecrated life, in living community life, ultimately should seek a fruitful exchange between young and old, “never discarding whole generations.”¹ Pope Francis says,

“An institute remains youthful by going back to its roots, by listening to its older members. There is no future without this encounter between the old and the young. There is no growth without roots and no flowering without new buds. There is never prophecy without memory, or memory without prophecy. And constant encounter.”²

Religious communities favouring such fruitful encounters and communication do much to console their elders, enrich their younger members, and give convincing, prophetic witness of communion to a world increasingly afflicted by intergenerational apartheid.

The need for dialogue and collaboration in religious communities, especially in Formation houses and in seminaries, appears also in relation to the use of a smartphone. The Catholic Church accepts and welcomes the prudent use of Smartphones for proclaiming the good news, in the context of her social teachings on the means of social communication. All communications media applications could be effectively used for evangelization and authentic human liberation.

¹Pope Francis, “World Day of Consecrated Life Homily (WDCL),” 2018.

²Pope Francis, “WDCL Homily,” 2018.

The study that Lettekidan Tesfa and colleagues offer here focuses on the benefits or opportunities and challenges of using a smartphone, and some other social media, in the holistic formation of religious women and men. Tesfa proposes alternative methods for effectively utilizing the benefits of smartphones for the holistic formation of the religious men and women. The identified benefits and challenges of smartphones and social media probably go beyond any small geographical region. Since the use of a smartphone can influence religious formation either positively or negatively, depending on the user and mode of usage, the authors offer important recommendations.

Therefore, readers are invited to seize this opportunity to appreciate and, hopefully, further reflect on the main issues the TCV-Africa here touches upon, namely: the attitudes and ways to walk and work together in the Church-as-Family of God; the exercise of authority in the process of decision-making; the promotion of inter-generational dialogue; the formation on the appropriate use of smartphones in religious communities; the training of spiritual directors; the role of Catholic schools in the moral development of society; and the need for faithfulness and fruitfulness in Consecrated life.

Enjoy reading!

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