

Studies and Perspectives

**Africa and the Future of Catholicism:
Critical Considerations on the Formation of Candidates
for Consecrated Life and Priesthood**

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In the face of a vibrant Christianity, the hope is that the Church in Africa will contribute substantially to the future of Catholicism. Nonetheless, a deeper examination of the challenges facing Catholicism today, and a critical engagement with Christianity in Africa would expose a number of challenges, which the African Church must confront for a truly meaningful enrichment of Catholicism. This paper examines some of the factors that shape Catholicism today and the place of the African Church within these factors. It premises this exploration on the thesis that cultivating grounded-dialogic and inculturated faith could be a credible resource for attaining the required task of Africa's role in the future of Catholicism, and that without such dialogic-grounded faith in the formation of candidates for Priesthood and Consecrated life, its enrichment of the global Church might be jeopardised. I begin by analysing two primary factors

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that are determinant of the Catholicism of today, taking up a prognosis of their implication for the future of Catholicism. Following this analysis, I will give a concise account of their implications for Christianity in Africa, and indicate possible paths to formation of candidates for priesthood and religious life in view of Africa's place and role in a dialogic world-church. analysis, I will give a concise account of their implications for Christianity in Africa, and indicate possible paths to formation of candidates for priesthood and religious life in view of Africa's place and role in a dialogic world-church.

1. *Unity and Diversity, Mission and Dialogue*

Catholicism may be defined as “the traditions, beliefs, way of life, institutional allegiance and coherence, worship and moral standards of those communities of Christians which maintain full institutional communion with Rome.”² Catholicism is also closely bound with the quality of catholicity, namely, “the quality of being universal, complete or all embracing.”³ The early Fathers of the Church, Ignatius of Antioch and Cyril of Jerusalem used the idea of Catholicism and catholicity to designate the whole Church, as Catholic, whereby the local and particular Churches participate in the catholicity of the whole. At Vatican II, a Church characterised by unity and diversity through dialogue became a defining mark which adorns the Catholicism of the Church. Avery Dulles attests that the council documents “represent the church as a diversified unity, made up of distinct local and regional Churches, each having its own proper characteristic and gifts to contribute to the whole.”⁴ In virtue of its

²Monika Hellwig, “Catholicism,” in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Joseph Komonchak et. al. (Dublin: Gill& Macmillan, 1987), 167.

³Avery Dulles, “Catholicity,” in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Joseph Komonchak et. al. (Dublin: Gill& Macmillan, 1987), 172.

⁴Dulles, “Catholicity,” 173-4.

Catholicity each individual part brings its particular gifts to the other parts and to the whole Church, so that the whole and the individual parts are enriched by the mutual sharing of gifts and the striving of all for fullness in unity... (LG 13).⁵

The ability to uphold Catholicism's unity and diversity is one of the determinant issues challenging Catholicism. Shaped historically in Mediterranean and European patterns of life, worship and organisation, Catholicism has been challenged to open itself to other cultures and traditions. As noted by Rahner, the most significant things about Vatican II was the shift it occasioned in Catholic self-understanding to being a genuinely world-church.⁶ The result is that the Church opened itself up and recognises the essential differences of the other cultures in which it belongs as a world-church.⁷ The novelty of a world-church perspective could be seen in the Church's renewed self-understanding of mission, ministry, salvation from a perspective of dialogue and the appraisal of the values of other religions and cultures within the divine creative and redemptive plan. Furthermore, this world-church is characterised as “consisting not in uniform repetition and the exporting of an 'hegemonic universality'..., but as living between a centripetal gathering in communion and a centrifugal dispersal throughout the diverse localities of the world.”⁸

⁵All reference to the Documents of the Second Vatican Council is from: Norman Tanner and Giusseppe Alberigo, eds., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils: Trent to Vatican II*, vol. 2 (London: Sheed & Ward, 1990). The documents will be cited in text using the Latin abbreviation and article number.

⁶Karl Rahner, “Basic Theological Interpretation of the Second Vatican Council,” in *Theological Investigations, XX: Concern for the Church*, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1981), 86.

⁷Rahner, “Basic Theological Interpretation of the Second Vatican Council,” 86.

⁸Johanna Rahner, “A Less Eurocentric Theology: Advantages, Tasks, and Challenges”, in Staf Hellemans & Peter Jonkers, *Envisioning Futures for the Catholic Church*, (Michigan, Washington D.C: CRVP, 2018), 160.

The various ways in which Catholic life, language, and liturgy have been adapted to local cultural norms, encouraged by Vatican II and Pope Francis' *Evangelii Gaudium* 117&127 among others, are recorded milestones. The diversities and multiplicities of Catholicism can be seen from attempts by indigenous and grassroots communities – and not by expatriate missionaries – to contextualize the Christian faith.⁹ The inaugural encyclical letter of Paul VI *Ecclesiam Suam* 1963, refocused the missionary outreach from “one simply seeking conversion to Catholicism to a concern primarily with dialogue in quest of greater depth and breadth in the understanding of the truth of revelation.”¹⁰ Furthermore, in their important work on Vatican II, Richard Gillardetz and Catherine Clifford understood mission more along the lines of “living out the rich tradition of the church's social teaching.”¹¹ Hence, mission in the present Catholicism of the world-church involves a living witness to the doctrine and praxis of the Church everywhere.¹² As Paul Murray remarks, this expression of particularities should also take place “in the articulation of Catholic teaching in a manner fitted to the specificities of the context.”¹³

In its renewed evangelisation and mission, dialogue, fraternity and justice are surely the condition for the possibility of believable faith. External emphasis on Catholicity concerns its relation and dialogue with non-Christian religions and the effort to balance doctrine and the

⁹Peter Phan, “Doing Theology in World Christianities: Old Tasks, New Ways,” in *Relocating World Christianities: Interdisciplinary Studies in Universal and Local Expressions of the Christian Faith*, (Leiden, Brill:2017), 117.

¹⁰Hellwig, 172.

¹¹Richard Gillardetz and Catherine Clifford, *Keys to the Council: Unlocking the Teaching of Vatican II* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002) 87-97.

¹²Stephan Bevans, “Revisiting Mission at Vatican II: Theology and Practice for Today's Missionary Church,” in *Theological Studies* 74, (2013):261-283, 261.

¹³ Paul Murray, “The Reception of Vatican II in Systematic Theology,” in Catherine Clifford & Massimo Faggioli, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Vatican II*, (Oxford: University Press, 2023), 396-417, 415.

human contexts in which the Church exists. Internally, the Church maintains its relation with the other Churches through ecumenism, and a relationship between the local and the universal that makes up its Catholicity. The joys, the hopes, the griefs, and the anxieties of humanity everywhere are to be the same for Christians everywhere. This is a sure ground for the preaching of the gospel and work for justice, even in a world that is greatly divided by religious, cultural, ideological, political, economic and social stratifications.

Having explained the basic qualities of Catholicism, I will look at the next point which is a call to renewal of life, doctrine and praxis in today's context.

2. A Call for Renewal of Faith

Among the most urgent challenges within Catholicism itself, Gerald O' Collins names “encouraging everywhere a radical conversion to Jesus Christ” as the most significant.¹⁴ The turn of events in present times demonstrate that radical conversion to Christ and renewal of faith is another imminent determinant issue for the future of Catholicism. The idea of a New evangelization is prompted by Vatican II but deeply developed by John Paul II and post-conciliar Popes – Pope Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and Pope Benedict, and is presently being reaffirmed and advanced by Pope Francis. However, with the so-called end of mission land and the establishment of interreligious dialogue which implies acceptance of non-Christians as legitimate believers in God, the New evangelisation was misunderstood and replaced with the concern “to make the Church of the twentieth century ever better fitted for proclaiming the gospel to the people of the twentieth century.”¹⁵

¹⁴Gerald O' Collins, *Catholicism: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: University Press, 2008), 123.

¹⁵Avery Dulles, “Vatican II and Evangelisation,” in Stephen Boguslawski and Ralph Martin eds. *The New Evangelisation: Overcoming the Obstacles* (New York: Paulist Press, 2008), 1-2.

Thereby, the call for renewal and holiness became misplaced with institutional renewal and restructuring.

Catholicism roots its self-understanding in the message of the incarnate Word of God and the corresponding human response of faith to God's self-communication. As such, it is an interpersonal-relational faith. In this interpersonal view of faith, creation, human beings, community, relationship are factors for articulating the event of the incarnation which as it were, is the summit of the Christian faith. The sacramental principle which is founded on the incarnation points to the divine presence in the world of human beings, in human experiences, in *signs of the times* and the sacramentality of created reality.¹⁶ Above all, the human person, history and creation form part of the medium of faith and mediates reception of the revealed God. The mediation of the revelation of God which takes place in human response of obedience of faith opens the reality of grace in created realities and human experience.

In the Western world and elsewhere, millions of Catholics have disengaged themselves and no longer share in the Eucharist. They have been alienated from the Church by poor homilies, rules and norms that do not conform to living situations of people and that estrange spirituality from actual life context, and other defective features of Catholic life and worship. Secularisation is a real challenge to Catholicism and is also taking place presently in Africa even without a clear and distinct declaration or defined evolvment as in the western world. A level of disenchantment among young people, uncritical faith that emerges in uncritical Pentecostalism and materialism are aspects of secularism. Furthermore, the clamour for individualism is a concrete faith challenging issue of our times. Pope Francis listed some of the

¹⁶The document of the International Theological Commission (ITC), *Theology Today: Perspectives, Principles and Criteria* (March 8, 2012), nrs.4,5,6,51.

anti-gospel behaviours in his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* (10&11) naming “the tendency of our times to regress into conflicts, myopic, extremist, resentful and aggressive nationalism, a loss of social and communal sense that undergirds a defence of national interest, fragmentation, and lack of fraternity. How does Christian faith stay in respect to these issues?

Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi* introduced a renewed understanding of evangelisation beyond mere conversion of the Non-Christians to re-evangelisation and renewal of faith in all Christian contexts (71). That is why it takes the adjective “new” evangelisation or renewal of faith. It was on this note that he offered the oft cited expression: “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses” (41). Pope Benedict deepened this aspect on the emphasis that the Church must bring to a disenchanted and suffering world the good news that is Jesus himself. The Pope points out that:

More than ever, humanity needs Catholics and other Christians whose lives are totally centred on Jesus. Without such a conversion, any reforms in the Catholic Church will remain at best merely cosmetic decoration. By sharing through Christ ever so much more in the ecstasy of love that is the life of the tripersonal God, the Church will be enabled to bring to the whole world the faith, justice, and peace that it so urgently requires.

This call for a new evangelisation was greatly misunderstood, and not adequately implemented. One of the reasons, some argue of a missed opportunity in re-evangelisation in Europe. Most of the reason for this was the confusion on what the meaning of renewal to Christ and the message of Christ mean and on what it hinges. For instance, in his homily at the inaugural Mass of 24 April 2005, Pope Benedict XVI took up his ministry as successor of Peter very much in terms of turning

to Christ: 'If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful, and great.' The Pope ended his homily with words that echoed John Paul II and sum up the central message of Catholicism: 'Open wide the doors to Christ, and you will find true life.'¹⁷ But what is the difference between the new evangelisation and what was previously proclaimed?

The renewal of the New Evangelisation was introduced some time ago in the seminary formation in Enugu diocese, in Nigeria by Bishop Anthony Gbuji. Nevertheless, like the call for new evangelisation of John Paul II, it didn't live long. First there was no previous education of the people on what the New evangelization means and why it was necessary for priestly formation. Seminarians simply narrated how the bishop made them to walk rather than use a bike or car. They must go from house to houses preaching like Pentecostal pastors and engage in some self-renunciation. They have to practice some sort of poverty and community living even as candidates for diocesan priesthood. This warranted the second reason in my view, why this New evangelisation did not last in Nigeria. Secondly, there was no organised and systematic execution of it through theological education, catechesis and workshops in Parishes. Consequently, the New evangelization came to be misunderstood, castigated and despised.

From the events taking place in Catholicism today, one can assert that the present time is the era of retrieving the meaning of the gospel on fraternity, solidarity, justice, spirit of poverty and service in Africa. The idea of a New evangelization advanced by Francis' own pastoral approach is novel for our times.¹⁸ The message is that the whole Catholic Church needs a radical conversion to the gospel in the light of

¹⁷O' Collins, *Catholicism*, 127-128.

¹⁸The Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exultate, on the Call to Holiness in Today's World* is a masterpiece on the meaning of Holiness in a holistic sense of it. In my view, this document is a must read for candidates for Priesthood and the religious life.

Christ the master. It is a call to “going against the flow” of “contemporary Gnosticism,” “an intellect without God and without flesh”, “a doctrine without mystery,” “contemporary Pelagianism,” “a will lacking humility,” etc. In the light of Christ, the master, he summons a renewal rooted in the spirit of the beatitude, “ideologies striking at the heart of the Gospel” and “the worship most acceptable to God.”

The renewal turn of Pope Francis is also visible also in the encyclical *Laudato Si'* and especially in the global appeal from a perspective of theological *ressourcement*, a “return to the sources.” He calls for a church that is more faithful to the original message than to the social, political, and cultural aspects of more recent times.¹⁹ The liturgy as a centre of Christian faith holds the keys to authentic renewal of faith. A true return to the sources looks at Jesus Christ – his message, his life and his mission as a resource for the liturgy in all its aspects. It also implies that contrary to traditional or orthodox thought patterns that has colored Christian theology, theology's thinking as reflection on the revealed word of God and as faith seeking understanding must be underlined by “our cultural quirks, historical wounds, and other vagaries of our social identities.”²⁰ Prayer, praxis and proclamation must be given room in the celebration of the liturgy. Spirituality must engage with the concrete existential life of worshippers and engage these in active conversation since favouring one aspect over the other brings nothing less but a disoriented personality or empty faith. This warrants the next important point on enculturation.

¹⁹Massimo Faggioli, “*Evangelii Gaudium* as an Act of Reception of Vatican II,” in Gerard Mannion, ed. *Pope Francis and the Future of Catholicism: Evangelii Gaudium and the Papal Agenda*, (Cambridge: University Press, 2017), 54 citing from Chapter IV of *Evangelii Gaudium*.

²⁰ Veli Mitova, “Decolonising Knowledge Here and Now,” *Philosophical Papers* 49 (2020): 191–212, 191.

3. Formation of Candidates for Priesthood and Religious Life in view of upholding the Catholicism of the Church

To be sure, the lack of vocation to priesthood and religious life in the west and the declining of faith in previously vibrant areas are issues of debates in Catholicism. Two points are often focused on: the first is the fundamental question about the traditional priesthood, the inability to participate in the Eucharist due to the lack of vocation to priesthood and the essence of the religious life. The fact is that most regions in Europe and America are aversive to taking non-Indigenous priests and even more, Africans to make up for the scarcity of priestly ministers of the eucharist. Most others prefer alternative forms of priesthood such as women ordination, married deacons, pastoral ministers. In this case, the “importation” of priests is viewed as a hindrance to these new approaches to Catholic ministry, the pattern of celebration of the eucharist and inclusive ministry/authority. Hence, mission to these regions constitute perhaps one percent of Africa's contribution to the future of Catholicism. The second, is the conception that socio-economic status is one of the reasons for vocation boom in Africa. Consequently, the belief in most western ideology that the tide will surely turn when the third-world countries attain a good economic and social status for all.

One way to go about this debate is to work towards building up the faith and renewal in the spirit of the gospel. The decline of Christianity in parts of Europe and America is not caused by socio-economic situation as the quality of Christian faith and praxis. Christianity thrived as a religion of the rich in Europe and America. Up till today ardent rich Catholics are handy in these regions. More than economic and social emancipation, the enlightenment (*aufklärung*) which began with the scientific discoveries and historical consciousness, leading to the questioning of the Christian doctrines and self-understanding was instrumental to the decline of faith. Furthermore, the scandals caused

by the gap between the gospel message and Christian moral and ethical presumptions and its practice by Christians, especially within the leaders, and strict institutionalism that relegated the weak and the poor, (being the basic Christian message), weakened the believability and authenticity of the Christian teaching and praxis. These were the major reasons for the failure of Christianity in Europe and North America. These regions paid deaf ears to the reality of the times and could not respond to the enlightenment through adequate contextualisation, renewal and praxis. Consequently, more than the socio-economic aspect of vocation boom in Africa and other parts of the world, the assessment of faith in Africa and the future of Catholicism must take the issues of believable faith and authenticity into consideration. My view is that a renewal of faith and deepening of the received faith to have root in the African way of life and custom can be a backbone for facing the challenges to future Catholicism in Africa.

Having said the foregoing, I admit that Catholicism in Africa is facing a serious challenge, especially in the face of globalisation and secularisation. It calls for authentic renewal. It is like Jesus' challenge to his Apostles in the Gospel (Matt 15,16): And you, who do you say that I am? And so, I throw the question back to Christianity in Africa: Africans' who do you say that I (the gospel of Christ) am?²¹ This is a question challenging African Christianity to self-redefinition. If mission is not the major contribution in a Catholicism that seeks for alternatives to traditional male-clerical priesthood, what then would be the contribution of Christianity-its booming vocation to the Church? Second, how is African Christianity – its vocation and faith authentic to the gospel of Christ and assured of a lasting future? Third, what could

²¹Refer my essay: Okwara, Olisaemeka, R., "Africans, 'Who do you say I am? Addressing the Challenges of Inter-Cultural and Religious Dialogue in *African Christianity in the Light of Nostra Aetate and Evangelii Gaudium*," in Ogonnaya, Joseph/Orji, Cyril, eds., *Christianity and Culture Collision. Particularities and Trends from the Global South*, (UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), 68-88.

African religious and human cultures, philosophy and worldview offer in the contemporary crisis of faith in Christianity in the context of priestly and religious vocation. I argue, that the relevance of the Church in Africa in the future of Catholicism could be much more than missionary work of priestly and religious vocation. Given the turn of events, priests and the religious people could contribute to the quality of faith - faithfulness to the gospel of Christ, a dialogic-and grounded faith that could withstand the test of the present times. In what follows, I examine how the formation of candidates for priesthood and religious life could imbue these qualities for in formandees.

3.1. Deepening of Faith through Inculturation, Contextualisation and Dialogue with the Signs of the Times

Two issues are at stake at the present times of Catholicism, namely, the necessity of renewal of faith towards its root in the message of Jesus Christ and his pattern and dialogue with the signs of times. Vatican II was emphatic about bringing the Christian faith in conversation with its historical and cultural contexts through inculturation and dialogue with the *signs of times* (*Gaudium et Spes* 4&11). The opening address of John XXIII to the Council, *Gaudet mater ecclesia* expressed a continuous call to dialogue and renewal. In the Pope's words, doctrines are not engravements, rather they have life in the interpretation we give to them.²² Formation of candidates for priesthood and religious life, as members of the local and universal Church, share the concerns of the church in these levels.

In the face of a secularised faith in Europe and North America, inculturation or contextualisation of the Christian faith in Africa could deepen the meaning of the gospel in the everyday life of people – in relationship, community, vulnerability, poverty, hope and love. The

²² Pope John XXIII, "Speech at the Solemn Inauguration of the Second Vatican Council *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*," 11 October 1962, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 54 (1962): 786-795.

cultural and religious features of our context such as hospitality, fraternity, love of neighbour, long suffering, communal life, sense of sin and the sacred, taboo, faith, hope and love, constitute critical issues in formation of candidates for the Priesthood and religious life today. Today, the question extends to how cultures support and nurture human potentials and their flourishing. Cultures from the customs and traditions of their people, from their learning, from their arts and sciences, which can contribute the preservation of the Christian life as the message of salvation and liberation and fullness. When properly integrated, will deepen the biblical witness and the witness of the early fathers and theologians and the church's tradition.

Inculturation and contextualisation of faith could also be significant in combating the loss of indigenous cultures warranted by globalisation and the erstwhile missionary evangelisation and foster a balance between identity and *otherness*. The turn of events in our world today points to the one fact that human beings are rooted in their world and that authentic development begins with this root.²³ The question of inculturation and contextualisation is more urgent for the world today in need of dialogue and rootedness. In the wake of globalisation, secularisation and the Media, human beings have become like tools to a fast-moving economy and media, and are stripped of the quiddity of their existence by visual connections with the internet. The import of the signs of the times for formation of candidates for priesthood and religious life follows the central view that theology is not done in a vacuum, rather, the existential contexts of human beings as anthropological entities are the *dramatis personae* for the Word of

²³ Compare the meaning of Life world in Jurgen Habermas, Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Vol. II): The Critique of Functionalist Reason*. Translated by Thomas McCarthy. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), 138. Ude Donald C., *The Idea of Interconnectedness in Igbo Subaltern Knowledges: A Quest for Identity in Response to Modernity*. (Unpublished Dissertation, KU Leuven Humanities and Social Sciences Group Institute of Philosophy, 2021), 137.

God. The formation of candidates for priesthood and religious must be rooted in the pressing issues in the global Catholicism as well as their local contexts.

The essence of contextual theology is not to regress into an isolated colony, but rather to bring contextual issues in dialogue with the global Church and see how the particularities can enrich each other as a learning process. The inculturation of dancing in liturgy, nor the one that achieves a momentary illusion and forgetting of existential realities and issues lacks the true meaning and role of inculturation. True inculturation is attentive to the message of Christ as a message of liberation and wholeness (Jn 10,10).²⁴ Elochukwu Uzukwu a South-eastern Nigerian has devoted much work on the Church as a listening Church and with the notion of 'large ears' as a way of inculturation of the teaching and learning Church.²⁵ Unfortunately, these aspects of renewal and inculturation receive greater attention in academic theology without exploring its potential as a core structuring principle for a renewed Catholic ecclesiology and ecclesial practice. These texts could form part of the reading and learning for the candidates for Priesthood and religious life. They are concrete ways of inculturation. The Church, in the words of Ormond Rush, is a community of reception, continually receiving the living tradition afresh in the lived faith of the Church.²⁶

Inculturation is an important aspect of the present and future of Catholicism. In the African context, merely dancing and clapping

²⁴ Elochukwu Uzukwu, *God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness. Appropriating Faith and Culture in West African Style*, (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012), 4-9.

²⁵ Elochukwu Uzukwu, "Ministry with Large Ears," in Peter De Mey & Wim François, eds. *Ecclesia Semper Reformanda: Renewal and Reform Beyond Polemics* (Leuven: Peeters, 2020).

²⁶ Ormond Rush, *The Eyes of Faith: The Sense of the Faithful and the Church's Reception of Revelation* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2009). See Murray, *The Reception of Vatican II*, 413.

during the liturgical celebration cannot fulfil the demands of inculturation. One of the reasons for setback to developing a critical and liberative faith in the African context as Elochukwu Uzukwu argues, could be aligned with inculturation as tantamount to drumming, clapping and dancing. Hence, people at liturgy easily experience momentary joy and fulfilment but get home to face their problems as they were. Uzukwu's observation is correct when one considers for example, the number of Adoration ministries existing in Nigeria. The young priests wishing to secure their parish members from these ministries of exuberance also convert the mass and eucharistic adoration to these patterns of dancing and drumming. Uzukwu's view is that inculturation should bring faith into life of people in a critical and liberative manner. But inculturation requires intense work by those responsible for the liturgy, the priest, bishops and theologians.

Cultivation of a dialogic approach to formation through inculturation could possibly abate the tendencies to legalistic clericalism and inculcate the attentiveness to the experiences of people beginning with themselves.²⁷ Following its hegemonic past, most regions that form parts of the Church received a traditional Christianity – clerical, patriarchal, white and a *bourgeois* Church. Faith was communicated at the expense of true human development - cultures and identities were destroyed at the expense of the “true religion.” In the present times, the Church battles with the two extremes: on one part, rejection of Christianity as received faith by those intellectuals ready for progress and liberation. On the other part and in regions such as Africa, another group of bishops would like to maintain the statuesque based on tradition, authority and orthodoxy. The excessive clinging on authority

²⁷ Agbonkhanmeghe Orobator, “The Impact, Reception and Implementation of Vatican II in Africa” in Catherine Clifford & Massimo Faggioli eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Vatican II*, (Oxford: University Press, 2023), 657-675.

hampers the progress of inculturation and liberation as aspects of the renewal of Catholicism. As *Lumen Gentium* 12 puts it, “the infallibility of the Church 'in matters of belief' fundamentally pertains to the 'whole body of the faithful' on the basis of their 'supernatural appreciation of the faith.’”²⁸ These ways of appreciation of the faith enables the church or formators to know where the received faith is in the service of spiritual and human wellbeing of people and where not.

3.2. A Renewal of Priesthood and Religious Life towards the Gospel

Africa, through the vocation to religious and priestly life, can contribute in sustaining unity in diversity, the call for renewal in the spirit of the Gospel and holiness in Catholicism. The state of consecrated life comprises the religious institute and the secular institutes. The religious institute bind themselves to observe the three evangelical counsels by means of vows (can. 607.2) and their religious state requires fraternal life in community, and also a degree of separation from the world in conformity with the character and purpose of the individual institute (can. 607.2 and 607.3). Secular institutes observe the three evangelical counsels by means of a sacred commitment like the religious institute. Uniquely, they fulfil their dedication to Christ and to the Church, by devoting themselves to the sanctification of the world, particularly by working within the world (can. 710). The word “secular” is meant to underline the fact that the persons who make profession in this state of consecrated life do not change the status they have as in the world, and they continue to live and to work in the midst of the people of God in the normal conditions of their own social setting (can. 711; can. 713.2) according to the secular style of life which is proper to them. Societies of apostolic life is described in the 1917 Code of Canon Law as men or women who live in

²⁸Paul Murray, “The Reception of Vatican II in Systematic Theology,” 412.

common without vows whereas in can. 731.1 and 731.2 of the 1983 Code of Canon Law, they are those who without religious vows pursue the particular apostolic purpose of the society, live in common according to a particular manner of life, and strive for the perfection of charity through the observance of the constitutions.

The state of priesthood is assigned an important role in the daily increasing difficulty in the renewal of the Church in Vatican II's decree on Priestly formation and the Ministry of Priesthood, *Presbyterorum Ministerium et Vita* (PO)). Priests are promoted to, and share in the service of Christ the teacher, priest and king by the sacred ordination and mission they receive from their bishop. The decree on the ministry and life of priests emphasized the aim of the priesthood “to build up the church here on earth into the people of God, the body of Christ and the temple of the holy Spirit” (PO,1) Vatican II incorporated a wider issue of the human context into its understanding of the nature and ministry of priesthood in the Church. Under the model of Jesus, the Son of God, a man sent by the Father to humankind, who lived among his brothers and sisters, and like the apostle Paul, who became all things to all, that they might be saved through his exemplary life of faith and good work. In their ministry in which the priests are in “not to separate themselves from that people or from any individual person, but to devote themselves wholly to the task for which God chooses them (PO,3). The footnote to this article explains further that the church is stimulated by circumstances outside itself and cannot remain unaffected by changes in the human condition and cannot be indifferent to them

Consecrated life has its significance for the Church at Vatican II's Renewal of Religious Life. The primacy of the spiritual life was taken up in Art. 6 on the religious life. Here, the old text proposal was substantially expanded with emphasis on daily nourishment through union with God, prayer, the reading of Scripture and the celebration of the liturgy. The goal is “to live more and more with the Church and to

surrender oneself completely to its mission.” Art. 8 first makes the Pauline doctrine of charisms its theme. The apostate and apostolic spirit must permeate the whole life of the members of these institutes and demand love of God and neighbour. Hence, the religious life fulfils the gospel call to faith as spirituality in praxis. Already, Paul VI’s 1971 exhortation *Evangelia testificatio* appropriation of the religious vows set a pace for its deep rootedness in the life of the Church, the gospel and concrete faith.²⁹ The Pope interpreted chastity as being based on a loving relationship with God. Living poverty, which is realised in different ways depending on the type of institute, must be a genuine witness in the present tension between the cry of the poor and the temptations of the material: “It is a central task of your poverty to bear witness to the profoundly human meaning of work done in inner freedom and which has its natural meaning in being a help for subsistence and service,” ET, 20. Religious obedience, with all the justification of fraternity, has its deepest meaning in the Paschal Mystery, thus also in sacrifice and suffering. For the Pope, it was important not to lose sight of the “mysteriously necessary connection between renunciation and joy, sacrifice and greatness, discipline and spiritual freedom” ET 29.

The liberative character of the Christian faith is, as it stands, a core vocation of priesthood and consecrated life. To bear authentic witness in the world of today, in a liberative way, priesthood and religious life requires the formation of mature-dialogic and grounded human beings. Faith becomes liberative when it fulfils the core human aspirations which is a closeness with God and life of justice.³⁰ Identity and self-

²⁹ Latin Text in AAS 63 (1971) 497-526.

³⁰ Justice in this case is more than a mere juridical aspect. Rather a justice that is accompanied with love, mercy and righteousness. For this understanding of just-mercy see my article: “Bearing witness to Mercy and Justice in the Context of the Community Life,” in: Iwuji, Paulinus/Abasili, Alexander/Okanumee, Simon-Peter eds., *Mirrors of Justice and Mercy. Critical Reflection on Justice and Mercy, Leadership and Membership*, (Umuahia: Sons Digital Press), 2021, 36-63.

giving in the ministry of priesthood and the religious life begins with writing a concrete manifesto for one's goal in life. One asks the questions: Who am I in the universe of God? What could be my own contribution in the universe? From this personal manifesto the question of the essence of one's vocation takes its meaning? In the process of self-realisation, candidates must be made to understand that it is their own individual journey. The formator as a moderator and a witness must be well equipped for human and spiritual formation of candidates. Forming people who are envoys of God's love and mercy means they must be also merciful and loving, have the capacity to forgive injuries, love themselves and others, have empathy, live in peace with others, accept human weakness while having the courage to challenge themselves every day, show respect for God's people and creation, love the Church and exhume ardent faith, hope and love.

A sincere interest in the signs of the times is important for authentic renewal of priesthood and religious life. This means being well equipped to know the advantages and disadvantages of globalization and the media effects. Studies have shown that the underdeveloped regions are more prone to be exploited by the architects of globalisation because they are the victims – ignorant of the wheels on which globalisation turns. As prophets of justice and life, religious and priests are to educate themselves on these matters so as to be able to assert themselves in the contexts around them and be salt of the earth in educating and interacting with people. The *signs of times* further warrant a Christian anthropology that looks at the human being in its entirety. Practically, it is necessary to give time for reading and internalising of knowledge; and cultivating the art of questioning and thirst for knowledge in the formation process. Formation of mature minds through dialogue also has social, political, religious and spiritual qualities. It is the ability to transcend the I and to engage the other in sincere openness. A renewal towards the gospel message as Pope

Francis' *Gaudete et Exultate* affirms, and the spirit of the founder/foundress is sure to offer a sure compass for adequate spirituality, justice and mercy in the journey to self-discovery and self-giving.

Conclusion

Revisiting the future of Catholicism with particular reference to Africa, and examining critical issues in the increase of vocations and the formation of candidates for consecrated life and priesthood in this paper, is both a challenging and enriching task, particularly in this time of seismic complexity of global Catholicism, qualitative, quantitative and geographical shifts in Christian population and crises of ideologies, doctrine and praxis. Such a complexity and shift call the church in every part of the world and in every unit to realize its essential character in a way that embraces the present challenges of unity in diversity, renewal, dialogic-grounded faith, and dynamic engagement with *signs of the times*. In line with the exposure on challenging factors to the role of Africa in the future of Catholicism, it may be argued that the real contribution will depend on the renewal of faith and inculturation as a way of deepening and enriching the Catholicism of today and the future – its structures, doctrine and praxis.