



CATHOLIC YOUTHS AND CONSECRATED LIFE

***OMOJOLA IMMACULATA OLU, (SSMA), Ph.D &
KANU, Ikechukwu ANTHONY, OSA

**Department of Business Administration and Management,
Villanova Polytechnic, Imesi Ile, Osun State **Tansian University,
Umunya, Anambra State*

Abstract

This paper discusses youths and consecrated life. The ideal and rudiments of religious life is being represented in the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. By these three evangelical counsels, one offers all he has to God; his exterior goods by poverty, his body by chastity, and his soul by obedience. These vows are to be lived in the community with other member that shares the charism and spirituality of the same congregation. The particular concern is how today's youths are responding to this type of life in this age. The fact that society is gradually influencing consecrated life through the recruitment of children of this time may make it loose its meaning. It is then suggested that reviewing and reexamining the relevance of consecrated life in this generation may be urgent instead of professing what is no achievable.

Keywords: *Youths, Consecrated life, Chastity, Poverty, Obedience, Community life.*

Introduction

The attention of this paper is drawn to the way today's youths are responding to the consecrated life. Speaking about youths in general and especially about youths of the 21st century without taking into account how globalization has really influenced the religious life may be a mistake. The consecrated life is normally called the religious life. This is a vocation and by its meaning, is essentially a call. A call is a voice that attracts someone's attention and demands a response. A call can assume a dialogue between two persons. God initiates every process of vocation. Every vocation in life is purposeful. Some people are called to the marital life, while some opt for the ministerial priesthood and some are called to the consecrated religious

life. The consecrated life in particular is a life set aside to be lived in total dedication to God alone. It is a unique form of life. It is a life that is lived by professing the three evangelical counsels or vows of Chastity, Poverty and Obedience.

On chastity, we are told from the Holy bible, Matt 19:11-12:- Some people are born as eunuchs, while some are made eunuchs by others, and some assume the position of eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven and let anyone accept this who can. By common understanding, a eunuch is a person who cannot procreate and thus has no flare for marriage. The evangelical vow of chastity makes one assume this position. By implication, no marriage and any related enjoyment to marriage is forbidden.

On poverty, the religious is attracted to the word of Jesus in Lk 18: 29 where he says “And I assure you that everyone who has given up house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the Kingdom of God will be repaid many times over in this life, and will have eternal life in the world to come.” Therefore the vow of poverty is emptying oneself of these conveniences. Attachment of any form is not allowed and accumulation of material things is not allowed.

On obedience, the self-will is addressed in this matter. It is a renunciation of self will to accept the will of others for the sake of the kingdom of God. This finds its bases in the attitude of Jesus as express by St Paul in Phil (2: from verse 5) which says, “Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus. Who though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness, and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. The vow of obedience is therefore important in responding promptly to the commands of the lawful superiors.

The consecrated life has its values in the following: total self-giving, freedom from attachment and freedom from anxiety. Total self-giving is reflected in the vow of obedience is in imitation of Jesus who was always doing the will of his father. “Jesus says to them: My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, that I may perfect his work.” Jn 4:34. Freedom from attachment is in the vow of poverty where members are encouraged to restrict themselves from worldly desires. “Jesus said to him: If you will be perfect, go sell what you have, and give to the poor and you shall have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me.” Mt 19:21. The vow of chastity is

implores members to be free from anxiety by staying fully in the service of God without any intimate relationship with anybody. “But I would have you to be without solicitude. He that is without a wife is solicitous for the things that belong to the Lord: how he may please God...” 1 Cor 7: 32-34. Now, these vows are simply interpreted in not being ambitious for power and positions, not longing for money and living within one's approved income, not interested in marriage and all the enjoyment that goes with it, all in the name of witnessing to Christ.

Each religious congregation has a unique way of contributing to the life of the church in their charism. This charism is lived daily by all members in the community life and in their distinct life style. Each congregation also has their spirituality which expresses in an exciting manner the spiritual beliefs accepted by the members of the congregation and is being passed on to posterity. Men and women are called freely to this life, of witnessing to the gospel of Christ, reflecting in their living together as a community. Consequently, the vows are lived in the community. “A Religious Community is to live in a lawfully constituted house, under the authority of a superior designated according to the norms of law. Each house is to have at least an oratory, in which the Eucharist is celebrated and reserved, so that it may truly be the center of the community.” (CCL 608).

Apart from this, the community life is a reflection of what the early Christians practiced in Acts 4:32 “And the multitude of believers had but one heart and one soul. Neither did anyone say that aught of the things which he possessed was his own: but all things were common unto them.” In the light of this, the church therefore admonishes consecrated people to own things in common by praying together, eating together, traveling together whenever they are going to the same place, supporting one another in times of good and bad, and simply put, being your brothers and sisters keeper. This will enable members to live out the accepted charism and spirituality in the church. Nevertheless, it is clear that we are witnessing a profound change of values that is eroding not only the moral but also the natural principles.

Youths and Consecrated Life

At the initial stage of consecrated life, especially during formation, sweet words like these are used to present to intending members the importance of the consecrated life that should be lived in a community. “Our vocations are nurtured in community”, The vows are better lived in the community” or

“Religious life is lived in community, “Community is our home”
“Community is the place of encounter with God and with one another”
“Formation of each one of us takes place in community” and “Community
is built day by day by the contribution of each member”, “Community gives
meaning to our consecrated life” and many more. Aside this, the master or
mistress of novices may give further explanation quoting the Bible: “Like
the early Christians, we gather in community to witness to the love of Christ
Act 2:44 and 4:32.

This means that community is an essential aspect of religious life. The model
or ideal of consecrated life is being presented in the above statements and
many interested members embrace it and strive day in day out to be perfect
as it is in the value of the consecrated life. It will be an understatement to
say that the consecrated life is changing by day. The standards, ethics and
principles are no longer lived out as in the past. Great silence no longer taken
seriously, telephones and use of computers to watch movies has replaced
community sharing. The older members are wondering and want to know
where they have gone wrong, while the younger generations are asking why
things are so tight or why do we have tight rules?

From the experience of being a vocations director for eight years and being
fully involved in regular recruitments, it can be concluded that today’s
youths are not finding the consecrated life very interesting. Their assessment
of men and women religious they meet before desiring the consecrated life
does not truly represent what we present to them as the true meaning of
devoted life. Their values and interest are far beyond the ideal. The vows are
perceived as one of those things which may be compared to “A drifts towards
bourgeois values and moral relativism” that Rodé (2008) presents as two
great dangers that weaken religious life,” They are anxious to profess the
vows and have positions where they can enjoy their freedom and this most
of the time work for them, especially when they are close to the authorities.
Nobody is ready to do any work that is not prestigious. So how then can the
poor be helped and the needy be adequately attended to? Some
congregations even abandon their charisms in the name of making more
money. Accumulation of goods is the other of the day as against the vow of
poverty. Selected few go to the extent of developing social relationship with
the opposite sex that has even cost them to be expelled or leave the
consecrated life voluntarily after taking the final vows.

Community life is so weak that members find comfort outside. The entire congregation is broken into factions where those who are not a circle member may not find a space to be happy. This is relevant to the view of 58 year old religious that was interviewed by (Gray 1995) 'if you didn't have friends in the group, who would you, come "home" to? There should be a "home" where you can come home, where you feel good, your friends are going to there.' By inference, the consecrated life is changing daily. Rodé (2008) again lists a number of ways in which this change is visible among members of religious communities as: "Freedom without constraints, a weak sense of the family, a worldly spirit, low visibility of religious clothing, a devaluation of prayer, insufficient community life and a weak sense of obedience".

The arguments of some people in relation to how today's youths are living the vows is that religious superiors are not paying attention to the needs of member like before. They feel that members may abandon their religious commitment for worldly desires if authorities are only interested in playing their role partially. Taking lead from some of the experiences of members of the religious life, it may be important to think twice. Imagine a superior general making a public address to her members that if they are kidnapped, they should remain in the dens of kidnappers because there is no money and if they think the congregation should pay; members should give names of the person or persons that will be responsible for payment. She added that members should sign a document to show that agreed to this and they refused to sign.

Another situation is a community superior addressing her members that she sold the community car to buy her project car, therefore, the community has no car but she has. Can you picture a situation where a community superior declared kitchen free for a week because there is no money? Or how can members be committed to a community that will not have anything in common apart from daily three square meals? The worse part of it is Congregations asking members to sponsor themselves and when they are working, they remit their income to the congregation. Where is justice when obedience is turning to politics? There are lots and lots of lists of uncoordinated leadership styles that brought about the issue of consecrated people in this age leaving outside the communities.

The expression of the experiences of a 59 year old religious as Gray (1995) presented it may be relevant here. 'I felt alone and it was extremely painful.

Support came from another member of staff. She taught me about not taking the law seriously-she was a free kind of person and I was not.’ Many people find the life no longer thrilling and they change as in this expression. This is not in the plans of religious institutes from the beginning according to the mind of the Church. “The institutes must supply the members with **everything** that, in accordance with the constitutions, is necessary to fulfil the purpose of their vocation” Can 670. In the interpretation of this it covers education, conferences, retreats, adequate housing, clothing, professional updating, counseling etc.

Consequently, Paredes (2005) opines that consecrated life must be lived in a family spirit where sincerity and openness abides. “In our community, no one should feel censured, prevented from expressing himself the way he is. The community grows when an atmosphere is created in which we able to communicate not only what we see, but also what we think and even what we feel”. Listening to all these, the question is: can we relate the above with Mt 24:12? “And because iniquity has abounded, the love of many shall grow cold.”

Conclusion

The total gift of oneself to God, when accepted and confirmed by the Church, is a true consecration of the person to God. In the description of Catholic Encyclopedia, “The religious life which is pointed out to us by the Evangelical counsels is a life of charity and of union with God, and the great means it employs to this end is freedom and detachment from everything that could in any manner prevent or impair that union.” Which means it is a life of devotion, a total giving and commitment. Consecrated members are then encouraged to attach importance to it in the light of Mt 24: 13 “But he that shall persevere to the end, he shall be saved.”

In conclusion, the reasons presented here may seem negative, and in a way they are. However, they must be understood in a positive light; there is no point in giving things up unless one is seeking something better. It is therefore pertinent to begin to think of how to review and make critical evaluation of the consecrated life to suit what the society is offering it in today’s youths, instead of professing what is not practicable or attainable.

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