

Enhancing Initial Formation for Spiritual Discernment of Private Revelations in The Redemptorist Vice-Province of Nigeria

¹**Henry Ifeanyichukwu Nwokoro**

²**Prof. Patrick Mwanja Ph.D**

&

³**Dr. Wambua Pius Muasa Ph.D**

^{1,2&3}*Tangaza University College,*

The Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Kenya

Abstract

This study was motivated by the pastoral need to effectively guide the laity who often come to Priests and Religious seeking guidance in discerning private revelations such as dreams, locutions, visions, and prophetic messages. Christians have become victims of false prophets, fraudsters, and charlatans, who pontificate claims of private revelations as means for manipulating others. Despite this, there is little in the formation program to prepare Priests and Religious for spiritual discernment of private revelations. The main objective of the study was to explore ways of enhancing initial formation for spiritual discernment of private revelations in the Redemptorist Vice-Province of Nigeria. This qualitative study adopted an exploratory research design. The study utilized an Interview Guide for data collection. The purposive sampling technique was used to select 16 formators to participate in the study. Thematic analysis was used to generate themes from the data that was collected. Findings revealed that through competent formators, change of mindset, spiritual direction, spiritual reading, introducing a new course, focusing more on learning, and community sharing, candidates can better be prepared for discerning private revelations.

Keywords: Initial Formation, Spiritual Discernment, Private Revelations, Candidates, Formators, Redemptorists, Pastoral, Priests and Brothers

Introduction

“How can we form Priests who are truly able to respond to the demands of our times and capable of evangelizing the world today?”¹ This question of Pope John Paul II in the Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, has been the question of the Church from the beginning to the present day. This question is what this study broadly seeks to address. Arguably, it is in a bid to answer this question that the initial formation of Priests and Religious has undergone several changes and modifications throughout the Church’s history.

The self-evaluation of the Church led to the calling of the Second Vatican Council in 1962, during which, among other concerns, the issue of priestly formation was extensively discussed, and this led to the Decree on Priestly Training, *Optatam Titulius*, issued on the 28th of October, 1965. This decree stated that the Episcopal Conference of each region is to organize a formation program for their region to respond to the unique circumstances of their region or country. This instruction was also repeated in the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, issued by the Congregation for the Clergy (first published in 1970 and updated in 1985 and 2016).² Following the instruction mentioned above, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria, in 2005, produced a *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* in response to the pastoral circumstances of Nigeria. One of the challenges faced by the Nigerian Church was described as follows:

There is use and abuse of religion to misinform, to divide, to dehumanize, and to instill and nurture fears in the minds of a populace that is largely gullible and prone to superstition in the insatiable appetite for miracles and healing. Illiteracy, lack of good medical facilities, and the enduring influence of African traditional religions make it convenient to see every problem as caused by witches and enemies requiring the intervention of healing and

¹John Paul II, “Pastores Dabo Vobis: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation” (Rome, 1992), sec. 10, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_25031992_pastores-dabo-vobis.html.

²William Cleary, “The Gift of Priestly Vocation,” *Spiritans Horizons* 14, no. 14 (2019).

miracle ministries, even within the Catholic Church. Such ministries are supported by the literal interpretation of the Bible and by unauthenticated claims of private revelation. Many Catholic Priests have fallen into this temptation. They, in turn, inspire many candidates for the priesthood, who see them as models of successful priests.³

In this *Ratio*, mention is made of miracle ministries, even within the Catholic Church, which thrives on claims of private revelations. However, this is the only place where private revelations are mentioned. There is no further statement on how Priests can better be trained for spiritual discernment of private revelations, yet this remains a pastoral concern in the Nigerian Church.

The current study focused on enhancing initial formation for spiritual discernment of private revelations in the Redemptorist Vice-Province of Nigeria. This study responds to the perennial question of how Priests and Religious can be formed to respond to the pastoral needs of their time and region. It is based on the understanding that the quality of initial formation determines the quality of pastoral ministry.

Literature Review

Several studies have been carried out on enhancing initial formation to prepare better Priests and Religious for ministry in their unique contexts. For instance, Ott and Winters (2014) carried out a study in the United States on ways of enhancing initial formation to better prepare ministers to guide the laity in dealing with issues of sexuality. They discovered that previous research focused on providing better academic knowledge for seminarians on matters of sexuality. However, in their study, they focused not only on academics but on the human formation of the candidates so that they could deal with issues related to their sexuality before ministering to others. They discovered that candidates generally do not offer sufficient sexuality-related courses.⁴ They recommended more courses on sexuality-related issues and an environment that enables sexual

³Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria, *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* (Abuja: Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, 2005), xii.

⁴Kate O. Ott and Amanda J. Winters, "Sex and the Seminary: Preparing Ministers for Sexual Health and Justice," *American Journal of Sexuality Education* 6, no. 1 (2011): 63, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15546128.2011.547368>.

integration. Learning more about sexuality will help Priests and Religious better guide those who need guidance in understanding sexual dreams.

A study was conducted in the United States of America by Koss *et al.* (2018) among American clergy to examine how well the clergy has been trained in end-of-life care, namely caring for the dying, bearing in mind that sometimes dying persons experience end-of-life visions, dreams, or locutions. Participants testified that they had not received sufficient training on pastoral care for the dying. Their understanding of the dying situation is basic and general. They admitted that they feel incompetent in dealing with issues like patients who believe they will be healed by a miracle rather than by medicine, how to respond to “complex medical decisions,”⁵ and how to work with medical professionals. They suggested that special training should be given to the clergy concerning end-of-life care, which should include more counselling skills than is already available in the seminaries. They suggested workshops on end-of-life care, which should consist of a deeper reflection on the mystery of death.

A qualitative study conducted by Karadzhov and White (2020) in Glasgow, Scotland, examined the ability of the clergy to recognize psychological disorders, knowledge about their risk factors and causes, knowledge about self-help interventions, about available professional assistance, attitude towards recognition and appropriate help-seeking, and learning about how to seek mental health information. These basic skills are needed by professional counsellors to differentiate between what is spiritual and what is psychological and also to know when and how to refer to psychological disorders. Out of the 10 Participants, 1 was a Catholic Priest, and 9 of the participants were Africans (1 Eritrean and 8 Nigerians). Though their responses vary, there is a general lack of sufficient insight into psychological issues and how to deal with them. Some clergy could only think of the lack of spiritual life as a cause and prayers as a solution to psychological problems.⁶ This study revealed the importance of

⁵Sarah E. Koss et al., “Training Community Clergy in Serious Illness: Balancing Faith and Medicine,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 57, no. 4 (2018): 1423, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26750609>.

⁶Dimitar Karadzhov & Ross White, “Between the ‘Whispers of the Devil’ and ‘the Revelation of the Word’: Christian Clergy’s Mental Health Literacy and Pastoral Support for BME Congregants,” *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health* 22, no. 2 (2020): 162–63, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19349637.2018.1537755>.

mental health studies for those in initial formation. Regarding pastoral work, the study suggests that candidates should not only be sent to parishes, hospitals, and prisons but also to mental institutions where they can experience and understand mental disorders and differentiate between what is spiritual and what is psychological.

Similarly, Nyandoro (2010) conducted a case study with 40 priests and 50 lay persons in Masvingo Diocese, Zimbabwe, to assess the counselling skills among the clergy. Using qualitative and quantitative methods, he confirmed the “lack of counselling skills among the clergy.”⁷ He recommended thorough training and supervision towards pastoral counselling. He noticed a lack of competence among priests in counselling the laity who had issues of “HIV/AIDS pandemic, cholera, hunger, poverty, unemployment, political violence, divorce, sexual promiscuity, corruption, socio-psychological disorders, traumatic events, chronic sickness, and other problems.”⁸

He emphasised the need for priests to have counselling skills such as psychodynamic skills, among which is dream analysis. He noticed that before 2002, there were no pastoral counselling courses at Chishawasha Regional Seminary in Zimbabwe. At the time of the study, only two courses in pastoral counselling were offered in the Chishawasha Seminary. In addition, these were not enough, considering the importance of pastoral counselling skills for the clergy in Zimbabwe. Participants suggested, among other things, that counselling should be studied from the beginning of initial formation until the end and continue afterwards. They suggested that it should be taught in seminaries by professional counsellors. Such courses will also enhance intellectual formation for spiritual discernment of private revelations.

During initial formation, candidates must have regular meetings with their spiritual directors. However, if the spiritual directors are not well trained, the quality of spiritual direction they give candidates is questionable. For this reason, Ujang (2023) carried out study among spiritual directors, formators, and candidates of St. Paul’s Major Seminary, Juba, South Sudan, on the need to train

⁷Rudolf Nyandoro, “Assessment of Counselling Skills among the Clergy: A Case Study of the Roman Catholic Priests in the Diocese of Masvingo in Zimbabwe” (University of South Africa, 2010), ii.

⁸Nyandoro, 2.

spiritual directors appointed for seminarians. The study discovered that most of the spiritual directors in seminaries are not trained for spiritual direction. Using qualitative and quantitative methods, the study discovered that “it is important to train spiritual directors before their assignment.”⁹ This will enable them to be competent enough to guide candidates. The spiritual director's quality depends not only on training “but also the personality and experience of directors.”¹⁰

Adubale and Aluede (2017) conducted a qualitative study among 547 seminarians from Makurdi, Ibadan, and Ekpoma, in Nigeria to discover ways of enhancing initial formation to meet the counselling needs of seminarians. They discovered that though seminaries have spiritual directors, "no provision is made to attend to the seminarians' emotional disposition about personal, social, academic and other related issues.”¹¹ Results from this study revealed that the seminarians rated academics as their biggest concern and emotional needs like dealing with the death of loved ones as the least. This could be because of the emphasis on academic excellence in seminaries and little attention given to emotional integration. If candidates are being trained to be spiritual guides to people with psycho-emotional needs, then they also need to be people who have dealt effectively with their own psycho-emotional needs. If they continue to neglect their psycho-emotional needs, they may not be in touch with themselves and may be unable to help others in the future.

The academic curriculum needs to be constantly reviewed to ensure it responds to contemporary concerns. A study by Nyabera *et al.* (2022) among priests in the Catholic Diocese of Homa Bay, Kenya, revealed that Priests, after ordination struggles with many challenges, including love of money, alcohol problems, and lack of dedication. Participants suggested a constant review of the seminary curriculum to address current pastoral challenges faced by Priests.

⁹John Andrea Philip Ujang, “Training of Spiritual Directors for Effective Spiritual Development of Candidates to the Priesthood in St. Paul’s Major Seminary Juba, South Sudan,” *The Catholic Voyage: African Journal of Consecrated Life* 20, no. 2 (2023): 51, <https://doi.org/https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/tcv.c20i2.4>.

¹⁰John Andrea Philip Ujang, 51.

¹¹Andrew A. Adubale & Oyaziwo Aluede, “A Survey of Counselling Needs of Seminarians in Catholic Major Seminaries in Nigeria,” *Asia Pacific Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy* 8, no. 1 (2017): 31, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2014.886671>.

Methodology

This qualitative study adopted an exploratory research design, which is most suitable to an area that has not been scientifically explored. The purposive sampling technique was used to select 16 formators to participate in the study. The study utilized an in-depth interview Guide for data collection. The interview began by asking open-ended questions, which were sometimes followed by further questions seeking further clarifications. In some cases, the researcher repeated the response to participants to ensure that the point is well understood. Thematic analysis was used to generate themes from the data that collected. Themes were organized, and coded along areas of similarity. Themes were then presented along with verbatim from participants.

Findings and Discussions

The study sought to explore ways of enhancing initial formation for spiritual discernment of private revelations in the Redemptorist Vice-Province of Nigeria. The findings are presented as themes that emerged from the data and it supported by verbatim from the participants.

Competent Formators

All participants spoke about the need for formators with the right personality, the right spirituality, and proper training. Commenting on this, P15 has the following to say:

On the part of the government of the congregation, in appointing confreres as formators, the Congregation should not just appoint people and send them to formation. The Congregation should form formators, send them to proper training that equips them with the right kind of knowledge and attitude. Also, in the selection of formators, the Congregation should look for confreres with the right type of temperament, the kind of temperament that is patient, that is calm; that does not jump to conclusion; that is not, you know..... jumpy, for lack of a better word, but people who have perhaps leaning in that direction, and then sent for proper training. Training is transformative and will equip them with the right mental and emotional tools to deal with specific situations. Experience is also essential. When the Congregation is selecting formators, experience has to come into play. Someone who has not had enough contact with human suffering and dealt with it healthily cannot manage the crisis of

another. Such a person cannot be put in charge of thirty, forty, or fifty people who are discerning their vocations. There would be chaos.

Part of the formators' training is also to equip them with basic counselling skills. One such skill is confidentiality. P16 believes that "Formators should be properly trained. They should have basic counselling skills, especially confidentiality. That will enable candidates to trust them more. Formators should be open-minded and not closed-minded. Formators should be open to the possibility of private revelations in candidates' lives and help them discern what God is saying to them."

Speaking on the need for formators to have basic psychological training, P12 has the following to say:

The formators themselves need to be educated about the human person and psychology, considering the mental state of individuals. I think formators need to be equipped to know some psychology and guide the candidates, particularly with the discernment of private revelations. I am happy that you are going into this study because people have suffered due to poor spiritual discernment of private revelations due to the inability to balance what they perceive to be paranormal and what they perceive to be normal. Doing an advanced psychology study has helped me a lot in this area.

It is one thing to have trained formators, and it is another thing to have a formator who has the right personality. Speaking on the personality of formators, P07 said, "The formators are to consider themselves as candidates as well. They are to know that their actions speak louder than their words. If their lifestyle is not right, the candidates will learn from it."

Similarly, P08 said, "Formators themselves need to be people who are in touch with their spiritual selves, conversant with the scriptures as well as with some spiritual writings dealing with private revelations. They are also to be aware of psycho-spiritual writings dealing with this subject. It is what the formators are exposed to that they can give to the candidates."

This is also the position of the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* of the Congregation for the Clergy¹² and that of the Catholic Bishops'

¹²Congregation for the Clergy, *The Gift of Priestly Vocation: Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* (Vatican City: L'Osservatore Romano, 2016), 57.

Conference of Nigeria¹³. Also, in the *Ratio Formationis* of the Conference of Redemptorists of Africa and Madagascar (COREAM), there is a stipulation on the need for formators to be formed in five areas: human, spiritual, community, intellectual, and pastoral. Very importantly, it states that formators should be capable of good discernment.¹⁴ From the literature review, participants in the 2022 study by Nyabera *et al.* in the Homa Bay Diocese of Kenya also suggested the need to have qualified formators.

Change of Mindset

All the participants expressed the need for a mindset change concerning private revelations. P10 used the term ‘cognitive restructuring’, which he described as follows:

Another point is that we need cognitive restructuring, which has to do with a person's thinking process. It is restructuring the thinking pattern in the candidates from how they evaluate private revelations and other spiritual experiences before coming into formation to how they should evaluate them. Their suspicions and biases have to be restructured.

In the view of some participants, there is a need for a change of mindset among members of the admission board who sometimes treat applicants who talk about private revelations with suspicion. P15 presents this point as follows:

Our admission process is another area where we need some form of conversion because there is a very low tolerance for private revelations. The Congregation and the Formation program need to be more holistic and less judgmental and have a proper discerning attitude towards private revelations. A proper discerning attitude does not just dismiss things at face value. It takes time, listens, accommodates, and genuinely has the attitude of searching for the authenticity of an experience.

P15 also spoke of the need to challenge the lack of appreciation for extraordinary spiritual phenomena within the formation house. He said:

The unspoken culture that makes those who study philosophy too skeptical about spiritual realities needs to be noticed and challenged by formators. It is like being silent about bullying. For me, it is a type of subtle bullying when at

¹³Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria, *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, 61–62.

¹⁴Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, “*Ratio Formationis*” of the *Conference of Redemptorists of Africa and Madagascar* (Nairobi, Kenya, 2022), sec. 49.

tables, candidates who are studying philosophy downplay any talk about spiritual experiences or private revelations, and they make people who speak of spiritual experiences look like they are not intelligent or that they are not taking in the study of philosophy properly. I think that culture needs to be challenged and challenged properly by formators, and the way to challenge it is, first of all, to speak about it and to encourage a balanced view of our intellectual formation, that our intellectual formation is not a dry science. It is faith-seeking understanding. It is looking for the proper use of our reason to be able to help us with our faith. Reason is at the service of our faith because reason cannot take us to God. There is a certain level it gets to.

Speaking on the proper mindset to adopt concerning private revelations, P06 said:

The first thing is to become more open-minded and stop living in denial of the possibility of private revelations. We should begin to look at private revelations from the point of view that they can be true in some cases and false in others, rather than conclude that they are all false. This has to do with what we believe about God. There should be an awareness that God is a mystery and that divine revelation is ongoing. When we believe that God can reveal himself to people, we can discuss discerning whether a particular case is true or false.

Understanding that quest for money could lead people to lie about, or exaggerate the facts of private revelations, P07 said:

Some problems with the discernment of private revelations among Priests and Religious boil down to the love of money. The quest for money has blinded many Priests and Religious from doing the right thing. Money is important, but if we do the right thing, the money will come in. Human formation should focus on helping candidates develop the right attitude toward money. There should be constant stress on the fact that in ministry, we are there to preach Christ and so should not deviate from the norm.

Spiritual Direction

Usually, candidates must meet with their spiritual directors at least once a month. Some participants suggested ways of enhancing spiritual direction for spiritual discernment of private revelations. The first consideration is the choice of spiritual directors. P04 suggests that:

A spiritual director should be chosen with care to choose someone knowledgeable in dealing with extraordinary spiritual experiences.

Candidates should also be open to guidance from more than one spiritual guide. This is because the views of each person are limited. Receiving spiritual guidance from some selected individuals will help the candidate build a more balanced view.

Similarly, P12 also said, “The candidates need proper spiritual guides or mentors guiding them. The quality of their spiritual guides, primarily their formators, will determine their ability to be spiritual guides. Mentorship here can be from their spiritual directors and other spiritual mentors in the ministry.”

On the part of candidates, P01 suggested that “Openness in spiritual direction and the guidance they receive in spiritual direction can help them (candidates) develop the skills of spiritual discernment of private revelations.”

Suggesting practical ways of achieving this was P10 who said:

First, whenever the candidates see their spiritual directors or formators, they should look out for signs of the possibility that a candidate may be receiving private revelations or having any other spiritual experiences. Having noticed such signs, they need to ask the candidate if he has such experiences. This way, they will be able to help the candidate in spiritual discernment and, by so doing, teach them how to discern private revelations. The formators and spiritual directors should also be willing to journey with the candidates and educate them (candidates). The candidates should be taught to be open and attentive to the possibility of private revelations and other spiritual experiences. This is different from teaching them to desire it. Formators and spiritual directors should also educate candidates regarding private revelations.

One of the ways to improve the spiritual direction process is what the 2023 research of Ujan in Sudan revealed, namely that spiritual directors should be appropriately trained. The Congregation for the Clergy, in their *Ratio*, also expressed the need to have competent spiritual directors. It was stated that candidates could choose their spiritual directors, but only from among those recommended by the Bishops.¹⁵ This is to ensure that qualified persons are chosen. In the Redemptorist *Ratio Generalis*, it was also suggested that spiritual directors do not need to be Redemptorists but should understand the

¹⁵Congregation for the Clergy, “The Gift of the Priestly Vocation: Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis” (2016), sec. 46.

Redemptorist way of life¹⁶. It also states that aspirants should have spiritual directors before joining the Congregation. Similarly, Directives issued by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life insist that spiritual directors accompany candidates.¹⁷

Spiritual Reading

Spiritual reading comprises reading the scriptures, spiritual classics, and other spiritual writings, including the lives of saints. Most participants suggested this can be enhanced to better prepare candidates for spiritual discernment of private revelations. This was explained by P12, who said:

First and foremost, we know that every Christian needs to be conversant with the scriptures, and there are instances of private revelations in the scriptures. Also, in the writings of spiritual fathers, there are writings on spiritual discernment of private revelations. These forms of spiritual reading can be enhanced for the personal development of our candidates. It is not enough for the candidates to study the scriptures and other spiritual writings, but also to personally imbibe the core values contained in them.

P04 suggested that “Books related to spiritual discernment of private revelations should be made available to students.”

Focusing more on the lives of saints, P08 suggested that “The mystical aspect of the lives of the saints should be well explained to candidates.” Similarly, P13 observed, “We have in our Congregation mystics like St. Gerard Majella and St. Alphonsus Liguori. From these examples, and through prayer, they (candidates) can grow in their ability to discern private revelations.” From a wider perspective, P03 said:

They (candidates) can learn from the examples of Blessed Faustina, who received private revelations concerning the Divine Mercy, St. Margaret Mary Aloccoque concerning the Sacred Heart of Jesus, reflections of St. Teresa of Avilla, and others who, through discernment of private revelations have made meaningful contributions to the deposit of faith. When St. Therese, the little

¹⁶Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, *Redemptorist Formation: Ratio Formationis Generalis C.Ss.R.* (Rome: Redemptorist Publications, 2020), 61.

¹⁷The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, “Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes” (Rome: The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, 1990), sec. 19.

flower, wrote her little manual, she wrote it for her superior, but it became a treasure for the entire Church.

The *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* of the Congregation for the Clergy encouraged candidates to grow deeper in their love for the scriptures through different means, including the practice of *Lectio Divina*¹⁸. In some Redemptorists Communities, *Lectio Divina* is part of weekly Community preparation for the homily of the following Sunday. The COREAM *Ratio* encourages candidates to study the lives of Redemptorist Saints¹⁹.

New Course

All the participants suggested introducing a new course into the academic curriculum. The suggestion is that a course should be created around spiritual discernment of private revelations, but not a course to be offered as part of a degree course, but a course studied within the Community or an elective or seminar course in the Seminary, which does not involve the writing of exams. Several titles emerged from participants. For example, P01 suggested, "There should also be a course on the lives of the Saints, and this allows candidates to learn how the Saints experienced and discerned private revelations."

Similarly, P09 stated, "Mystical theology bothers on realities that deal with mystical realities, on mysticism. With Vatican II, it has been taken off the curriculum. Hence, a need to reintroduce mystical theology into the formation curriculum. The lives of some mystics are presented as guides in this discourse."

Speaking on the need for a psycho-spiritual course was P10, who proposes that:

Courses which deal with private revelations need to be introduced for our candidates. In this regard, I think of psycho-spirituality, which deals with psychology and spirituality. Such courses should be able to analyze psychological disorders so that, if what the person is experiencing is not a private revelation but a psychological disorder, the Priest or Religious will be able to know. Every Priest must know the different kinds of disorders that exist. Candidates should be equipped to know when it is a private revelation, or it is hallucination, as a result of schizophrenia, or when the person is suffering from

¹⁸Congregation for the Clergy, *The Gift of Priestly Vocation: Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, 45–46.

¹⁹Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, "*Ratio Formationis*" of the Conference of Redemptorists of Africa and Madagascar, sec. 18.

delusion. There are different kinds of delusions. For example, someone can have delusion of grandeur, whereby somebody believes they are greater than they are. They can believe that God has empowered them to perform miracles and that something has filled them and made them powerful.

Regarding the right time for such studies to be introduced, P11 opined that:

The candidates must be introduced to psycho-spiritual courses, which include ways of discerning private revelations. My suggestion would be that psycho-spiritual courses should be taken during the years of philosophical studies. This will help them to reason through it. As they go on pastoral year after philosophy, they will also take that knowledge into the pastoral year. When they come back from the pastoral year, other similar studies can support what they have learnt from the pastoral year.

Considering the role played by scientific and technological advancements in our contemporary world, P13 has the following to say:

Given where science and technology are headed currently, there should be some level of consciousness towards AI (artificial intelligence) so that they (candidates) can draw the line in terms of what modern science and technology can do. They (candidates) need to understand how modern technology can create confusion regarding its ability to manipulate certain realities. Artificial intelligence can make people believe there is a revelation when there is none. Candidates should also have basic knowledge of social sciences such as psychology and sociology to differentiate spiritual from psychological.

The findings are consistent with findings of Glasgow, Scotland by Karadzhev and White (2020) who emphasized the need of clergy to have ability to recognize psychological disorders. Based on the current findings there is a general lack of insight among Priests into psychological disorders and how to deal with them. Even though the research was carried out in Scotland, out of the 10 participants, 8 were Nigerians. Most of them end up offering prayers as a solution to psychological problems. A careful look at the theological courses offered in the seminaries today will reveal that it does not deal with mystical subjects. There seems to be an unwritten understanding that mysticism is a thing of the past.

Learning-based

Most participants believed that too much emphasis on examination affects the capacity of candidates to internalize what they are learning. They suggest that

intellectual formation should be primarily focused on learning. P02 explains this succinctly:

Candidates need to move away from focusing on exams and focus more on how to imbibe what has been given to them. Emphasis on exams is a serious stumbling block to learning. On the level of the students, they need to understand that it is good to pass their exams, but the most important thing is to understand what is being taught. Someone can memorize an answer to pass an exam, and after the exam, everything is lost. I think more needs to be done, firstly among lecturers. In academic council meetings, the focus is usually on what students are doing wrongly. I have had to call out fellow lecturers on the need to reflect on what we, as lecturers, are not doing right. Lecturers need to understand that they are there to impart knowledge, not necessarily to judge knowledge. Some lecturers will come to class, and after two weeks, they are already telling the students that if they answer questions in certain ways, they will not pass. This way, they prepare the students to start thinking of exams and not imbibe what they are being taught.

Similarly, P07 said, “Intellectual formation should focus not only on teaching the candidates but also trying to help them to make what they have been taught a part of them. This is the work that each individual needs to do so as not to deviate from the right spirituality.”

Speaking on the need to make a connection between intellectual formation and future ministry was P11, who said:

When courses in private revelations are taught, the students should see them not just as academic knowledge but as a tool they will use in ministry for the rest of their lives. It should be put in the minds of the seminarians that the courses are taught not just so that they will make Distinctions and forget about them but that they should see it as a tool for ministry in the future.

Speaking on the need to make a connection between intellectual formation and spirituality was P16, who said, “Our intellectual formation should be linked to the spiritual life and not be focused on passing exams. There should be a good relationship between students and teachers so they will be open to asking questions in class, especially on sensitive topics such as private revelations.”

The Redemptorist *Ratio Generalis* encouraged Redemptorists to seek true learning and acquisition of valuable skills for ministry rather than acquiring

certificates²⁰. In the same breath, the *Ratio* of the Redemptorist Vice-Province of Nigeria instructs that philosophy should help candidates to become thinkers, while theology is to help them to become believers²¹. That way, intellectual formation will not only be learning-based but also transformative.

Community Sharing

For Redemptorists, the Community is an important training ground for pastoral work. All participants spoke about the important role of Community sharing in preparing candidates for spiritual discernment of private revelations. Explaining the role that those already in full-time ministry can play in the lives of candidates within the Community, P05 said

The Brothers in ministry should freely share their experiences with the Brothers in initial formation as a way of helping them to understand how certain situations should be handled. They could even pose it as a question to those in initial formation to know what they would do in certain pastoral situations. That will help the young man to think about something. If he is wrong, the elder Brother can correct him. That will go a long way to help those in initial formation. The candidate should also be encouraged to ask questions. It will be advantageous to the candidate if there is a dialogue between the candidate and the pastoral team. It will be difficult to forget when things are learnt in such situations.

On the part of candidates, P01 said, “Candidates should be free to discuss the difficulties they encounter in guiding the faithful with the Community to receive proper guidance. They need to be allowed to share their experiences.”

Furthermore, P02 said:

Given that we are religious and not diocesans, we have a fifth dimension of initial formation: the Community dimension. This gives us an advantage in terms of spiritual discernment of private revelations. In a Community where meetings are held, and ideas are shared, with Community support; when pastoral experiences are shared in the Community, they (candidates) will develop better skills for discerning private revelations and have the

²⁰Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, *Redemptorist Formation: Ratio Formationis Generalis C.Ss.R.*, sec. 55.

²¹Redemptorist Region of Nigeria, *Student Ratio: Redemptorist Formation Programme* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Redemptorist Publications Nigeria, 1998), 4.

Community's support. A good Community life also gives the candidates the confidence to ask questions and receive proper guidance.

P03 described the Community as a discerning ground when he said, "Working with the Community also means that Community becomes a discernment ground, such that candidates can share their experiences with the Community, and so can be helped towards spiritual discernment of private revelations. Our unity as a Community helps us to work with one mind and heart."

Stating that Community sharing can be both formal and informal, P08 said,

When a Community is healthy, it also provides an avenue for candidates to share their pastoral experiences with other Community members. This kind of sharing is done both formally and informally in the Community, which enriches the candidate's experience in the spiritual discernment of private revelations.

Most of the sharing within the Community happens at the table. Sometimes members of the Community may not come to the table for several reasons. P15 said, "Even if brothers are not hungry or on a diet, they should create time to come to the table and share." He concluded by quoting the Redemptorist Constitutions and Statutes 21, which states, "*Community does not truly exist when members merely live together; it requires as well genuine sharing on the human and spiritual level.*"²²

St. Ignatius of Loyola talks about the importance of the discerning community. The *Ratio* of the Congregation of the Clergy spoke about the importance of being formed within a formation Community where sharing can take place among candidates as well as with formators.²³ An essential number in the Redemptorist Constitutions and Statutes is number 21, which the Redemptorist *Ratio Generalis*, the COREAM *Ratio*, and the *Ratio* of the Redemptorist Vice-Province of Nigeria all made reference to.

²²Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, *Constitutions and Statutes: Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer* (Rome: General Curia C.Ss.R., 2002), sec. 21.

²³Congregation for the Clergy, *The Gift of Priestly Vocation: Ratio Fundamentalibus Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, 3–4.

Recommendations

Those responsible for the appointment of formators should ensure that formators are people who are in touch with their spiritual selves and can relate to extraordinary spiritual experiences and evaluate them objectively. Spiritual directors must understand the importance of spiritual direction in candidates' lives. They should realize that spiritual direction allows candidates to share with someone who is not directly involved in their evaluation. Lecturers should not only focus on what candidates may be doing wrong but should also evaluate themselves to see if they may be doing anything to hinder candidates' learning. One such is that they should not make candidates so afraid of exams at the expense of internalizing what they are learning. It is the responsibility of lecturers to awaken candidates' genuine interest and love for learning.

Bibliography

- Andrew A. Adubale & Oyaziwo Aluede. "A Survey of Counselling Needs of Seminarians in Catholic Major Seminaries in Nigeria." *Asia Pacific Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy* 8, no. 1 (2017): 29–40. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2014.886671>.
- Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria. *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*. Abuja: Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, 2005.
- Congregation for the Clergy. *The Gift of Priestly Vocation: Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*. Vatican City: L'Osservatore Romano, 2016.
- . *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation: Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* (2016).
- Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer. *Constitutions and Statutes: Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer*. Rome: General Curia C.Ss.R., 2002.
- . "*Ratio Formationis*" of the Conference of Redemptorists of Africa and Madagascar. Nairobi, Kenya, 2022.
- . *Redemptorist Formation: Ratio Formationis Generalis C.Ss.R.* Rome: Redemptorist Publications, 2020.
- John Andrea Philip Ujang. "Training of Spiritual Directors for Effective Spiritual Development of Candidates to the Priesthood in St. Paul's Major Seminary Juba,

- South Sudan.” *The Catholic Voyage: African Journal of Consecrated Life* 20, no. 2 (2023). <https://doi.org/https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/tcv.c20i2.4>.
- John Paul II. “Pastores Dabo Vobis: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation.” Rome, 1992. http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_25031992_pastores-dabo-vobis.html.
- Koss, Sarah E., Ross Weissman, Vinca Chow, Patrick T. Smith, Bethany Slack, Vitaliy Voytenko, Tracy A. Balboni, and Michael J. Balboni. “Training Community Clergy in Serious Illness: Balancing Faith and Medicine.” *Journal of Religion and Health* 57, no. 4 (2018): 1413–27. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26750609>.
- Nyandoro, Rudolf. “Assessment of Counselling Skills among the Clergy: A Case Study of the Roman Catholic Priests in the Diocese of Masvingo in Zimbabwe.” University of South Africa, 2010.
- Redemptorist Region of Nigeria. *Student Ratio: Redemptorist Formation Programme*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Redemptorist Publications Nigeria, 1998.
- The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. “Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes.” Rome: The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, 1990.
- White, Dimitar Karadzhov & Ross. “Between the ‘Whispers of the Devil’ and ‘the Revelation of the Word’: Christian Clergy’s Mental Health Literacy and Pastoral Support for BME Congregants.” *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health* 22, no. 2 (2020): 147–72. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19349637.2018.1537755>.
- William Cleary. “The Gift of Priestly Vocation.” *Spiritan Horizons* 14, no. 14 (2019).
- Winters, Kate O. Ott and Amanda J. “Sex and the Seminary: Preparing Ministers for Sexual Health and Justice.” *American Journal of Sexuality Education* 6, no. 1 (2011): 55–74. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15546128.2011.547368>.