

# STUDIES AND PERSPECTIVES

## THE CALL TO “CONSECRATED LIFE” AND ITS CHARITABLE APOSTOLATE

Prof. Bartholomew Chidili OSA<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

*This essay, “The Call to ‘Consecrated Life’ and its Charitable Apostolate” was all about naming the “consecrated life” through the detailed analysis of the concept of the expression “consecrated life.” The study travelled through the phenomenological approach which was considered very adequate for the interpretation of this type. ‘Naming’ was analysed to ensure its unequivocal stance in classifying “consecrated life.” so as to name it properly. In the process consecrated life was discovered to be a state of life in the Catholic Church lived by believers who wish to follow Christ in a more thorough way. The life was found to be heavily tied to the concept of apostolic calling. It was a mode of life rising from the will of God and journeying towards God in all its expressions. It was a call freely made by God on the believers who were pleased to freely respond to it. In responding to this call one was bound to follow strictly the biddings of Jesus Christ doing his father’s will, in praying, preaching, doing good to people, healing the sick and casting out demons and more. In all, Jesus must be seen doing his father’s will in the religious person. Thus, while the faithful was bound to attach to one religious order or congregation in expressing the peculiar vocation assigned to them by the Lord himself, he or she must adhere to the rules and regulations of the congregation or the order in union with the mind of the entire church. Charity was traced to be the channel through which this call was answered adequately. Charity in this case was an extraordinary force which led people to opt for courageous and generous engagement in the field of justice and peace. It was a force that had its origin in God, who was the Eternal Love and Absolute Truth. Charitable person found his good by adhering to God's plan for him/her, in order to realize it fully: in this plan, he found his truth, and through adhering to this truth he becomes free (cf. Jn 8:32). To defend the discovered truth, the religious person articulated it with humility and conviction throughout life.*

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<sup>1</sup> Prof Fr. Bartholomew Chidili is an Augustinian Priest. He is an adjunct lecturer in Good Shepherd Major Seminary, Kaduna, Nigeria.

## **INTRODUCTION AND DEFINITION**

This work attempts to name the term ‘consecrated life’ via phenomenological approach. Ekwunife, (1990),<sup>2</sup> explains phenomenological approach as “holistic method” which searches for the meaning of a phenomenon in its immediate and total contexts. This is why this work adopts this method in its totality to analyse consecrated life in its totality with a view to ‘assigning name’ on it to express its dynamic phenomena in our present historical, sociological and religious status in the scheme of existence. “Assigning names’ as a theme of study was spearheaded by Van der Leeuw, (1938), when he placed “assigning names” as first list in his phenomenological method which began with listing and naming all religious phenomena in his work. His reason was to point out the initial human activity of classifying one object in order to separate it conceptually from another followed by mental procedure of placing similar objects into categories. Drawing from Gen 2:20, he maintains that, ‘since, Adam named the animals, in the book of Genesis, speakers all over the world have always named objects in like manner (p. 674).<sup>3</sup> His main reason for towing this line of thought is to extricate scholars from repeating the mistake of treating mere words ‘as if they were objects’ thereby confusing concepts with the reality behind the concept.<sup>4</sup> To avoid this error, the phenomenologist and those who think in like manner must always remain attuned to the phenomena as they appear within the consciousness.

Consecrated life therefore, is a state of life in the Catholic Church lived by believers who wish to follow Christ in a more thorough way. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, it “is characterized by the public profession of evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience in a stable state of life recognized by the Church<sup>5</sup>”. The Code of canon law defines it as a stable form of living by which the faithful, following Christ more closely under the action of the Holy Spirit, are totally dedicated to God who is supremely loved so that having been dedicated by a new and special title to his honour, to the building of the church, and to the salvation of the world, they strive for the perfection of charity in the service of the kingdom of God and having been made an outstanding sign in the church, foretell the glory.<sup>6</sup> Consecrated life may be lived either in institute

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<sup>2</sup>Anthony Ekwunife, *Consecration in Igbo Traditional Religion*.(Enugu: Jet Publications (Nig) Ltd. 1990.) 22.

<sup>3</sup> Gerardus Van der Leeuw, “Assigning Names,”*Religion in Essence and Manifestation: A Study in Phenomenology*,(London: The Macmillan company, 1938)674.Quoted in Cox, James, L. *An Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion*. (New York: Continuum Press, 2010) 58

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Canon 944

<sup>6</sup> Canon 573 no.1

or individually. While those living it are either clergy (if ordained) or lay people; the state of consecrated life itself is neither clerical nor lay by nature.<sup>7</sup>

## **THEOLOGICAL AND EXEGETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF RELIGIOUS CALLING AND APOSTOLATE**

In the beginning, Jesus said to his apostles, “you did not choose me but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you” (John 15:16). Jesus further said, I chose you to be apostles (Luke 6:13) and also chose you to bear fruit, fruit that would last; it may also mean, that he chose them “to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth,” (2 Thes.2:13). As the cited pericope demonstrate, the choice of the apostles was entirely free without any attachment. This means that Jesus did not choose his apostles out of their previously known qualifications, no! He freely chose them and appointed them to bear fruit that will last. Obviously, he chose them, before they chose him as their master; so that his choice as we have noted was entirely free. Thus, the choice did not arise from any character, motive, or condition in them: the allusion must have risen from a usual custom of the Jews, where in the choice of this kind, the disciples chose their masters. Jesus in this case did the opposite; he chose his apostles before they chose him as their master without any attachment. Hence, the choice was said to be totally free.

## **REASONS FOR CHOOSING THE APOSTLES, AND BY EXTENSION THE RELIGIOUS**

Many reasons for choosing the Apostles may be adduced as follows: It might be that he chose and appointed them to work, (Luke 6:13-16; Matthew 10:2-5). But most importantly, he chose them to be with him and to be sent out to preach (Mark 3:14); bringing forth fruit that would be rich in good works; faithful and successful in spreading the gospel. This was the great business to which they were set apart. It is also the great business the religious people of our modern times are called and set apart; to stay with Jesus and spread as far as possible the rich temporal and spiritual blessings which the gospel is tailored to confer on the world. And as the Acts would have it; to be witnesses of Christ to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8).

## **THE CALL TO CONSECRATED LIFE AND THE FREEDOM TO RESPOND**

Canon (574 no.2) claims that some of Christ’s faithful are specially called by God to the state of consecrated life; which in the words of canon 573, no, 2 maintains that Christ’s faithful freely assume this manner of life in institutes of consecrated life which are canonically established by the competent ecclesiastical authority. Hence, by vows or by other sacred bonds, in accordance with

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<sup>7</sup> Canon 558 no.1

the laws of their own institutes, they profess the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience. Canon 573<sup>8</sup> certainly asserts that this form of life is a stable form of living. Thus, in her divinely inspired wisdom these institutes spawned and are consecrated by the church and displayed publicly for the followers to freely choose. As a result many institutes of consecrated life with gifts that differ according to the graces given them are readily available. These institutes more closely follow Christ praying or Christ proclaiming the Kingdom of God, or Christ doing good to the people, or Christ in dialogue with the people of this world, but always Christ doing the will of the Father.<sup>9</sup> Following the charity to which these counsels lead, they are linked in a special way to the Church and its mystery.<sup>10</sup> By a new and a special title they are dedicated to seek the perfection of charity in the service of God's Kingdom, for the honour of God, the building of the Church and the salvation of the world. They are a splendid sign in the Church, as they foretell the heavenly glory. It may be added that this is the great end for which Christians are chosen. And by implication the religious of ages are called to do good, and to spread as far as possible the rich temporal and spiritual blessings which the gospel is fitted to confer on the world.

### **JESUS' PLAN FOR THE CHOSEN**

Jesus willed that the effect of the apostles' labours would be permanent on mankind. Their efforts were not to be like those of false teachers, the result of whose labours soon vanish away (Acts 5:38-39), but their gospel was to take a deep and permanent hold on people, and was ultimately to spread and fill the world, (Matthew 16:18.) Their ministry were also declared to be unremitted. This means that the apostles were sent forth to be diligent in their work, and untiring in their efforts to spread the gospel, until the day of their death. Thus, their fruit, the continued product or growth of religion in their souls, was to remain, or to be continually produced, until God should call them home from their work. This follows to the fact that Christians, and particularly the religious, should be devoted to the Saviour for life. The religious must toil without intermission, and without being weary of his work, until God should call them home (Mat 4:18-22). This, means that there is no part time service to the Lord. For the Saviour never called a disciple to serve him merely for a part of his life, nor to feel him/herself at liberty to relax their endeavours, nor to suppose him/herself to be a Christian when his religion produced no fruit. Rather that they should work hard and bear fruit that would last. This means that he who enlists under the banners of the Son of God does it for life. He that expects or desires to grow weary and ceases to serve him, has never yet put on the Christian armour, or known anything of the grace of God. For, "no one who puts his hand on the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62.)

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<sup>8</sup> Cannon 573, no. 1

<sup>9</sup> Can 577

<sup>10</sup> Can573, no, 2

## **THE OPINION OF THE FATHERS**

Augustine and others of the ancients, approved that the apostles were called to bring forth fruit amongst the Gentiles, turning many to righteousness, and that they might bring forth the fruit of holiness, in obedience to the gospel of Christ. Yea, not only to bring forth fruit, but that they might persevere in bringing forth fruit; and that thus doing, they might have a freedom of access to the throne of grace, and obtain whatsoever they should ask of the Father, in the name, for the merits, and through the mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>11</sup>

Moreover, that your fruit should remain; means further that they not only persevered themselves in faith and holiness, in preaching the Gospel, and living according to it, but that the persons whose conversion they were instrumental to, continued steadfastly in their doctrine, and in the fellowship of the church; and the Gospel which was preached by them, has remained, with the converts forever: he subsequently added that whatsoever they should ask of the Father in his name, he may give it to them. This is added, to encourage their perseverance in the work he chose and called them to do, which would be attended with many difficulties and discouragements; wherefore as they would stand in need of divine assistance, they might assure themselves of it; for be it what it would they should ask of his Father, making mention of his name and righteousness; whether for a sufficiency of gifts and grace in the discharge of their duty; or for success in it; or for the confirmation of the truths delivered by them; or for liberty and boldness to speak in vindication of themselves, when called to it before kings and governors, it should be given to them. <sup>12</sup>

## **THE CALL WRAPPED IN CHARITY**

The charity required in this all important call is the type narrated by Paul in 1 Cori 13:1-3. In this type of charity, Paul demonstrates what more excellent way he has in view, in the close of the previous chapter, namely, charity, or, as it is commonly elsewhere rendered, love or agape: not what is meant by charity in our common use of the word, which most people understand as almsgiving, but love in its fullest and most extensive meaning. This living principle of all duty and obedience is the more excellent way of which the apostle speaks, preferable to all gifts. Nay, without this the most glorious gifts are nothing, of no account to us, and of no esteem in the sight of God.

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<sup>11</sup> Poole on "John 14:13" and on "John 14:14".

<sup>12</sup> Poole on "John 14:13" and on "John 14:14".

## **THE CHARACTERISTICS OF TRUE CHARITY OR TRUE LOVE TO GOD AND HUMANITY**

### **1 Corinthians 13:4-7**

Charity is “long suffering” *makrothymei* meaning that it can endure evil, injury, and provocation, without being filled with resentment, indignation or revenge. This is what we are called to live full out. In living out this charity we’ll discover that Charity makes the mind firm, it gives the mind power over the angry passions, and furnishes it with a persevering patience. Such a patience that would rather wait and wish for the reformation of a brother/sister than fly out in resentment of his/her conduct. Charity puts up with many slights and rejects from the person it loves, and wait long to see the kindly effects of such patience on him/her<sup>13</sup>

Its meaning is clarified by the Greek translation of the Old Testament, where we read that God is “slow to anger” (Ex 34:6; Numb 14:18). It refers then to the quality of one who does not act on impulse and avoids giving offense. We find this quality in the God of the Covenant, who calls us to imitate him also within the life of the family. St Paul’s texts using this word need to be read in the light of the Book of Wisdom (cf. 11:23; 12:2, 15-18), which extols God’s restraint, as leaving open the possibility of repentance, yet insists on his power, as revealed in his acts of mercy. God’s “patience,” shown in his mercy towards sinners, is a sign of his real power.<sup>14</sup>

Now, bear in mind that being patient does not mean letting ourselves be constantly; tolerating physical aggression or allowing other people to use us. We encounter problems whenever we think that relationships or people ought to be perfect, or when we put ourselves at the centre and expect things to turn our way. Then everything makes us impatient, everything makes us react aggressively. Unless; we cultivate patience, we will always find excuses for responding angrily. We will end up being incapable of living together, being antisocial, and unable to control our impulses as well as ultimately turning our families into battlegrounds... At the moment, note that **p**atience takes root when I recognise that other people also have a right to live in this world, just as they are. It does not matter if they hold me back, if they unsettle my plans, or annoy me by the way they think or if they are not everything I want them to be. Love always has an aspect of deep compassion that leads to accepting the other person as part of this world, even when he or she acts differently than I would like.<sup>15</sup> Charity is also “kind” *chresteuetai*, meaning that charity is courteous and obliging. In this case we’ll realize that the law of kindness is in her lips; in her heart and such a heart is large enough to accommodate many things. The kind charity’s hand is open to

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<sup>13</sup> Matthew Henry’s Comm. on charity as a long suffering

<sup>14</sup> *Amoris Laetitia* no. 91 parag. 1

<sup>15</sup> *Amoris Laetitia*, 2016, 50-51.

*The CATHOLIC VOYAGE*

*African Journal of Consecrated Life*

*A Publication of the Conferences of Major Superiors of Nigeria Motto: Witness to Truth and Mercy through Love and Service with Faith and Reason*

ISSN 1597 6610

ISSN 2659-0301online

give; it is ready to show favours and to do good. She seeks to be useful; and not only seizes on opportunities of doing good, but searches for opportunities to do good. In this way the charitable kindness empowers the wellbeing of human persons.<sup>16</sup>

Charity also suppresses envy: for envy is the effect of ill-will. It is not grieved at the good of others; neither at their gifts nor at their good qualities, their honours nor their estates. If we love our neighbour we shall be so far from envying his welfare, or being displeased with it, that we shall share in it and rejoice at it. His blessings and sanctification will be an addition to ours, instead of impairing or lessening it. This is the proper effect of kindness and benevolence. The prosperity of those to whom we wish well can never grieve us; and the mind which is bent on doing good to all can never wish ill to any.<sup>17</sup>

Charity still subdues pride and vain-glory; it neither puffs off nor bloats with self-conceit. It does not swell upon its acquisitions, nor arrogates itself to that honour, or power, or respect, which does not belong to it. It is not insolent, apt to despise others, or trample on them, or treat them with contempt and scorn. Those who are animated with a principle of true brotherly love will in honour prefer one another (Rom 12:10). They will do nothing out of a spirit of contention or vain-glory, but in lowliness of mind will esteem others better than themselves, (Phil 2:3). True love will give us an esteem of our brethren, and raise our value for them; and this will limit our esteem of ourselves, and prevent the tumours of self-conceit and arrogance. These ill qualities can never grow out of tender affection for the brethren, nor a diffusive benevolence. Charity calms the angry passions, instead of raising them. Charity does not act insidiously with any, seek to ensnare them, nor tease them with needless importunities and addresses. It is not forward, nor stubborn and intractable, nor apt to be cross and contradictory. Some understand it of dissembling and flattery, when a fair face is put on, and fine words are said, without any regard to truth, or intention of good. Charity abhors such falsehood and flattery. Nothing is commonly more pernicious, nor more apt to cross the purposes of true love and good will.<sup>18</sup>

Charity is an utter enemy to selfishness: it does not seek its own, does not inordinately desire nor seek its own praise, or honour, or profit, or pleasure. Indeed self-love, in some degree, is natural to all humanity, and indeed it enters into their very constitution. Moreover, a reasonable love of self is by our Saviour made the measure of our love to others, that charity which is here described, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. The apostle does not mean that charity destroys all regard to self; he does not mean that the charitable man should never challenge what is his own, but utterly neglect himself and all his interests. Charity must then root up that principle which is wrought into

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> ibid

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our nature. But charity never seeks its own to the hurt of others, or with the neglect of others. It often neglects its own for the sake of others; prefers their welfare, and satisfaction, and advantage, to its own; and it ever prefers the weal of the public, of the community, whether civil or ecclesiastical, to its private advantage. It would not advance, nor aggrandize, nor enrich, nor gratify itself, at the cost and damage of the public<sup>19</sup>.

At this point we agree with Pope Benedict XVI that charity<sup>20</sup> is an extraordinary force which leads people to opt for courageous and generous engagement in the field of justice and peace. It is a force that has its origin in God, who is the Eternal Love and Absolute Truth. Charitable person finds his good by adhering to God's plan for him, in order to realize it fully: in this plan, he/she finds his/her truth, and through adhering to this truth s/he becomes free (cf. Jn 8:32). To defend the truth, he/she must articulate it with humility and conviction, and to bear witness to it in life are therefore challenging and indispensable forms of charity. Charity, in fact, "rejoices in the truth" (1 Cor 13:6). All people feel the interior impulse to love authentically: love and truth never abandon them completely, because these are the vocation planted by God in the heart and mind of every human person. The search for love and truth is purified and liberated by Jesus Christ from the impoverishment that our humanity brings to it, and he reveals to us in all its fullness the initiative of love and the plan for true life that God has prepared for us. In Christ, charity in truth becomes the Face of his Person, a vocation for us to love our brothers and sisters in the truth of his plan.<sup>21</sup>

At this juncture we can say that the apostolate of the Religious in charity is exteriorly and interiorly to be with the Lord always praying with him; feeding the hungry, helping families facing homelessness return to self-sufficiency, and empowering survivors of domestic violence. As Religious Communities, we direct resources to people facing hunger, homelessness, domestic violence and a lack of basic needs. To serve effectively, as religious communities we have evolved into a cooperative of professional staff members, integral volunteers and partnering faith congregations delivering reliable services to those most vulnerable in internally displaced members of the society. The Communities continue to use research, communication and best practices to be a premier community based agency providing help & hope to people in need. In this type of charity all the religious communities become in truth the Face of Christ in the world, a vocation for us to love our brothers and sisters in the truth of his plan.<sup>22</sup> In this way, we no longer live for ourselves but for him who died and resurrected for us (2 Cor 5:15).

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<sup>19</sup> Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible, PC Study Bible Formatted Electronic Database 2006

<sup>20</sup> Benedict XVI, Caritas in Veritate

July 2009

<sup>21</sup> ibid

<sup>22</sup> Wikipedia 2019



## CONCLUSION

The forgoing has considered the call to consecrated life and its apostolates. It realised that the call freely originates from God and freely given to all the faithful to freely respond to. we now conclude with the assertion of canon law that consecrated life is a stable form of living by which the faithful, following Christ more closely under the action of the Holy Spirit, are totally dedicated to God who is supremely loved so that having been dedicated by a new and special title to his honour, to the building of the church, and to the salvation of the world, they strive for the perfection of charity in the service of kingdom of God and having been made an outstanding sign in the church, foretell the glory.<sup>23</sup> We discovered also that consecrated life may be lived either in institute or individually. While those living it are either clergy (if ordained) or lay people; the state of consecrated life itself is neither clerical nor lay by nature. Accepting this state of life therefore means accepting permanent life with commitment to the Lord. This, being the case we accept the call with every consciousness to diligently serve with charity the call without complain of tiredness or boredom,

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<sup>23</sup> Canon 573 no.1