

THE  
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**PILGRIMS OF HOPE ON THE PATH TO PEACE:  
A JOURNEY OF RECONCILIATION, MISSION  
AND CELEBRATION**

**Towards the Special Jubilee of Consecrated Life  
2025 - A Holy Year**

*A Publication of the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria*

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A Publication of the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria

Motto: *Witness to Truth and Mercy through Love and Service  
with Faith and Reason*

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## EDITORIAL

The Catholic Church celebrates two major worldwide historic events. First, the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on Synodality (2021-2024), held in different phases, including the two celebrative Sessions<sup>1</sup>. Second, the Jubilee Year, which is celebrated from Dec.24, 2024 to January 6, 2026)<sup>2</sup>, preceded by a Year (2024) devoted to “a great ‘symphony’ of prayer”<sup>3</sup>. The conclusion of the Synod of Bishops (in October 2024) does not end the synod process; rather, it constitutes only the beginning of a new, longer and more engaging phase of the journey, which is the phase of reception and implementation of the Synod.

According to Pope Francis’s “*Accompanying Note by the Holy Father Francis*”, while it is “*not strictly normative*”, the *final Document* of the Synod on Synodality constitutes a papal ordinary magisterium. The *Document* will require “different mediations”, that is, thoughtful interpretation and application over time. He emphasises that immediate action is also needed. Local churches are urged to begin implementing measures aligned with the *Final*

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/assembly/synthesis/english/2023.10.28-ENG-Synthesis-Report.pdf>; [https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2024-10-26\\_final-document/ENG---Documento-finale\\_traduzione-di-lavoro.pdf](https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2024-10-26_final-document/ENG---Documento-finale_traduzione-di-lavoro.pdf) ; <https://www.synod.va/en/the-synodal-process.html> (Accessed 14 Nov.2024).

<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, *Spes Non Confundit*, Bull of Indiction of the Ordinary Jubilee of The Year 2025 (May 9, 2024), in: [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/bulls/documents/20240509\\_spes-non-confundit\\_bolla-giubileo2025.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/bulls/documents/20240509_spes-non-confundit_bolla-giubileo2025.html).

<sup>3</sup> *Letter Of the Holy Father Francis to Msgr. Rino Fisichella, President of The Pontifical Council for The Promotion of The New Evangelization, For the Jubilee 2025*, in: <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2022/documents/20220211-fisichella-giubileo2025.html>.

*Document's* recommendations. The *Final Document* did not discuss or exhaust every theme. Indeed, it entrusts specific themes to ten study groups, with more potentially being added to facilitate informed decisions on essential matters. Moreover, solutions need not be universal; instead, they should reflect the diverse cultural, pastoral, and regional realities of the global Church. The Pope has reiterated that not every doctrinal or moral debate requires magisterial intervention. Therefore, local churches and Institutes of Consecrated Life are encouraged to explore “more inculturated solutions” that respect traditions while addressing unique or new challenges. In truth, the *final Document* of the synod contains many actionable steps and theological insights. The local churches and institutes of Consecrated Life are directed to adopt the *final document's* insights actively, adapt them to their specific contexts, and take concrete actions to achieve tangible reform.

In brief, the synod process must pass from words (discussions) to deeds or actions. Therefore, the *final document* is not merely a roadmap: it is a call to transformation. As local communities embrace the Pope's recommendations on the *final document* of the synod, the Church is invited to live out its mission with renewed unity, inculturation, adaptability and commitment to the Gospel. Local churches and church groupings are now called upon to implement, in their different contexts, the authoritative indications contained in the Document. The journey is complex; however, it promises to shape a more inclusive, participatory, and mission-driven Church for generations to come<sup>4</sup>. The Synod is anticipated to

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<sup>4</sup> Cfr. “Nota di accompagnamento del Santo Padre Francesco”, in: [https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2024-10-26\\_final-document/ITA---Documento-finale.pdf](https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2024-10-26_final-document/ITA---Documento-finale.pdf), pp. 5-6.

have a long-lasting impact on the local churches and on Consecrated life for many years to come. For the desired synodality to happen -- that is, for the synodal Church to be a family in communion, participation and mission --, the local Churches and particularly consecrated persons, will play a vital and ongoing role.

As we enter into the implementation phase of the Synod, divine providence wants the entire Church to begin it, as it is proper to do, with the celebration of the Jubilee, a Holy Year which includes the celebration of the *Jubilee of Consecrated Life* (October 8th-12<sup>th</sup>, 2025).

The following paragraphs offer a glimpse of Pope Francis' *Spes Non Confundit*, Bull of Indiction of the Ordinary Jubilee of the Year 2025, and then introduce the studies in this volume. Following an ancient tradition, the Pope proclaims Jubilee, ordinarily every twenty-five years. Hope is the central message of the 2025 Jubilee. Hope is inscribed in the heart of every person. Everyone knows what it means to hope. Hope is the desire and expectation of good things to come, despite our not knowing what the future may bring. Still, uncertainty about the future sometimes leads to conflicting feelings. These feelings range from confident trust to apprehensiveness, from serenity to anxiety, from firm conviction to hesitation and doubt. Frequently, we encounter people who are discouraged, pessimistic and cynical about the future, as if nothing could bring them happiness. "For all of us, may the Jubilee be an opportunity to be renewed in hope. God's word helps us find reasons for that hope"<sup>5</sup>. We hear St. Paul's message of hope: "The Gospel of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen from the dead, a message of hope that fulfils the

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<sup>5</sup> *Spes Non Confundit*, 1.



ancient promises, leads to glory and, grounded in love, does not disappoint”<sup>6</sup>.

Hope is born of love and is based on the love of the crucified Jesus, who reconciles with himself and who wants to be reconciled with others. The Holy Spirit illumines all believers with the light of hope. He continually sustains and invigorates our lives. Christian hope does not deceive or disappoint because it is grounded in the certainty that nothing and no one may ever separate us from God’s love (Cf. Rom 8:35.37-39). For this reason, hope perseveres in the midst of trials, since it is “founded on faith and nurtured by charity, it enables us to press forward in life”<sup>7</sup>. However, with St. Paul, we know that life has its joys and sorrows, that love is tested amid trials, and that hope can falter in the face of suffering. Nonetheless, while acknowledging that “we boast in our sufferings”, St. Paul leads us to recognise that trials and tribulations mark the lives of those who preach the Gospel amid incomprehension and persecution (cf. *Rom* 5:3-4; *2 Cor* 6:3-10). However, it is precisely in these situations that we glimpse a light beyond the darkness, when we realise that evangelisation is sustained by the power of the crucified and risen Christ, and in this way, we learn to practise the virtue of patience, which is closely linked to hope. These experiences, marked by the interplay of hope and patience, show that Christian life is “a journey calling for moments of greater intensity to encourage and sustain hope as the constant companion that guides our steps towards the goal of our encounter with the Lord Jesus”<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> *Spes Non Confundit*, 2.

<sup>7</sup> *Spes Non Confundit*, 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Spes Non Confundit*, 5

For the Jubilee, we are called to keep in mind a Word of hope, undertake a journey of hope, discover signs of hope, welcome his appeals for hope, and be aware that Christian life is anchored in hope<sup>9</sup>. With the slogan “Pilgrims of hope on the way of peace”, the Jubilee calls on Consecrated men and women to reconciliation, conversion and sacramental penance, as well as to solidarity, justice and joy in God's service<sup>10</sup>. The Jubilee invites everyone, especially Christians, to promote holiness of life, strengthen faith and encourage works of mercy and solidarity and a fraternal communion within the Church and society.

The Churches in Africa and the institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, hear this call. They welcome it as a pressing invitation to be witnesses of hope – a Hope that does not deceive or disappoint (Rom 5:5) -- and builders of peace within their communities, in the societies and in the relationship with and care of creation<sup>11</sup>. We cannot overemphasize the importance, scope and implications of becoming pilgrims of hope on the path of peace, especially in regions marked by poor economic and health

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Spes Non Confundit*.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. <https://www.vitaconsacrata.va/en/eventi-e-notizie/jubilee-2025/jubilee-2025-updates.html>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.aciafrica.org/news/11977/catholic-church-in-malawi-to-launch-jubilee-year-on-solemnity-of-the-epiphany-2025> ; <https://www.aciafrica.org/news/12933/churchs-2025-jubilee-year-key-focus-of-ghana-catholic-bishops-annual-plenary-assembly-deliberations> ; <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2024-07/african-faith-leaders-join-pleas-for-jubilee-debt-forgiveness.html>; <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/africa/news/2024-05/cote-d-ivoire-consecrated-persons-begin-preparations-for-the-ju.html>; <https://www.aciafrica.org/news/12895/ahead-of-churchs-2025-jubilee-nigerias-consecrated-need-to-review-charisms-in-light-of-todays-realities-official>.

conditions, wars and social conflicts, political instability or suffer the agony of debt crisis.

Pope Francis calls on everyone to discover hope in the signs of the times that the Lord gives us. “We need to recognize the immense goodness present in our world, lest we be tempted to think ourselves overwhelmed by evil and violence. The signs of the times, which include the yearning of human hearts in need of God’s saving presence, ought to become signs of hope.”<sup>12</sup>. There are several categories of persons and situations where tangible signs of hope should be present during the Jubilee Year, and expressed in practical ways and touching the lives of people in the Church and in society<sup>13</sup>. The signs of hope should manifest themselves in these spheres: Peace in the world, enthusiasm for human life and a readiness to share or transmit it; persons who experience hardships of any kind; prisoners, the sick at home or in hospital, as well as all those in particularly difficult situations who experience their own weaknesses and limitations, especially those affected by illnesses or disabilities; the young people; migrants, exiles, displaced persons and refugees; the elderly, including grandparents; the poor, who often lack the essentials of life. Therefore, Pope Francis makes fervent appeals for hope<sup>14</sup>. He addressed appeals particularly to:

- *The rich*: Since the goods of the earth are not destined for a privileged few, but for everyone, the request is that wealthy people must be generous and help their brothers and sisters in need, especially those who lack water and food, for “hunger is

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<sup>12</sup> *Spes Non Confundit*, 7.

<sup>13</sup> *Spes Non Confundit*, 7-15.

<sup>14</sup> *Spes Non Confundit*, 16-17.

a scandal, an open wound on the body of our humanity, and it summons all of us to a serious examination of conscience.”

- *The more affluent nations*: these should acknowledge the gravity of so many of their past decisions and determine to *forgive the debts* of countries that will never be able to repay them. The Pope refers to the exceptionally “serious” nature of this matter today because of the existence of “a new form of injustice” which is the “true ‘ecological debt’” between the global North and South. Regarding the *forgiveness of debt*, the issues at stake debt here are high, especially for African countries facing an unprecedented debt emergency. Fr. Giulio Albanese, of the Vatican Secretariat of State, pointed out that “in the face of this scenario, the turbulence on the disadvantaged countries, primarily those in Africa, is such that they are already those who are paying the consequences more than others. We are talking about economies with high rates of informality and, therefore, low tax revenues, high dependence on foreign countries for essential goods and, therefore, high exposure to international price fluctuations, the need to borrow in dollars or euros with the consequent diversion of a large part of export revenues to debt service payments”<sup>15</sup>. Governments and financial institutions - both national and international - are called upon to suspend the payment of debt and even to carry out its conversion, in some cases even provide for its partial or total

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<sup>15</sup> Giulio Albanese, “La bolla del debito”, in: <https://www.osservatoreromano.va/it/news/2024-03/quo-073/la-bolla-del-debito.html> ; cf. *Id.*, “Lotta alla povertà e prosperità per tutti”, in: <https://www.osservatoreromano.va/it/news/2023-11/quo-270/lotta-alla-poverta-e-prosperita-per-tutti.html> .

cancellation, demanding in exchange a precise commitment from the debtor country. Various faith-based organisations joined in the appeal for the forgiveness of debt on the occasion of the Jubilee Year 2025<sup>16</sup>.

- *All Christians, East and West, for unity*: the appeal is to commemorate together the 1700th anniversary of the celebration of the first great Ecumenical Council, that of Nicaea, and to take a decisive step forward towards unity around a common date for Easter.

Hope, faith and charity are the “theological virtues” that, in their inseparable unity, express the heart of the Christian life (cf. 1 Cor 13:13; 1 Thess 1:3). The virtue of hope gives inward direction and purpose to the life of believers. Hence, St. Paul encourages us to “rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, and persevere in prayer” (Rom 12:12). We need to “abound in hope” (cf. Rom 15:13), “so that we may bear credible and attractive witness to the faith and love that dwell in our hearts; that our faith may be joyful and our charity enthusiastic; and that each of us may be able to offer a smile, a small gesture of friendship, a kind look, a ready ear, a good deed, in the knowledge that, in the Spirit of Jesus, these can become, for those who receive them, rich seeds of hope.”<sup>17</sup>

The death and resurrection of Jesus is the heart of our faith and the basis of our hope (Cf. 1 Cor 15:3-5). The martyrs provide the most convincing testimony to this hope. They were steadfast in their faith in Christ and, as a result, renounced earthly life itself rather than

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2024-07/african-faith-leaders-join-pleas-for-jubilee-debt-forgiveness.html>.

<sup>17</sup> *Spes Non Confundit*, 18.

betray the Lord Jesus. Martyrs are confessors of the life without end. The Church therefore calls us to “treasure their testimony, in order to confirm our hope and allow it to bear good fruit”<sup>18</sup>.

The Holy Father speaks also of judgement – which is one of what the Christian Eschatology traditionally calls “The Four Last Things”, namely, Death, Judgement, Heaven and Hell. The judgement concerns the salvation which we hope for and which Jesus has won for us through his death and resurrection. It is intended to bring us to a definitive encounter with the Lord. The evil we have done cannot remain hidden; it needs to be purified in order to enable this definitive encounter with God’s love. Hence, it is necessary to offer prayers for all those who died on this earthly journey as an expression of our solidarity that is effective in virtue of the communion of saints and of the shared bond that makes us one in Christ.

The Jubilee *indulgence*, thanks to the power of prayer, is intended especially for those who have died, so that they may obtain full mercy. In fact, “the indulgence is a way of discovering the unlimited nature of God’s mercy”. The sacrament of Reconciliation assures us that God wipes away our sins: “It is he who forgives all your guilt, who heals every one of your ills, who redeems your life from the grave, who crowns you with love and compassion... The Lord is compassion and love, slow to anger and rich in mercy... He does not treat us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our faults. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so strong is his love for those who fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far does

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<sup>18</sup> *Spes Non Confundit*, 20.

he remove our sins” (*Ps* 103:3-4.8.10-12)<sup>19</sup>. However, every sin “leaves its mark”. Sin has consequences, both outwardly and inwardly, inasmuch as “every sin, even venial, entails an unhealthy attachment to creatures, which must be purified either here on earth, or after death, in the state called Purgatory”<sup>20</sup>. In our humanity, weak and attracted by evil, certain residual effects of sin remain. These are removed by the indulgence, always by the grace of Christ.

In the Lord Jesus’s prayer, we say: “*Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us*”. This experience of full *forgiveness* must “open our hearts and minds to the need to forgive others in turn. Forgiveness does not change the past; it cannot change what happened in the past, yet it can allow us to change the future and to live different lives, free of anger, animosity and vindictiveness. Forgiveness makes possible a brighter future, which enables us to look at the past with different eyes, now more serene, albeit still bearing the trace of past tears.”<sup>21</sup>

Hope finds its supreme witness in the Mother of God: In her, we see that “hope is not naive optimism but a gift of grace amid the realities of life.”<sup>22</sup>

Turning its attention, then, on Jubilee, The *Catholic Voyage* (TCV-Africa) decided to reflect on a theme “*around the jubilee of Consecrated life,*” highlighting the desire of the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria. The Jubilee Year calls on Consecrated persons as faith-filled pilgrims to undertake the journey of hope,

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<sup>19</sup> *Spes Non Confundit*, 22-23.

<sup>20</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 1472.

<sup>21</sup> *Spes Non Confundit*, 23.

<sup>22</sup> *Spes Non Confundit*, 24.

promote holiness of life and, therefore, encourage peace through reconciliation, solidarity, works of charity, mercy and justice, joy and celebration. The general theme of this volume is *"Pilgrims of hope on the way to peace: Consecrated life as a journey of reconciliation, mission and celebration"*. Without claiming to address all issues related to this theme exhaustively, much less to the Jubilee, the authors undertake a careful study of some important topics and invite readers to reflect further on them.

In a word, the Jubilee is the year of reconciliation, conversion and sacramental penance and consequently, of solidarity, hope, justice, and commitment to the service of God in joy and peace with one's brothers and sisters. It is called a "Holy Year" because it begins, takes place and ends with solemn, sacred rites, but especially because it is intended to promote the holiness of life. In fact, Jubilee was established to consolidate faith, foster works of charity and fraternal communion with the Church and society, and call and stimulate believers to a more sincere and consistent promotion of their faith in Christ.<sup>23</sup> These are some of the issues that deeply and directly involve consecrated persons. Jubilee, therefore, is particularly relevant and significant to Consecrated Life.

Olisaemeka Okwara opens the volume with a study titled *"Hope Founded on Justice: A Critical Reflection On 'Spes Non Confundit', Bull of Indiction of The Ordinary Jubilee of The Year 2025."* The author notes that, in the perspective of *Spes non Confundit*, hope is active, not passive, for it challenges the believer to live out the faith

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<sup>23</sup> Letter of Joao Braz Cardinal de Aviz, Prefect of Dicastery of Institute of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life to the Presidents of the Conferences of Major Superiors, 29/6/2023, in: <https://www.vitaconsacrata.va/content/dam/vitaconsacrata/giubileo-2025/Iubilaeum-2025--En--Conferences-Of-Major-Superiors.pdf>



which is believed. Rooted in Vatican II's theological hermeneutics of *signs of the times* and a view of human existential issues as *locus* of faith and its praxis, Pope Francis discusses hope in its different facets as human and religious value that could also be resourceful in the challenging ethical, economic, religious, and socio-political issues of our times. Okwara's paper addresses the guiding question: Why is hope relevant for the ordinary Jubilee 2025, and how do the Pope's views offer a sure pathway of hope for our times? In her view, the Pope's mandate on hope offers insight to human society by way of its understanding of hope as rooted in ardent faith, solidarity and justice.

The centrality of hope, as the theme of the Jubilee, leads to the basic question: What is "Jubilee"? Margaret Fagbamigbe examines this question from its different dimensions in her study titled: "*The Jubilee: Its Spiritual, Ecclesial, and Social Significance in the Life of the Church*". This paper examines the topic from a theological perspective. Her reflection presents Jubilee and Holy Year from the Old Testament in the pre-exilic and post-exilic epochs; illustrates the mode of operation of the Holy Year; highlights the essence of the previous Jubilee Years; demonstrates the Ecclesial, Spiritual, and social significances of 2025 Jubilee Year; enumerates the fruits of the Jubilee and, then, draws some conclusions. The Jubilee Year 2025 is seen as symbol of hope for all peoples, permeating great expectations. We plant the seeds of hope in another person's life, she notes, when we have a genuine encounter with others when individuals embark on personal inward pilgrimage for transformation and conversion, and by going on external pilgrimage to encounter God in holy places of worship and in one another by offering good deeds to alleviate sufferings of others and by showing

love and offering happiness to others. These good actions we take upon ourselves in joyful hope as we expect to receive happiness in eternity by the power of Christ.

Eugenia Ijeoma Ejiogu's paper, *"Hope Amid Despair: Pathways to Resilience and Renewal"*, explores the journey from despair to hope. She examines the psychological, emotional and social effects of despair and the transformative power of hope. Beginning with a definition of despair and its manifestations, it outlines its detrimental effects on individuals and communities. The article introduces the concept of hope and its importance as a remedy for despair and provides strategies for cultivating it on a personal and collective level. The main enemies of hope include cynicism, fear and nihilism. The author offers insights into how to combat these forces. Resilience is needed as a crucial element in overcoming despair, and the article presents inspiring case studies of individuals and communities who have successfully navigated this journey. It argues that education, health care and community development have an important role to play in fostering a culture of hope and resilience. In addition, the author emphasises the power of collective action, as demonstrated by successful movements driven by hope. It, therefore, advocates a commitment to hope as a guiding principle for building a more compassionate, resilient and just society.

What does the Jubilee Year 2025 have to do with consecrated life? What are the relevance and implications of the Jubilee for Consecrated persons? Ikechukwu Kanu addresses this question in his study titled *"Consecrated Persons and The Jubilee: Embracing Hope, Conversion and Reconciliation"*. He writes in the context of the past four years that constituted difficult moments for humanity longing for peace and hope. The outbreak of COVID-19 in 2019 led

to the tragedy of death and further made clear the uncertainty and fleetingness of existence. Christians and people of other faiths endured hardships and limitations. This period generated feelings of grief, doubt, fear and disorientation amidst new interrogations. Then, there are the wars between Ukraine and Russia, and between Israel and Palestine, alongside other conflicts around the world. In declaring the year 2025 the Jubilee Year, Pope Francis calls on and expects humanity to move away from a season of tragedy to a season of hope. In this context, Kanu's article examines the Jubilee Year 2025 by focusing on the implications of the Jubilee Year for Consecrated Persons. He argues that the 2025 Jubilee Year can contribute greatly to restoring a climate of hope and trust, and a sense of universal fraternity as a prelude to the renewal and rebirth that is so urgently desired by the world. In this quest for renewal and rebirth, the consecrated life has a vital role to play in the Church and in society, as it seeks a deeper understanding and appreciation of its vocation, way of life and mission.

The Consecrated life is a gift to the church and the world. It maintains its uniqueness and intrinsic values throughout the history of the Church and in all societies. Though countercultural, consecrated life contributes to the cultures around the world, particularly African culture. The contribution of Judemary Amgbeye draws attention to "*The teaching of the consecrated life in the major seminaries in the African context: its needs, challenges and prospects.*" Questions are asked: Is there a synergy between the consecrated life and African culture? Can the consecrated life be taught in the African context? Is the major diocesan seminary an appropriate place to teach consecrated life? What are the needs, challenges and prospects for teaching consecrated life in major

seminaries in the African context? These are not just mind-boggling questions, Amgbeye suggests, but also *status questionis* that need to be developed within the academic system and curriculum framework, especially in the major seminaries. Moreover, considering the richness of Consecrated life, it is asked whether the major seminaries are platforms through which the importance and richness embedded in consecrated life in the African context “are preserved and consecrated persons formed as pilgrims of hope on the path to peace”? Although many works have been written on consecrated Life as a unique form of life, the author’s paper focuses on teaching this form of life in major seminaries in the African context, an important topic that is less often addressed in the literature on Consecrated Life. The future relationship and collaboration in mission between the diocesan clergy and consecrated persons depends on what they had learnt in their seminary days and the vision and perception they have about each other. Therefore, this article seeks to establish and underscore the need to teach consecrated life in the major seminaries in the African context and the challenges and prospects involved.

Any reflection on the formation, mission, and ministry of priests and consecrated persons presupposes, of course, that there are persons who are called upon and respond to fulfil the activities. Ikechukwu Kanu and Michael Pilani examine the theme of vocations in the study titled “*Priestly and Religious Vocations in the Light of Genesis (2:5-9): Insights and Actions for The Jubilee Year*”. This explores the historical, literary, and theological implications of this biblical text, particularly in relation to the understanding of vocations, and the interpretation of contemporary vocations crisis. The article is distinguished by its understanding and interpretation

of the contemporary experience of religious vocation in the light of the Book of Genesis, arguing that this passage of Genesis offers a rich, multifaceted view of religious vocation. This study shows how the creation narrative in Genesis 2:5-9 emphasises stewardship and divine-human partnership as fundamental to different understandings. These insights are then applied to contemporary religious life, offering recommendations for reimagining priestly and religious vocations in the light of modern challenges.

Daniel Chukwuemeka Ugwu, MDM, writes on "The practice of the works of mercy as a sign of hope and gratitude". The article explores the transformative power of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. The works of mercy are selfless acts rooted in compassion and empathy that bring hope and gratitude to a world filled with darkness and despair. Their practice has biblical foundations and references. The works of mercy are not only a religious matter, for they also have a profound social dimension and implications. Through the practice of the works of mercy, individuals are able to demonstrate the love of God and neighbour in a significant way. This practice leads to the promotion of a sense of community life, genuine compassion and unwavering love for all. As the article shows, the works of mercy have a powerful impact on both the giver and the receiver, fostering empathy, breaking down barriers of isolation and individualism, and transforming lives for a better and more harmonious society. By practising these acts of selflessness, citizens and Christians can become beacons of hope and gratitude without limitations, thus making a positive impact on the world. Therefore, the author emphasises the importance of putting into practice the works of mercy to become givers of hope and gratitude to a world in need.

In addition, the volume draws readers' attention to the vital and (re-)current theme of the *common good*. In fact, in a recent message to participants at the meeting, “Common Good: Theory and Practice”, Pope Francis recalled three important points about this topic: first, it’s one of the cornerstones of the social teachings of the Church. Second, “The quest for the common good and justice are central and indispensable aspects of any defence of every human life, especially the most fragile and defenceless. Third, “The common good is first and foremost a practice, made up of fraternal welcome and a common search for truth and justice.” In the pursuit of the common good, we need, both in society and in the Church, the Pope implored, to listen to female voices, and “we need the genuine contributions of all the world's cultures, allowing them to express their needs and resources.”<sup>24</sup> Efeturi Ojakaminor addresses precisely the topic of the common good and the need to serve it in a paper entitled “*Serving the Common Good of Society: Reflections for the Socio-Political Transformation of Nigeria*”. The paper discusses the meaning and implications of the common good, Christian participation in the realisation of the common good, and the implementation and challenges of the Church's social teaching in Nigeria. “The nation needs re-fixing or transformation, and this must start with a return to the idea of the common good.” The author suggests some ways out of the quagmire in which the nation finds itself today. The Church believes that with her social teachings, she has something to offer in the attempt to fashion out a more humane and just society for the

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<sup>24</sup> Pope Francis, “Message of The Holy Father to Participants at the Meeting “Common Good: Theory and Practice” (12 November 2024), in: <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2024/documents/20241112-messaggio-bene-comune.html>.

benefit of God’s children. This conviction calls for a recommitment on the part of both the Church’s hierarchy and committed Catholics.

Finally, since we are called to embark on a journey of hope, to discover signs of hope, to welcome the Church’s appeals for hope, and to be aware that Christian life is anchored in hope, let us pray and work so that through our witness hope may spread to all those who anxiously seek it. With this aim in mind and as a contribution to the reflection and celebration of the current Jubilee, this volume proposes these studies. So, may the way we live our lives say to everyone, our neighbour, in so many words: “Hope in the Lord! Hold firm, take heart and hope in the Lord!” (Ps 27:14)<sup>25</sup>.

*Enjoy reading.*

***Oseni Ogunu, OMV***

Editor-in-Chief,

The Catholic Voyage: African Journal of Consecrated Life

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<sup>25</sup> *Spes Non Confundit*, 25.

## **Hope Founded on Justice: A Critical Reflection on “Spes non Confundit”, Bull of Indiction of the Ordinary Jubilee of the Year 2025**

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### **Abstract**

*Spes non Confundit: “Hope does not disappoint” taken from Romans 5:5, is the title of the Pope Francis’ letter of announcement of the ordinary jubilee of 2025.<sup>2</sup> The letter indicates that hope is the central message of the coming Jubilee.<sup>3</sup> The perspective of hope*

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<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, “Spes non Confundit”: Bull of Indiction of the Ordinary Jubilee of the Year 2025, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/bulls/documents/20240509\\_spes-non-confundit\\_bolla-giubileo2025.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/bulls/documents/20240509_spes-non-confundit_bolla-giubileo2025.html), accessed, August 25, 2024.

<sup>3</sup> “The coming Jubilee will thus be a Holy Year marked by the hope that does not fade, our hope in God. May it help us to recover the confident trust that we require, in the Church and in society,



*according Spes non Confundit is that hope is not passive, rather hope challenges one to live out the faith which is believed. Rooted in Vatican II's theological hermeneutics of signs of the times and a view of human existential issues as locus of faith and its praxis, the Holy Father discusses hope in its different facets as human and religious value that could also be resourceful in the challenging ethical, economic, religious, and socio-political issues of our times. The question that would guide the present paper is: Why is hope relevant for the ordinary jubilee 2025 and how does the Pope's views offer a sure pathway of hope for our times? The paper's argument is that the Pope's mandate on hope offers insight to the human society by way of its understanding of hope as rooted in ardent faith, solidarity and justice.*

**Introduction - “Spes non confundit” – Hope does not Disappoint**  
“Spes non Confundit”, the Bull of Indiction of the Ordinary Jubilee of the Year 2025 is the Papal announcement letter of the Ordinary Jubilee of the year 2025 given on 9 May, 2024 (henceforth as *SNC*). This letter of announcement of the 2025 ordinary jubilee, premises the theme of St Paul's Letter to the Romans, “Hope does not disappoint” - *Spes non Confundit*. It presents the virtue of hope and a guide for its implementation in practical human experiences in view of the jubilee. This practice of locating hope and its praxis in the context of our times is premised on the perspective of Vatican

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in our interpersonal relationships, in international relations, and in our task of promoting the dignity of all persons and respect for God's gift of creation. May the witness of believers be for our world a leaven of authentic hope, a harbinger of new heavens and a new earth (cf. 2 Pet 3:13), where men and women will dwell in justice and harmony, in joyful expectation of the fulfilment of the Lord's promises” (nr.25).

II's theological hermeneutics of *the signs of the times*.<sup>4</sup> *SNC* demonstrates this perspective vividly by presenting some of the human situations challenging the Christian faith and hope. Furthermore, it presents existential issues as the antithesis that could be transformed into signs of hope.

*SNC* requires a critical reception given above all, its creative focus on existential issues as “signs of hope”; meaning that although these issues pose challenges, hope leads to a proactive engagement with them. The existential issues which feature greatly in the Popes *SNC* has found resonance in two significant contexts. The *Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development*, of the Holy See, equally takes the approach to *doing theology from the existential peripheries* as its major focus and engagement. Secondly, a renounced Jesuit theologian recently emphasizes that the *peripheries* are “places where the Spirit is at work, places we are constantly called to reach out.”<sup>5</sup> Hence, the question of human existential contexts has emerged as a critical question for theology and Christian faith.

The reflection in the present paper is based on the foregoing critical place of *SNC* as it presents itself within the existential challenges to hope through the practical role of faith and justice. It will reflect on the contents of the *SNC* in line with its view of faith, hope and solidarity as they emerge within the existential contexts of our

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<sup>4</sup> Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today, *Gaudium et Spes*, in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils: Trent to Vatican II*, ed. Norman Tanner and Giuseppe Alberigo (London: Sheed & Ward, 1990), nr.4.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Simone, “The Future of the Theological Field—through the eyes of the first African Jesuit dean of theology in Berkeley”: <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2024/05/21/orobator-jesuit-school-theology-berkeley-247933>, accessed August 25, 2024.

human society today. The author adopts the view that justice could be a critical way to active hope rooted in faith. Could the Pope’s invitation to hope and its view of *human existential issues as signs of hope* advance justice and solidarity in our world today? The paper will first give a general review of the letter emphasizing its contents and prospects. Then, it will discuss the existential issues featuring in the Pope’s letter in line with its invitation to a pilgrimage of hope. Finally, the paper will advance the letter’s path to hope focusing on faith, justice and solidarity.

### **Hope – A Basic Human and Christian Virtue**

Hope according to *SNC* is the ability to expect a favourable turn of events even in the midst of challenging situations. Aptly put: “In the heart of each person, hope dwells as the desire and expectation of good things to come, despite our not knowing what the future may bring” (nr.1). Just as human beings have the innate aptitude to hope, they are also prone to and could be swayed away from hope. Hence, the Pope takes cognizance of this ambiguity: “Even so, uncertainty about the future may at times give rise to conflicting feelings, ranging from confident trust to apprehensiveness, from serenity to anxiety, from firm conviction to hesitation and doubt” (nr.1) This tendency to give in to the despair is the reason according to *SNC*, that we often “come across people who are discouraged, pessimistic and cynical about the future, as if nothing could possibly bring them happiness” (nr.1) Hence, we find that hope is an important quality of human life and yet, hope could be a special gift of God. In *SNC*, hope is not a state of being, it is rather a state of action. Hope is our striving to resist the obstacles we encounter and the ability believe that these would be surmounted. The proactive perspective to hope provides

the background for the Holy Father's profiling of hope and prayer, and the Jubilee as an opportunity for people everywhere to be renewed in hope.

If hope is very significant for meaningful human existence, the pursuit of it then can best be described as noble and profitable. Hence, another significant question emerging in *SNC* is: where and how do human beings find or cultivate the hope they so very much desire and deserve? One of the resources of hope according to *SNC* is built on contact with God gained reflection on God's words and God's ways. It says: "God's word helps us find reasons for that hope." This is clearly, why the Pope chooses the Apostle's letter to the Romans as its building block for his jubilee announcement letter. Furthermore, hope is born of God's love: this is the heart of the apostles' letter to the Romans. "Hope does not disappoint, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Rom 5:1-2.5)" (nr.2). Furthermore, the love that nourishes hope, according to St Paul, is rooted on the import of God's love springing from the pierced heart of Jesus upon the cross: "For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life" (Rom 5:19)."

Hope does not disappoint because of the love of Christ that is poured out for us and the consolation of the Holy Spirit which is a gift of God to all who believe. Hence, the Holy Father surmises that hope "becomes manifest in our own life of faith, which begins with Baptism, develops in openness to God's grace and is enlivened by a hope constantly renewed and confirmed by the working of the Holy Spirit." (nr.2). The Holy Spirit is the one who makes hope vivid in the life of the believer. If hope is born of love because of the love of

Christ for us and our justification through faith, the Holy Spirit keeps hope alive in us as a persevering attitude in the midst of uncertainties. God’s Spirit that is given to us in creation and baptism “illuminates all believers with the light of hope. He keeps that light burning, like an ever-burning lamp, to sustain and invigorate our lives” (nr.2).

Hope is filled with the word of God spoken from eternity in God, in creation, in the incarnation and the sending of the Holy Spirit. Hope is the grace that is given to those who believe. *SNC* points to the conviction of faith and hope rooted in the faith on God’s promises: “Christian hope does not deceive or disappoint because it is grounded in the certainty that nothing and no one may ever separate us from God’s love: “Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril or the sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:35.37-39)” (nr.2). Here we see the reason why hope perseveres in the midst of trials: founded on faith and nurtured by charity, it enables us to press forward in life. Referring to Saint Augustine: *SNC* affirms: “Whatever our state of life, we cannot live without these three dispositions of the soul, namely, to believe, to hope and to love.” (nr.3).

Perseverance in hope is founded on faith: the light of faith must stay burning – day in and out even in the oasis of tribulations. *SNC* thus points out that hope is nurtured by patience and contemplation. This expression of patience, aligns with and recalls the quality of faith as “assurance of things hoped for, the convictions of things not seen”

(Heb. 11,1). It is thus obvious that hope is intertwined with faith and is nurtured by it. Yet, *SNC* takes cognizance that the vagaries of life are challenges to hope. Above all, the life dedicated to God and evangelization are often filled with trials and tribulations. A life of virtue is not freed from persecution. Indeed, the Bible is filled with evidences of such tribulations in a life of faith beginning with Abraham through Job, the Apostles and Jesus Christ. Yet, hope is tested and nurtured in trials and tribulations. Trials enable people to build endurance and hope is nurtured through it. St Paul's letter which *SNC* follows closely, is clear about this. St Paul knows that life has its joys and sorrows, that love is tested amid trials, and that hope can falter in the face of suffering. Even so, he can write: "We boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope" (Rom 5:3-4). For the Apostle, trials and tribulations mark the lives of those who preach the Gospel amid incomprehension and persecution (cf. 2 Cor 6:3-10).

*SNC* features the notion of pilgrimage to designate the jubilee of hope. It is a journey of hope for our times and reminds us that the Christian life is a journey. Although the life of faith and evangelization of the gospel is marked by incomprehension and persecution, "yet in those very contexts, beyond the darkness we glimpse a light: we come to realize that evangelization is sustained by the power flowing from Christ's cross and resurrection. In this way, we learn to practise a virtue closely linked with hope, namely patience" (nr.4). The interplay of hope and patience according *SNC* makes us "see clearly that the Christian life is a journey calling for moments of greater intensity to encourage and sustain hope as the constant companion that guides our steps towards the goal of our

encounter with the Lord Jesus” (nr.5). The events of our times are catalysts for hope even as they are equally and at the same time hindrances to our faith, hope and love. The question then is whether and how to acknowledge these challenges and how they are to be surmounted.

The sacramental life of the Church and of faith are sure strongholds for enduring challenges. Above all, the intercession and efficacy of the prayers of the saints, of the sacredness of particular times, places and events could be sacramental paths to hope. These are aspects that build faith and hope and their concrete application. When for example, one does a great charity to the poor who has been asking for a need on a particular celebration or occasion such as Christmas as the gift of Gods’ humanity and time of God’s visit for his people. These make faith believable and keeps hope alive. In the ancient times, the jubilee is marked by such acts of grace and favour: of forgiveness, and favour. According to *SNC*, in reference to such sacramentality: “It is good that such “dispersed” celebrations of the Jubilee continue, so that the power of God’s forgiveness can support and accompany communities and individuals on their pilgrim way” (nr.5).

Furthermore, *SNC* pleads for concrete expressions of the sacramentality of the quality of a jubilee as a time of freedom and renewal of mind and body. It suggests “Journeying from one country to another as if borders no longer mattered, and passing from one city to another in contemplating the beauty of creation and masterpieces of art, we learn to treasure the richness of different experiences and cultures, and are inspired to lift up that beauty, in prayer, to God, in thanksgiving for his wondrous works.” When such openness takes place, the Jubilee Churches along the pilgrimage

routes and in the city of Rome can serve as oases of spirituality and places of rest on the pilgrimage of faith, where we can drink from the wellsprings of hope, above all by approaching the sacrament of Reconciliation, the essential starting-point of any true journey of conversion. In a more spiritual sense of the renewal, special care should be taken to prepare priests and the faithful to celebrate the sacrament of Confession and to make it readily available in its individual form.

## **The Pope's Message of Hope for Our Times**

### ***Signs of Hope Amidst Contradictions***

The underlying assumption to *SNC* is that the existential questions of our time could be signs of hope, although they represent a challenge to hope. In engaging these questions, the document samples *our fast-paced world*, in which people prefer immediate satisfaction as the greatest challenge to hope. This concern for fast results reduces the ease human beings enjoy by having the time for the little things that make hope possible. For instance, time simply to be with others; families in order to enjoy one another's company is drastically reduced. The Pope laments that "Patience has been put to flight by frenetic haste, and this has proved detrimental, since it leads to impatience, anxiety and even gratuitous violence, resulting in more unhappiness and self-centredness" (nr.4). Contact with nature and appreciation of creation are possible ways of retrieving genuine engagement with life. Importantly, the Pope urges that interacting with nature has its ways of revealing things to those who find time to engage with human beings, trees, animals; either by way of service, nurture, presence or in meditation and praise of God the creator. Patience is also a gift to faith and hope since one requires



patience to follow God’s ways and understand his plans in every circumstance. The lack of which manifests in frenetic search for solutions, despair and loss of faith.

Though challenging the Pope sees the contradictions to hope as signs that challenges people to make options for hope and its promotion. Since the solution to a problem begins with its recognition as the adage “a problem known is half solved” demonstrates, uncovering the *signs of the times* within the existential questions of our times is one of the bases of *SNC*. The document builds its reflection on the signs of hope on the conciliar note of the signs of the times: “In addition to finding hope in God’s grace, we are also called to discover hope in the signs of the times that the Lord gives us.” As the Council observed in the “Constitution on the Church in the World of Today,” *Gaudium et Spes*, nr. 4: “In every age, the Church has the responsibility of reading the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel.

In focusing on the issues of our times as a language adapted to every generation, the Church hopes to “respond to people’s persistent questions about the meaning of this present life and of the life to come, and how one is related to the other” (*SNC* nr.7). Hence, rather than taking a negative approach or description of these challenges, the Pope calls them signs of hope: “We need to recognize the immense goodness present in our world, lest we be tempted to think ourselves overwhelmed by evil and violence” (nr.7). Furthermore, “the signs of the times, which include the yearning of human hearts in need of God’s saving presence, ought to become signs of hope” (nr.7). This approach to hope that looks at the positive aspect of the challenges to hope offers us hermeneutics of hope.

Taking the existential signs of hope in turns, the first in the rank that the desire for peace is the sign of hope against the tragedy and ordeal of war. War in our world concerns the signs of hope considering that in the course of war many peoples become prey to brutality and violence, a situation begging for an alternative thus emerges in the context war. Could the desperate plea for help motivate world leaders to resolve the numerous regional conflicts in view of their possible consequences at the global level? What does the future hold for those peoples, who have already endured so much? *SNC* falls back on the beatitude to provide an alternative: “the peace makers will be called children of God” In the context of war and violence, the lack of peace challenges us all, and demands that concrete steps be taken. Among them diplomacy and “commitment to seek, with courage and creativity, every opportunity to undertake negotiations aimed at a lasting peace” (nr.8).

The enthusiasm for life and a readiness to share it stands as a sign of hope against the loss of the desire to transmit life. *SNC* laments the aversion for procreation of the human species dotted with an alarming decline in the birth-rate existing in a number of countries. This aversion for propagation of life stems from “today’s frenetic pace, fears about the future, the lack of job, security and adequate social policies, and social models whose agenda is dictated by the quest for profit rather than concern for relationships” (nr.9). According to *SNC*, this aversion for procreation contradicts the hope the desire of young people to give birth to new sons and daughters as a sign of the fruitfulness of their love. On the one hand, the procreation and sustenance of the human species “is a matter of hope: it is born of hope and it generates hope” (nr.9).

On the other hand, it is true that openness to procreation must be accompanied by responsible parenthood since irresponsible multiplication of human species without adequate parenting and parental care could be inimical to hope in the future. The book Genesis affirms the goodness creation: procreation is marked by praise of God. Procreation that warrants unnecessary poverty and suffering could mock the beauty of it and cause a mockery of creation. Two situations are clear for both the sign of hope and its denial in this question of life. One lies at the option for consumerism and self-centredness whereas the other lies at a critical hope that knows that Children are blessing from God and require a good life condition. Knowing the drawing line between the two would be a practical sign of hope for our world.

Kindness and liberation are signs of hope against the deprivation of freedom. The Pope focuses on prisoners in this context, nevertheless, the question of liberty extends to all who, are deprived of their freedom, who experience the harshness of detention and its restrictions, lack of affection and, in more than a few cases, lack of respect for their persons. Many people in our world today live at the deprivation of their freedom. Freedom of opinion, of expression, of the joy of life and expression of faith. Daily, situations militating against genuine freedom exists including unjust laws and bad governance. Freedom according to *SNC* requires “Initiatives aimed at restoring hope; forms of amnesty or pardon meant to help individuals regain confidence in themselves and in society; and programmes of reintegration in the community, including a concrete commitment to respect for law” (nr.10). In today’s world, the quest for liberation in the postcolonial contexts have emerged as theological approaches to justice, and restoration of the dignity of

people. These theological approaches are rooted above all in the justice of God in the Scriptures practiced by Jesus's own ministry. *SNC* makes this biblical perspective vivid:

“You shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants” (Lev 25:10). This institution of the Mosaic law was later taken up by the prophet Isaiah: “The Lord has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour” (Is 61:1-2). Jesus made those words his own at the beginning of his ministry, presenting himself as the fulfilment of the “year of the Lord's favour” (cf. Lk 4:18-19).

The call for freedom as a sign of hope demands that in every part of the world, believers, should be one in demanding dignified conditions and respect for human rights as a provision of Christian hope of forgiveness and rehabilitation.

Liberation and the pursuit of authentic human wholeness is one of those concrete and complex questions for Christian praxis touching on the cords of justice and/or injustice. At present the question of justice has become eminent for the Church's teaching and praxis. How is the Christian faith attuned to justice? This question is even more challenging in the recent debates on diversity, freedom and signs of the times in the Church. The question being asked are: Whose times are recognised in the signs we proclaim and whose justice is favoured? How does governmental policies exhume a genuine concern for freedom and justice? How should liberation be addressed to avoid a binary that vitiates the centrality of humanity

and creation? What are the concrete signs of hope and a future for the marginalised?

The sick, the aged, the disabled, the migrants, the young people and the poor are in their unique challenges to our times credible signs of hope. The works of mercy for the sick are also “works of hope that give rise to immense gratitude” while care given to the disabled and the weak “is a hymn to human dignity, a song of hope that calls for the choral participation of society as a whole” (nr.11) The young people who sadly, often see their dreams and aspirations frustrated are further sign of hope for the society. The future depends on them, yet “it is sad to see young people who are without hope, who face an uncertain and unpromising future, who lack employment or job security, or realistic prospects after finishing school” (nr.12). As a sign of hope, the Jubilee should inspire the Church to reach out to them. The Migrants offer a sign of hope when their expectations are not frustrated by prejudice and rejection and are welcomed with respect which embraces everyone for their dignity, accompanied by a sense of responsibility and a dignified existence. Esteem for the treasure that they are, their life experiences, their accumulated wisdom and the contribution that they can still make are signs of hope for the aged people and grandparents. Finally, the poor, who often lack the essentials of life are signs of hope when we keep in mind that they are almost always the victims, not the ones to blame, and when their poverty challenge unjust socio-economic and political systems and policies and we they make us to rethink our options.

### ***Appeals for Hope – Faith and Charity as Strongholds of Hope***

Pope Francis' appeals for hope strikes on the sensitive cords of injustice and demands socio-political and economic choices and actions that make the signs of hope realizable. His position is grounded on the presupposition that hope is also made possible through acts of justice and fraternal communion. On making hope concrete, the Pope makes honest references to how the jubilee offers hope with regard to the noted *signs of the times*. Taking suffering as a case point, the Pope offers that the Jubilee “reminds us that the goods of the earth are not destined for a privileged few, but for everyone. The rich must be generous and not avert their eyes from the faces of their brothers and sisters in need.” Reflection on human suffering with *SNC*, here I must refer to my description of the notion of *violence of everyday life* as a challenge to humanity.<sup>6</sup> I commend the assertion of the Pope that “hunger is a scandal, an open wound on the body of our humanity, and it summons all of us to a serious examination of conscience” (nr.16). The Pope renews his appeal in *Fratelli Tutti* that with the money spent on weapons and other military expenditures, “the world could establish a global fund that can finally put an end to hunger and favour development in the most impoverished countries, so that their citizens will not resort to violent or illusory situations, or have to leave their countries in order to seek a more dignified life” (nr.16).

More than a question of generosity, *SNC* regards the offsetting of debts owed by poor countries to affluent nations as a matter of

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<sup>6</sup> Okwara, Olisaemeka, R., Witnessing the Identity and Mission of an Institute of Consecrated life in the face of Crisis and Violence in Nigeria, in: *The Catholic Voyage: African Journal of Consecrated Life*, 14 (2018), 117-127.

justice. According to him, forgiving the huge amounts of debts from our poor debtors is made all the more serious today by a new form of injustice which we must be increasingly recognized. Namely: that “a true ‘ecological debt’ exists, particularly between the global North and South, connected to commercial imbalances with effects on the environment and the disproportionate use of natural resources by certain countries over long periods of time” (nr.16) The Pope finds scriptural support for his position that: As sacred Scripture teaches, the earth is the Lord’s and all of us dwell in it as “aliens and tenants” (Lev 25:23).” He thus argues that “If we really wish to prepare a path to peace in our world, let us commit ourselves to remedying the remote causes of injustice, settling unjust and unpayable debts, and feeding the hungry.” As an appeal for Hope, the Pope asks that the affluent nations acknowledge the gravity of so many of their past decisions and determine to forgive the debts of countries that will never be able to repay them (nr.16).

Furthermore, appeals for hope are anchored on the heart of the Christian faith and reminds Christians of the need to renew and hold on to their faith. In the view of the pope, “Hope, together with faith and charity, makes up the triptych of the “theological virtues” that express the heart of the Christian life (cf. 1 Cor 13:13; 1 Thess 1:3). In their inseparable unity, hope is the virtue that, so to speak, gives inward direction and purpose to the life of believers while faith nourishes it. As such, every aspect of the Christian proclamation of faith, especially, regarding the questions of existence: life, death and afterlife are aspects supporting the pilgrimage of hope which Christians undertake in their life. The problems of life and death, of guilt and suffering cause humans to despair, above all when they do not anchor their life on the Christian hope. How can human beings

generate hope in our world today? The Christian hope is built on the hope of resurrection and the victory over sin and death that Christ by his life, death and resurrection secured for those who believe (*SNC*, 20).

Hope in Christian parlance is a necessary virtue for the practice of faith and charity. The Apostle Paul affirms this: Surely we need to “abound in hope” (cf. Rom 15:13), so that we may bear credible and attractive witness to the faith and love that dwell in our hearts; that our faith may be joyful and our charity enthusiastic; and that each of us may be able to offer a smile, a small gesture of friendship, a kind look, a ready ear, a good deed, in the knowledge that, in the Spirit of Jesus, these can become, for those who receive them, rich seeds of hope” (nr.18) Yet what is the basis of our hope? To understand this, let us stop and reflect on “the reasons for our hope” (cf. 1 Pet 3:15). Belief and hope in the future of humanity provides that human beings are not crushed by the existential questions and life is not lived in despair. The advantage of the Christian hope rooted in the hope of resurrection is that human beings conquer the tendency to reduce human life in the mere present, which often occurs in a mere evolutionary humanism. Rather, with Christian hope human existence could find meaning and hope in the human salvation.

Christ’s humanity, especially, his suffering and death, is a sign of triumph over despair as it offers a practical path to hope. Hope is central to the Christian believe that Jesus identified with our humanity in his death so that his death might offer us the hope and courage for our own life and death. The Christian baptism is a concrete way of articulating the union with Christ’s death in hope while the sacraments and the community of the Church keeps faith active. The end of life according to Christian faith in the belief in



God’s love and the kindness we ourselves have shown those in need – the teaching on the last judgement – assure believers of hopeful end. Hence, appeals for hope are made for preparation for the course of earthly and end of life with the help of the sacraments – of penance, especially in this jubilee year. To say that we believe in God requires some sort of conviction rooted in what we know about God. “Hope is not naive optimism but a gift of grace amid the realities of life” (SNC, nr.24). The image of the anchor in *SNC* is eloquent; it helps us to recognize the stability and security that is ours amid the troubled waters of this life, provided we entrust ourselves to the Lord Jesus. The storms that buffet us will never prevail, for we are firmly anchored in the hope born of grace, which enables us to live in Christ and to overcome sin, fear and death.

### ***Faith and Justice as Companions of hope***

As I pointed out in the introduction, the underlying assumption to *SNC* is that the existential issues of our times harbingers of hope when properly addressed and when we hearken to the appeals for hope through them. The perspective of faith, hope and charity emerge from St Paul’s letter to the Romans as well as in Pope Francis’ view that hope is not passive nrs1&2. Surmising *SNC*, one can say that hope is call to action—to make a change while faith is the stronghold for its realisation. A renewed appreciation of the virtue of hope would benefit the individual and societal realms. Saint Paul often speaks of hope in the context of our need for perseverance and confident trust in God’s promises (Rom 15:5). The promise of God is echoed by St Paul: that faith and hope will not fail us. The first action required for hope is ardent faith while justice is its handmaid, together with the fruits of the Holy Spirit, who sustains

our hope and strengthens it as a virtue and a way of life nr.4. How then should the Church be active carriers of hope in the context of our world today, propagating faith that is generous and anchored on justice?

The Church's pilgrimage as sign of hope for our world may be described as faith and justice – justice to the earth, the marginalised, the minority, to freedom, against war and violence, justice for peace and to human wholeness. *SNC* strikes on some of the ethical issues of justice with reference to forgiving debts, ending wars, desisting from violence and a global liberation through elimination of abject poverty. The question of justice as constituent of hope has been perennial. Pope John Paul II already referred to “Structures of sin” in *Sollicitudo rei socialis* and the 1971 Synod of Bishops – *Justitia in Mundo* describes “a network of domination, oppression and abuses which stifle freedom and which keep the greater part of humanity from sharing in the building up and enjoyment of a more just and fraternal world.”<sup>7</sup> At what point should orthodoxy be transformed to orthopraxis? Are the contemporary Christian communities, laity, priests and religious largely oblivious of the enormity of evil of injustice taking root around them? Has the dominant missionary, prophetic, ecclesiastical orientation to human wellbeing and solidarity been drowned by the mystical-spiritual re-enactment of the salvation of Christ's passion and death that call for justice and salvation in the present has been stifled, influencing a scandalous neglect of a pile of injustice and suffering holding many of God's children captive?

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<sup>7</sup> John Paul II. 1987. *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, (1987) nos. 36-40.

In different parts of the world, from Europe to America and to Africa, the culture of political unruliness has created unimaginable miseries and unparalleled oceans of conflicts and scandalous wars. This situation has destroyed basic virtues of trust and hope as well as creating a vicious circle of *violence of everyday life*. Social violence, namely, the violence that oppressive structures and unjust social orders bring to bear on human experience is the commonest and most neglected aspect of violence. This includes the devastating conditions provoked by suffering such as unemployment, homelessness, lack of education, exclusion, powerlessness, misery hunger, pain, disease and death.<sup>8</sup> The *violence of everyday life* have aggressive effects on the body and the moral order. These effects consequently impact on how people understand themselves and their ability to engage in with life. Thus, in the description of her book, *Death Without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil*, Nancy Scheper-Hughes, asks: “When lives are dominated by hunger, what becomes of love? When assaulted by daily acts of violence and untimely death, what happens to trust?”<sup>9</sup>

When justice is thought of internationally, then the Pope’s plea for forgiving of debts would demand, as it stand, a critical question on why the debts are incurred in the first place. What sort of solidarity and justice could Europe and America offer through their developed sense of rule of law to a continent such as Africa in the fight against corrupt leaders other than imposing of their personal interests and

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<sup>8</sup> Arthur Kleinman, “The Violences of Everyday Life: The Multiple Forms and Dynamics of Social Violence,” in *Violence and Subjectivity*, ed. Veena Das et al (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 227.

<sup>9</sup> Excerpt from the online University of California press website book description <http://www.ucpress.edu/book.php?isbn=9780520075375>

agendas on the continent? Charitable organisations, agencies of emancipation, and promoters of human well wellbeing abound on international levels. Nevertheless, their approach often portrays one that is a far cry from the concerns for justice and the promotion of the common good of all. Intentionally or unintentionally, when charity replaces justice, it leads to an uncritical solidarity that is incapable of offering a lasting undoing of poverty and does not critically engage with neither self-reliance nor true interdependence of the poor in an international level.

The Pope thus strikes a sensitive cord in view of socio-economic and political injustice, especially, with regard to the debts of poor countries to affluent ones. According to him, these debts, rightly analysed, are not to be reckoned with; given the unjust handling of economic policies and political contexts warranting the indebtedness and dependency existing in the relationship of the poor and the rich. In analysing this concrete situation, I take the view of hope built on structural approach to justice and solidarity as the heart of *SNC*. Hence, while I praise the Pope's critical view of the matter, I advance it further with a call for a critical justice and solidarity. My point of view is that, the concern for justice should not only address the forgiving of debts by creditors, but also warrants an understanding that there is an existential meeting point between injustice and lack of solidarity on the one hand, and socio-political and economic issues on the other hand, challenging the virtue of hope of many today.

Uzochukwu Njoku makes this structural view of solidarity and justice even more vivid. He asks: "Is Europe's fight against high immigrations from Africa and other Third World countries unrelated to the excruciating socio-economic difficulties of the former

colonies? Is the threat of terrorism removed from the increasing dominance of Western inspired socio-political and economic systems?”<sup>10</sup> Njoku refers further to a structural-experience approach. He uses the parable of the rich lawyer and the widow. How long can one withstand the cry of the suffering Other? Hence, a continuous cry of the oppressed for help and critical engagement with the *powers that be*, structured along the lines dialogue and not mere indictment and based on the necessity of concrete human redemption, justice and solidarity might be a more resourceful approach both in the local concern for justice and in international pursuit of it. What would happen when the so-called underdeveloped and rich countries take a structural approach in dealing with just distribution of wealth or in their relationship with the so-called third-world countries?

Addressing hope from the regional and internal levels aspect equally warrants actions by both the Church and the political leaders. Could leaders of the so-called poor countries stand up to the call for justice in their dealing with the resources of their lands? Here I point to the *violence of everyday life*: of hunger, of war, of racism, of exclusion, of corrupt government and leadership and of the weight of victimization and selfishness on the human spirit and the suffering bodies as a point for the appeal to justice and solidarity. In a Country such as Nigeria people are divided in the pursuit for their freedom and justice along the lines of religion, race, ethnicity and tribe. Hence, the evil leaders get away with their marginalization,

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<sup>10</sup> Uzochukwu Njoku, “Rethinking Solidarity as a Principle of Catholic Social Teaching: Going Beyond *Gaudium et spes* and the Social Encyclicals of John Paul II,” in: *Political Theology* 9/4 (2008): 525-544, 536.

discrimination, embezzlement of public funds and other impoverishing actions because of disunity and divided house.

On an international level, Europe and America focus on pursuing their personal interests of gender and migration politics. These socio-political issues are important for the strengthening of their lands and the political interests of their people. Nevertheless, the international body eaten up by war, conflicts and poverty is deeply seated and drastically affected by lack of solidarity in the pursuit of justice. People—the rich and the poor, regardless of religion or race must unite in authentic pursuit of justice and against wars, poverty, discrimination and lack of freedom.

Hope founded on justice underscores a planetary justice and solidarity, namely, it concerns all and extends to all and sundry with equal emphasis and intensity. This planetary justice according to Namsoon Kang demonstrates that the weakness of a part implies the weakness of the whole, and that there should be no hierarchy in the question of injustice.<sup>11</sup> In dealing with exclusion, discrimination and injustice, all must realize that there no hierarchy to oppressions and injustice, discrimination, exclusion exists. My idea is that injustice and oppression in one place is tantamount to its existence in another irrespective of the gradation that one sets on them or who is involved. People in advocacy movements tend to establish a hierarchy of oppressions. However, one must not limit the many injustices that occur every day in the world due to gradations based on numbers or who is involved. The same spirit of self-centeredness, exclusion and violence that generates even the minutest war and violent conflict

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<sup>11</sup> Namsoon Kang, *Cosmopolitan Theology: Reconstituting Planetary Hospitality, Neighbor-Love, and Solidarity in an Uneven World*, (St. Louis: Chalice Missouri Press, 2013), 4.

are also the root cause of the most gruesome wars that eat up the planet.

For a legitimizing foundation for a pursuit of hope based on justice, I adopt Paul Ricoeur’s political hermeneutics of otherness: “the other is like me (mon semblable) though he is not me.”<sup>12</sup> Njoku extending this view argues that “We are different but often share similar concerns, which cause our paths to cross.”<sup>13</sup> This approach gives room for solidarity but also provides for links through experiences and aspirations in life. Since the other that is not me is like me, his/her wellbeing and suffering ought to be affected in the same way as mine. The Pope’s approach is soundly supported with the existential questions framed on the structural and anthropological emphasis on human suffering and could also facilitate more solidarity. The suffering of Christ should not be merely re-enacted for its sake, rather, it should provide the ground and argument against oppression and human suffering. This standpoint challenges religious consciences and theological reflections to evolve patterns of thought and pastoral praxes which can assist in dispelling the evils militating against true hope.

## **A Proclamation of Hope**

*Spes non Confundit* - Hope does not disappoint! It may be true that because human beings live in the world, the socio-political aspects equally shape the state of faith. Nevertheless, the Christian conviction holds that hope, faith and love are theological virtues

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<sup>12</sup> P. Ricoeur, “The Problem of the Foundation of Moral Philosophy,” in *The Foundation and Application of Moral Philosophy: Ricoeur’s Ethical Order*, ed. H. J. Opdebeeck (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 11–30, 14.

<sup>13</sup> Njoku, *Rethinking Solidarity as a Principle of Catholic Social Teaching*, 537.

acquired through ardent and authentic spiritual life. The existential situations and state of things may influence faith and hope, nevertheless, a person of faith can withstand these human tribulations. This testimony of hope is based on the confessions of faith in the bible. The resources of faith, hope and love and the understanding of how to cultivate and sustain hope in times of trials and difficulties lies with a life lived in acquittance with word of God. Hence, Biblical metaphors offer instances that could assist a person in hope even in trials and tribulations.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines hope as a theological virtue that enables us to place our trust in God's promises and to rely not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit. It is the ability to trust in the promises of God and his faithfulness that he will fulfill these promises: "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful" (Heb 10,23). Hope keeps the human person from discouragement; it sustains him/her during times of abandonment. Furthermore, Christian hope takes up and fulfills the hope of the chosen people which has its origin and model in the *hope of Abraham*, who was blessed abundantly by the promises of God: "Hoping against hope, he believed, and thus became the father of many nations" (Rom 4,18). Christian hope unfolds in Jesus preaching in the proclamation of the *beatitudes* (Matt 5, 1-11). Hope as Jesus preached in the beatitudes proclaims the blessings of perseverance in good deeds and trace the path that leads through the trials that await the disciples of Jesus to a hope that does not disappoint. Hope is the sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, it



affords us joy even under trial: Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation be constant in prayer (Rom 12,12).<sup>14</sup>

Hope is a sensitivity to the ways of God's ways: of God's self-revelation and salvation. But hope and trust are the most difficult virtues as *SNC* rightly says because they require patience – a very difficult aspect of faith. But why do we lack patience? Biblical metaphors underlies that ardent hope and trust are often expressed in times when faith is put to trial. The conduct of faith that corresponds to my view of hope and trust are contained in the words of Prophet Habakuk 3, 17-18: “Though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines; though the produce of the olive fails and fields yield no food; though the flock is cut off from the fold and there is no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exult in the God of my salvation.” Indeed, the life of faith is a pilgrimage of hope, as Pope Francis rightly defines it. We are in a pilgrimage of hope. Faith bespeaks the sure hope that, amid the tempests of this life, God comes to our aid, sustains us and encourages us to persevere in hope and trust. This hope, “which transcends life's fleeting pleasures and the achievement of our immediate goals, makes us rise above our trials and difficulties, and inspires us to keep pressing forward, never losing sight of the grandeur of the heavenly goal to which we have been called” (*SNC*,25).

The second biblical metaphor that represents the journey of hope in Isaiah, chapter 7, concerns the God's promise to Jerusalem during the Syro-Ephraimite war of 735–732 B.C, a crisis period in the history of Judah and Jerusalem. Earlier in the book of Samuel, (2 Sm

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<sup>14</sup> Cf., CCC nrs.1817-1820.

7:12–16) God had chosen and made a commitment to David’s dynasty and his capital city Jerusalem: “Judah and its Davidic dynasty should trust God’s promises and not fear the combined armies of Israel and Syria; within a very short time these two enemy states will be destroyed, and David’s dynasty will continue.” Nevertheless, sixty-five years was too much a time of waiting for the people. Time became a constraint to their hope. As a sign of his faithfulness to his promise, God tells Ahaz through the Prophet Isaiah in today’s reading to ask for a sign that will prove God’s faithfulness. Ahaz the king, however, exhibited firm trust in God. He said to the prophet: I will not ask for a sign. “I will not tempt the LORD!” Then the prophet proclaimed the prophecy of the birth of Jesus. He will be Immanuel, God with us.

These biblical stories while offering insight on faith, hope and trust, also underlie some remarkable ambivalence which characterise hope as a religious virtue that can be encumbered by human situation. We think that God is not enough, or would want concrete and immediate results for things hoped for. Hence, the tendency to short-cut the pilgrimage of hope and to sail off to a closer shore. In some cases, people turn to solutions in search for miracle and other human idols. Others may boy court their true destiny and goals and prefer to choose other caveats. The excitement for the future in God’s plan for humanity urges us humans to secure a meaningful future by enduring tribulations and working towards a betterment of our world through justice. To a large extent, I think that contemporary theological thought and religious orientations are caught in this quagmire. Christians all over are caught up with poor socio-economic situations, dysfunctional family, issues of health, or poverty. But

how do they go about these realities of life as people who have faith, hope and trust?

Faith is the seedbed of hope. If only we have faith as little as the mustard seed we could tell the mountain to move and it will obey. But faith like hope and patience are among the difficult virtues for our people today. Because it warrants a waiting on something we are not in control of or sure of. If we well recall the encounter between Prophet Elijah and the woman of Zarephath in 1 Kings 17, 8-17, the poor widow had only the last drop of oil on the Jar and the last piece of bread. Nevertheless, she trusted in God’s word through the prophet and through her obedience to God - a worship of heart and soul that invokes God’s blessings—she received an abundance of blessings and her meagre food was multiplied. This story offers the true freedom of the spirit that also liberates humanity from unnecessary worry, fear and the tendency of lack of generosity and trust. Like Elijah in the Old Testament, Jesus showed that two loaves of bread and five fish were sufficient and even surplus with a leftover of twelve baskets at the feeding of the five thousand in the Gospel (Mtt 14.14. Mk 6, 30-44). Hope tells us that God can multiply the little we have and change our situations. The only condition for God’s blessings the belief that God is faithful to his promises and being steadfast in doing our own part while awaiting God’s fulfilment of his promise. The little justice we do could be the miracle that would transform our world. The fulfilment of God’s promise demands creative and critical engagement with hope as sign of social reconstruction, justice and communion. The profession of Christian faith is not a mere fulfilment of the vows of baptism. Christians, in light of their ardent faith, charity, patience, hope, trust,

communion, solidarity and dedication to divine providence, are a sign of hope for the redeemed people of God.

## **Conclusion**

Faith and hope are mark of true Christian virtues for those who believe. Human beings, but above all Christians have the task of propagating hope and trust in the world both in the active aspect of justice and in the act of faith and trust in the fulfilment of God's promise. The Pope has exposed the socio-political and human existential issues challenging humanity's hope in God's promises. War militates against the promise of peace, hunger and poverty against abundance and fullness of life, lack of love and aversion for creation and life militates against the beauty of creation and its propagation. But hope assures us that God's promises shall come to pass. The aversion for God and new forms of life that militate against Christian hope can raise anxiety and doubt for believers. But perseverance in faith, hope and love would enable us to see the promises of God in their fulfilment. This is why the Pope's message of hope for the ordinary jubilee of the year 2015 is well timed and felicitous.

## **The Jubilee: Its Spiritual, Ecclesial, and Social Significance in the Life of the Church**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper explores the significance of 2025 Jubilee Year from the deductive starting point of view in an attempt to engage in theological discourse. In the process, it examines Jubilee and Holy Year from the Old Testament in the pre-exilic and post-exilic epochs; illustrates the mode of operation of the Holy Year; highlights the essence of the previous Jubilee Years; demonstrates the Ecclesial, Spiritual, and social significances of 2025 Jubilee Year; enumerates the fruits of the Jubilee and draws conclusion. The piece of work views the 2025 Jubilee Year as symbol of hope for the entire world; permeating great expectations and assuring God's presence in our world. The article affirms that we plant the seeds of hope in another person's life when we have a genuine encounter with others. In addition, everyone participates in this Jubilee Year when individuals embark on personal inward pilgrimage for transformation and conversion and by going on external pilgrimage to encounter God in holy places of worship and in one another by offering good deeds to alleviate sufferings of others and by showing love and offering*

*happiness to others. These good actions we take upon ourselves in joyful hope as we expect to receive happiness in eternity by the power of Christ who loved us and empowered us and offered himself for us in the unity of the Holy Trinity.*

## **Introduction**

The 2025 Jubilee Year, as Pope Francis declares, is a Jubilee of hope. The Pontiff accentuates that we need to recognize, and even claim, the enormous goodness which exists in the contemporary times, reminding ourselves to have a positive outlook of the present-day because in the midst of violence and miseries of this present times, there are signs of hope as our hearts desire God, panting for His saving succour. The Jubilee's essence is to emphasize that hope does not disappoint us. The fulcrum of this hope is Jesus Christ as we await his second coming with great expectation of hope. With the grace of baptism, Christians receive a new life and when they die in Christ, the baptized Christians make entry into heaven at a point where hope breaks down the power of death and earns them a passage to eternity with the saving power of our Lord Jesus Christ in whom they placed their hope.

Thus, the Jubilee Year is offering the contemporary times the opportunity to appreciate, with gratitude, the gift of new life at baptism, a life that transfigures death's saga <sup>1</sup> into a life of happiness where we will live forever a life of love that does not disappoint and which nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Francis, *Spes Non Confundit*, "Bull for Indiction of the Ordinary Jubilee of the Year 2025", (9 May, 2024), 20. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va) . Accessed 01/08/2024.

<sup>2</sup> *Spes Non Confundit*, 21.

Moreover, the pontiff deems it fit to pronounce a Jubilee of hope in 2025 because hope, with faith and charity, gives inward direction and purpose to the life of believers; enabling them to bear credible witness to the faith and love that dwell in their hearts, propelling the faith to be joyful and charity be enthusiastic. With hope set in motion in individual hearts, the believers are empowered to offer smiles, gesture of friendship, kind look, and a ready listening ear in the Spirit of Jesus to one another in these precarious times; so that the good deeds shown to others become rich seeds of hope for those who receive them.<sup>3</sup>

### **Jubilee Year**

In the pre-exilic Judaism, the Jubilee Year was called יוֹבֵל *hayyobel* (the Yobel).<sup>4</sup> As recorded in the Old Testament in Leviticus 25:9-13, *hayyobel*, stands for the ram's horn which was blown as a trumpet (sopar) in the Day of Atonement for sins. In history, among the Hebrew, the Jubilee Year was inaugurated by the blowing of a ram's horn trumpet. Thus, *hayyobel*, is connected with Latin word, *Jubilaeus*, meaning joyous shouting.

According to R. North, who testifies to what was handed over to the progeny of the Jews, the Jubilee Year was to be celebrated on every seventh sabbath year which indicated the ending of a cycle of 49 years which is the 50<sup>th</sup> year.<sup>5</sup> The legislation for this year aims at protecting the small farmers against monopolizing landholders and as a scheme so that all land shall remain ultimately in the same

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<sup>3</sup> Francis, *Spes Non Confundit*, 18.

<sup>4</sup> Lev. 25:1-55.

<sup>5</sup> Lev. 25:8.

family forever.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the Jubilee Year's institution was to be kept on every seventh sabbath year by restoring alienated lands; freeing Hebrew slaves; and abstaining from sowing and harvesting.<sup>7</sup> The theological value, however, is to emphasize that God is the only true owner of all the land and God decreed that the land be utilized as private property and be managed sorely so that all the world's population may have reasonable access to its resources.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Holy Year**

In the post-exilic narrative and up to A D 70, the Jews continued to hold the sabbatical, *hayyobel*, in which debts of the fellow Jews were remitted. Nevertheless, *the popes in the Middle Ages (A D 500-1600) applied the concept of the Jubilee Year spiritually by proclaiming a Holy Year beginning and ending the year with sacred ceremonies to improve the spiritual, ecclesial and social life of the faithful.* Holy Year is ordinary when it occurs at regular intervals of every 25 years in modern times but the intervals had been adjusted over the centuries according to the reigning pontiffs, and it is extra-ordinary when holy year is proclaimed by the Roman Pontiff for some very special reason<sup>9</sup> like Marian Year declared by St. John Paul II between June 7, 1987 and August 15, 1988 in preparation for the forthcoming Millennium and the Year of Mercy declared by Pope Francis between December 8, 2015 and November 20, 2016 to re-

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<sup>6</sup> Lev. 27:24.

<sup>7</sup> Lev. 25:23-38.

<sup>8</sup> R. North. "Jubilee Year" in Berard L. Marthaler (ed), *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, Vol. 7. Second Edition, (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2003), p. 1062-1063.

<sup>9</sup> Gavigan J.J. (eds) "Holy Year" in Bernard Marthaler (ed), *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, Vol. 7. Second Edition, (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2003), p. 56-57.



encounter the Merciful Heavenly Father and be renewed by His gift of love and share His love with those entrusted to us each day.

### **Mode of operation**

An ordinary Jubilee Year begins on December 24 with first Vespers of Christmas. On this day, the Holy Doors of the Ancient Four Basilicas of Rome are Opened (the Basilica of St. Peter, the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls, the Basilica of St. Mary Major and the Arch-Basilica of St. John Lateran. The purpose is for the people to make pilgrimage to these holy places and pass through the Holy Doors in order to gain Jubilee indulgence.<sup>10</sup> In order to gain the full benefits, one must go for confession, receive the Holy Communion at the celebration of Mass, and visit the four Major Basilicas for those who have the opportunity to be in the City of Rome or those who visit the Churches designated by the local ordinary in particular Churches.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, a Holy Year is one in which a solemn *plenary indulgence* is granted to the faithful under certain conditions.<sup>12</sup> The objective is to

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<sup>10</sup> Indulgence in the Roman Catholic Church is granted by the Pope for the remission (lessening, a decrease) of the temporal punishment due for sins after absolution.

<sup>11</sup> Gavigan J.J. (eds) "Holy Year" in Bernard Marthaler (ed), *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, Vol. 7. Second Edition, (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2003), p. 56-57.

<sup>12</sup> A plenary means "Full". A plenary indulgence is a special type of indulgence that if all the requirements are met, it removes all temporal punishment due to one's sin. The conditions are – visit the Blessed Sacrament for adoration for continuous 30 minutes; devotedly participate in a Eucharistic Procession, spend three days in retreat; devotedly participate in the adoration of the Cross at the Good Friday Liturgy, pray for the intentions of the Supreme Pontiff, have sacramentally confessed sins, receive the Holy Eucharist at the celebration of Mass. This is different from a partial indulgence which covers part of the punishment due for sins. Both kinds of indulgence come from the merits of Jesus, the Blessed Mother Mary and the saints. Those

garner the original meaning of the Year of Jubilee which is to make a joyful shout unto the Lord for his magnificent spiritual and material resources bestowed on humanity and encourage a sharing of faith , hope and charity by empowering one another with such gifts and most especially by cancelling debts of sins and monetary debts.

### **Previous Jubilee Years**

According to a Vatican document<sup>13</sup> and another research,<sup>14</sup> before the Jubilee 2025, there had been 26 previous ordinary Jubilee in the History of the Church from first one declared by Pope Boniface VII in the year 1300 and the twenty-sixth Jubilee Year in 2000 declared by Pope John Paul II. The Jubilee in various years were determined for various intentions but the main purposes were the emphases on holiness of life and ongoing conversion of the people, and renewal of faith and love of God in peoples' hearts. Each of the popes issued Bull <sup>15</sup> to inform the whole world of the significance of each Jubilee Year. A researcher deemed it fit to collate the Year of the Jubilee.<sup>16</sup>

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impeded by age or illness or other grave cause will also be able to obtain plenary indulgence. They must do three essential conditions (Confession, Holy Communion, and prayer for the pope's intentions).

<sup>13</sup> History-Vatican, History of the Jubilees, "The Holy See", [www.vatican.va/jubilee\\_2000/documents/](http://www.vatican.va/jubilee_2000/documents/) Accessed: 08/08/2024.

<sup>14</sup> Giubileo 2025, "Jubilees throughout History". The Holy See, Dicastery of Evangelization, [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va). Accessed 02/08/2024.

<sup>15</sup> A Papal Bull is a type of public decree, letter patent, of charter issued by the Pope of Catholic Church. It carries significant authority and often deals with matters of great importance of the Church. The name is derived from the lead seal (bulla) traditionally affixed to such documents.

<sup>16</sup> GCatholic.org "Celebrations and Documents tagged with Jubilee", 2024 GCatholic.org. [www.gcatholic.org/documents/tag/jubilee.htm](http://www.gcatholic.org/documents/tag/jubilee.htm) Accessed:26/06/2024.

*The First*

The 1<sup>st</sup> Holy Year was declared opened by Pope Boniface VIII (d. 1303) in the year 1300 for gaining of indulgences. He issued the Bull *Antiquorum Habet Digna fide Relatio*. At this time, Jubilee was determined to be celebrated every 100 years. A universal Jubilee was celebrated. It was decreed that under the condition of contrition and confession, the faithful could gain plenary indulgence by making visits to the Basilicas.

*The Second*

The 2<sup>nd</sup> was celebrated in 1350. Pope Clement VI (d. 1352) ascended the throne and decreed a jubilee every 50 years. He issued the Bull *Unigenitus Dei Filius*. This was occasioned by the people of Rome who sent delegation to the Pope and asked him to bring the Apostolic See to the city of Rome and hold a Jubilee before the distinctive 100 years period.

*The Third*

The 3<sup>rd</sup>, in 1389, Pope Urban VI (d. 1389) established that the celebration of the Jubilee should take place every 33 years because of the belief that our Saviour Jesus Christ lived 33 years on earth. He issued the Bull *Salvator Noster Unigenitus Dei*. However, Pope Urban VI (d. 1389) died before the opening of the Holy Doors. Pope Boniface IX (d. 1404) celebrated the Holy Year in 1390.

*The Fourth*

The 4<sup>th</sup>, in the year 1400, the Holy Year was celebrated by Pope Boniface IX (d. 1404) with a Bull *Dudum Felicis* because of the many crowds that came in 1390. He decided to have another Jubilee Year earlier than the scheduled time. The 1400s were the unsettled times in the life of the Church due to plagues and schisms.

### *The Fifth*

The 5<sup>th</sup> Jubilee Year was in 1425 which was declared by Pope Martin V (d. 1431) with two novelties of a special commemorative Jubilee Medal and opening of a Holy Door in the Cathedral of St. John in the Lateran.

### *The Sixth*

The 6<sup>th</sup> Jubilee Year was proclaimed by Pope Nicholas V (d. 1455) in 1450 with a Bull *Immensa et Innumerabilia*. Pope Paul II (d. 1471) issued a Bull in 1470 to fix the Jubilee for every 25 years.

### *The Seventh*

The 7<sup>th</sup> Holy Year was proclaimed by Sixtus IV (d. 1484) in 1475 with the Bull *Salvator Noster*. He wished to adorn Rome with works of art and ordered the building of Sistine Chapel and the Ponte Sisto with many renowned artists working in Rome at that time.

### *The Eighth*

The 8<sup>th</sup> Jubilee Year was in 1500 declared by Pope Alexander VI (d. 1503) with the Bull issue in 1499 as *Inter Causa Multiplices* He established the opening and closing of Holy Year with ceremonies and specific liturgical rites which were not there before that time. The Pope legislated that the opening Door refers to the Gospel of John: *I am the Door. Whoever passes through me will be saved (John 10:9)*. The opening of the St. Peter's Door was to be done by the reigning Pontiff while the other Doors of the three Basilicas ((St. John Lateran, St. Mary Major, and St. Paul Outside Walls) were to be opened by 3 appointed Cardinals. The Holy Doors were to be remained opened and guarded by 4 clerics taking turns throughout the Jubilee Year.

*The Ninth*

The 9<sup>th</sup> Jubilee was established by Pope Clement VII (d. 1534) in 1525 with the Bull *Inter Sollucitidines et Coram Nobis*. It was a critical moment of war, schisms, Protestant Reformation, and Plagues.

*The Tenth*

The 10<sup>th</sup> Jubilee Year was proclaimed by pope Paul III (d. 1549) with a Bull *Si Pastores Ovium* but the Holy Door of the Jubilee was opened by Julius III (d. 1555) in 1550. There was influx of pilgrims into the City of Rome.

*The Eleventh*

The 11<sup>th</sup> Jubilee Year was celebrated by Pope Gregory XIII (d. 1585) in 1575 with the Bull *Dominus ac Redemptor Noster Jesus*. The Jubilee was celebrated after the turmoil of the protestant reformation to renew Catholicism with the decision of the Council of Trent. There were many pilgrims who came to Rome from all over Europe and other parts of the world.

*The Twelfth*

The 12<sup>th</sup> Jubilee Year was celebrated in 1600 by Pope Clement VIII (d. 1605) with the Bull *Annus Domini Placabilis*. The pope heard the confessions and served meals to the pilgrims who came to Rome. Many more pilgrims came to Rome in that year.

*The Thirteenth*

The 13<sup>th</sup> Jubilee Year was celebrated in 1625 and was proclaimed by Pope Urban VIII (d. 1644) with a Bull *Omnes Gentes Plaudite Manibus* The novelty to this Jubilee was the indulgence which was extended to the Belgium Provinces and West Indies. Numerous protestants also converted to Catholicism during the Year.

*The Fourteenth*

The 14<sup>th</sup> Jubilee Year was in 1650 which was proclaimed by Pope Innocent X (d. 1655) with the Bull *Appropinquat Dilectissimi Filii*. He extended the Jubilee indulgence to those who were unable to travel to Rome and to prisoners and the sick because of the plague of that year. He dispensed people from traditional visits to Basilica of St. Paul Outside Walls and replaced it with visit to the Central Church of Santa Maria and San Lorenzo. Lesser people went to Rome that year.

*The Fifteenth*

The 15<sup>th</sup> Jubilee Year was in 1675 and was proclaimed by Pope Clement X (d. 1676) with the Bull *Ad Apostolicae Vocis Oraculum*. The Jubilee stopped the fights which erstwhile was staged in Colosseum. He reconstructed the ancient building and many more pilgrims visited City of Rome that year.

*The Sixteenth*

The 16<sup>th</sup> Jubilee Year was opened in 1700 by Pope Innocent XII (d. 1700) with the Bull *Regi Saeculorum*. He established charitable institutions in Rome. The Jubilee was concluded by Clement XI (d. 1721).

*The Seventeenth*

The 17<sup>th</sup> Jubilee Year was in 1725 with the bull *Redemptor et Dominus Noster Jesus Christus* by Pope Benedict XIII (d. 1730).

*The Eighteenth*

The 18<sup>th</sup> Jubilee was proclaimed by Pope Benedict XIV (d. 1758) in 1750 with the Bull *Peregrinantes a Domino*. In this year, for the first time, St. Peter's Dome and Bernini's Colonnade were illuminated by thousands of flaming torches; 3000 crosses were built all over the

City of Rome. The Pontiff instituted the Good Friday *Via Crucis*<sup>17</sup> at the Colosseum and consecrated the Iconic amphitheatre as a sacred space set aside to honour the memory of the martyrs of the early Christians. There were many pilgrims in Rome and was so large that charitable homes in Rome and hospitals were forced to rent royal places to cope with the number of pilgrims.

### *The Nineteenth*

The 19<sup>th</sup> Jubilee Year was in the year 1775. Pope Clement XIV (d. 1774) proclaimed the year in 1774 but died shortly afterwards with a Bull *Salutis Nostrae Acutorr*. The opening of the Jubilee Door was done by Pius VI (d. 1799) Nothing was done at this time of the Jubilee.

### *The Twentieth*

The French invasion prevented the celebration of the Jubilee in the Year 1800. However,

The 20<sup>th</sup> Jubilee was celebrated by Pope Leo XII (d. 1829) in the year 1825 with the Bull *Quod Hoc Ineunte*. The Jubilee was to establish a bond between the Pope and the Christian people through a programme that involved all the resources of the Church Curia in the struggles against errors that threatened the faith.

### *The Twenty-first*

In 1850, which was to be the next Jubilee Year but there was Napoleonic war and there was no Jubilee. The 21<sup>st</sup> Jubilee was proclaimed by Pope Pius IX (d. 1878) in 1875 with the Bull *Gravibus Ecclesiae sed saeculi Calamantis* which he proclaimed after his return from exile and resumed the government of the Papal State.

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<sup>17</sup> 14 Stations of the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But because of the troops of King Victor Emmanuel II that occupied the City of Rome at this time, it was impossible to have ceremonies of opening and closing of Holy Doors.

*The Twenty-second*

The 22<sup>nd</sup> Holy Year was celebrated in the year 1900 by Pope Leo XIII (d. 1903) with the Bull *Properante ad Exitum Saeculo*. The Jubilee was called the Christian Jubilee because there was the unification of Italy with the Church and it was the king who announced the Jubilee in his speech of the crown. The Pope sent out an awakening of faith in the people. The main intention was to challenge the modernization of Christian life and promote Christianization of modern life. It was the Italian authorities who welcomed the pilgrims at that Jubilee Year celebration. Monuments to commemorate the Jubilee were erected from the North to the South of Sicily in order to pay homage to Jesus Christ, the Redeemer.

*The Twenty-third*

The 23<sup>rd</sup> Jubilee Year was celebrated by Pope Pius XI (d. 1939) in the year 1925 with the Bull *Infinita Dei Misericordia*. He directed the attention of the faithful to the work of the missions. He banned political symbols in the Vatican and bless the unified Italian State. He inaugurated the extra-ordinary Jubilee year in 1933 with the Bull *Quod Nuper* to mark 1900<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Jesus. Many pilgrims visited Rome that year.

*The Twenty-fourth*

24<sup>th</sup> Jubilee Year was proclaimed by Pope Pius XII (d. 1958) in the year 1950 with the Bull *Jubilaem Maximum*. The Pope defines the Dogma of Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. He transformed the college of Cardinals into universal representation of the Catholic



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world and increase the number of the cardinals from other nations. There was new national anthem for the Vatican. There was religious tourism. The Italian Government issued a “pilgrim Card” which was recognized as having the same validity as passport within Italy in order to permit more pilgrims.

*The Twenty-fifth*

The 25<sup>th</sup> Jubilee Year was celebrated in 1975 by Pope Paul VI (d. 1978) with the Bull *Apostolorum Limina*. He decided that the year should be dedicated to reconciliation and renewal. It was the first Jubilee to have worldwide broadcast and there was lifting of historic excommunication with the Church of Byzantium and also involved the participation of the Patriarch of Alexandria Melitone. Many pilgrims observed the year to the point of rationing water in the City of Rome.

*The Twenty-sixth*

The 26<sup>th</sup> Jubilee Year was celebrated by Pope John Paul II (d. 2005) in the year 2000 with the Bull *Incarnationis Mysterium*. The Pope included public request for forgiveness of sins committed in history. There was publication of a martyrology of Christians killed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The main event of the Jubilee was World Youth Day in Rome. He also encouraged dialogue between the Catholic Church, Islam and Judaism. This was to mark the transition to the third Christian millennium. Many pilgrims participated in the Jubilee in the City of Rome.

*The Twenty-seventh*

The 27<sup>th</sup> ordinary Jubilee would be celebrated in 2025. Pope Francis had issued the Bull *Spes Non Confundit* (*Hope does not disappoint*). One of the aims is to make 2025 Jubilee Year a moment of genuine,

personal encounter with the Lord Jesus who is the *Door* and proclaim him as the Hope of all the Nations.<sup>18</sup> The Jubilee is also identified as a way of renewing confident trust in God in these turbulent times of 21 century.

The 2025 Jubilee is a Holy Year of hope in God as we await with confidence the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. By this Jubilee, the Pontiff intends to rekindle the required confident trust in the Church, in the societies, in the interpersonal relationships, in international relations, in the task of promoting the dignity of all persons and respect for God's gifts of creation. When all is fulfilled, after the Jubilee, the world will be infused with authentic hope, heralding a new heaven and a new earth where everyone lives in justice and harmony in joyful expectation of the accomplishment of the Lord's promises.<sup>19</sup>

Pope Francis stated in his Letter to Msgr. Rino Fisichella, the President of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, for the Jubilee 2025 that the Jubilee has always been an event of great spiritual, ecclesial, and social significance in the life of the Church.<sup>20</sup> The significances are larded in the Bull of Indiction of the ordinary Jubilee of the year 2025 known as *Spes Non Confundit* (Hope does not disappoint).

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<sup>18</sup> 1 Tim. 1:1.

<sup>19</sup> Francis, *Spes Non Confundit*, 25.

<sup>20</sup> Jubilee 2025, Letter of the Holy Father Francis to Msgr. Rino Fisichella, 11 February, 2022. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va),

## **The Spiritual Significance of the Jubilee**

1. *Conversion:* The foremost reason for the celebration of the Jubilee is to foment the ongoing conversion of the children of God. The Pontiff anticipates the Jubilee to serve as oases of spirituality and proposes the pilgrimage centres as places of rest; spaces to drink from the wellsprings of hope. In order to gain the spiritual benefits abundantly, individuals are enjoined to approach the Sacrament of Reconciliation judiciously at the different places of pilgrimage.<sup>21</sup> The pilgrims are called to contemplate the beauty of creation and the care of our common home.
2. *Love of God poured out:* with the opening of the Holy Door of different Basilicas and designated Holy Doors in Particular Churches, everyone is invited to experience the love of God intensely with an ample influx of grace which precedes and accompanies his people.<sup>22</sup>
3. *Forgiveness:* the Jubilee brings the grace of forgiveness which is poured upon God's people. The pontiff reasons that the power of God's forgiveness supports and accompanies communities and individuals in their journeys of life and frees them from hopelessness of the ephemeral entities.
4. *Prayer for the dead:* common mode of prayer for the dead through the means of the Jubilee indulgences is intended to be offered up for those who have died in order to plead for the mercy of God on their behalf. "Mercy" and indulgence

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<sup>21</sup> Francis, *Spes Non Confundit*, 5.

<sup>22</sup> Francis, *Spes Non Confundit*, 6.

are used interchangeably by the pontiff as an expression of the fullness of God's forgiveness which is limitless.<sup>23</sup>

5. *Marian Shrines*: the Marian shrines are sacred places of welcome and privilege places for the rebirth of hope. The pilgrims are encouraged to spend time in the Marian Shrines in order to venerate the Blessed Mother and seek her intercession for protection.<sup>24</sup>
6. *Reading the Scripture*: reading of the scriptures especially during the Jubilee is to foster hope and affirm that this hope is a given.<sup>25</sup> It is a gift to embrace and discover that God is the sure refuge and strength.<sup>26</sup>

### **The Ecclesia Significance of the Jubilee**

1. *Form of Synodality*: the 2025 Jubilee Year serves as an important occasion for giving concrete expression to the form of synodality (journeying together and listening to one another as the people of God). This form of collaboration within the entire Church is increasingly necessary for responding to the urgent need for evangelization in the modern time. More importantly, the year 2025 marks the 1700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in AD 325. With the celebration, everyone is invited to collaborate with one another and be co-responsible for

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<sup>23</sup> Francis, *Spes Non Confundit*, 22.

<sup>24</sup> Francis, *Spes Non Confundit*, 24.

<sup>25</sup> Francis, *Spes Non Confundit*, 25.

<sup>26</sup> Heb. 6:18-20.

implanting unity, communion, and signs of hope into our world.<sup>27</sup>

2. *Pilgrimage*: pilgrimage is a fundamental element of every Jubilee event. By passing through one city to the other in contemplating the beauty of creation, one learns to treasure the richness of different culture and surrender the beauty to God in thanksgiving. The Eastern Churches are invited to take part in the pilgrimage to City of Rome and feel welcomed by the Mother Church and cherish the memories of their presence afterwards.<sup>28</sup>
3. *Opening the Doors of Grace*: The Jubilee is for the entire Church a lively experience of grace and hope wherein the Holy Door of the Basilica of St. Peter will be opened on 24 December 2024 to inaugurate the Jubilee Year; the Holy Door of St. John Lateran will be opened on 29 December 2024 to celebrate the 1700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its dedication; on 1 January 2025, the Holy Door of the Basilica of St. Mary Major will be opened; the Basilica of St. Paul Outside Walls' Holy Door will be opened on 5 January 2025.

On Sunday 29 December 2024, in every Cathedral and co-cathedral, diocesan bishops are to celebrate the Holy Mass as the solemn opening of the Jubilee Year with the rituals pertaining to the celebration.

To conclude the ordinary Jubilee Year, three of the Basilica Holy Doors (St. John, St. Mary Major, and St. Paul) will be

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<sup>27</sup> Francis, *Spes Non Confundit*, 17.

<sup>28</sup> Francis, *Spes Non Confundit*, 5.

closed on Sunday 29 December 2025 and the Holy Door in the Papal Basilica of St. Peter in the Vatican will close on 6 January 2026 on the Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord.<sup>29</sup>

4. *Hymns of Praise and Thanksgiving and appeal*: the celebration of the anniversary of the Council of Nicaea summons the Christians to join in the hymns of praise and thanksgiving to the Blessed Trinity because the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea represents a beckon to all churches and Ecclesial communities to persevere on the path to visible unity as Christ prayed.<sup>30</sup> In this Jubilee Year of 2025, a common celebration of Easter will take place which to this day different methods of celebration prevent the celebration of Easter on the same day among all Christians all over the world. This celebration is an appeal and serves as an entreaty to all Christians, East and West, to take concrete steps towards unity around a common date for Easter.<sup>31</sup>

### **The Social Significance of the Jubilee**

The social significance of the Jubilee indicates certain actions to embark upon in the Society and some communal impartial activities to one another to demonstrate that God is present among us. The activities are what Pope Francis referred to as signs of hope desired in the world.

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<sup>29</sup> Francis, *Spes Non Confundit*, 6.

<sup>30</sup> John 17: 21.

<sup>31</sup> Francis, *Spes Non Confundit*, 17.

The social positive ions for the Jubilee are projected by the pontiff as follows:

1. *Negotiation for Peace*: the need for peace in our world demands that each person takes concrete steps with diplomacy; commitment; courage; and creativity in generating harmony in the world. Every opportunity is to be sought to negotiate for lasting peace.<sup>32</sup>
2. *Inclusive future*: the desire for the young people to give birth to new children in many countries is a sign of the fruitfulness of their love for one another that ensure a future for every society. Thus, everyone is expected to be at the forefront to foster hope that is inclusive and recover the joy of living rather than settling for and seeking fulfilment in material realities alone.<sup>33</sup>
3. *The Prisoners*: we are called to be signs of hope to our brothers and sisters who are experiencing hardships of any kind such as prisoners who are feeling the harshness of detention and restrictions, lacking affecting and respect for their persons. The pontiff calls on the government to take certain initiatives that restores hope and formulate amnesty meant to help individuals to regain confidence in themselves and in the society; design programmes of integration into the community with concrete commitment to respect the rule of law in their policies. To demonstrate this sign of hope, the pontiff intends to open a Holy Door in a prison as a sign of

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<sup>32</sup> Francis, *Spes Non Confundit*, 8.

<sup>33</sup> Francis, *Spes Non Confundit*, 9.

invitation to the prisoners to look to the future with hope and renewed sense of confidence.<sup>34</sup>

4. *The Sick*: the signs of hope are shown to the sick at homes or in the hospitals through the closeness and affection of those who nurse and visit them. Special care should be given to those who are affected by illness and disabilities that severely restrict their personal independence. Care for these ones is a song of hope that calls for choral participation of the whole society.<sup>35</sup>
5. *The Youth*: signs of hope are needed by the young without which their dreams may not be achieved. They may grow discouraged and listless; they will go into drugs and momentary pleasure and sink into deep depression which might lead them into self-destructive behaviours. The pontiff calls on the Church to reach out to them specially in this Jubilee Year to demonstrate care and concern for the adolescent, students and the young couples.<sup>36</sup>
6. *The Migrants*: as a way of celebrating the Jubilee, sign of hope is presented to the migrants who leave their homelands in search of better life for their family. There is a call not to frustrate their efforts by rejection and prejudice but to welcome them with respect and dignity and accompany them with a sense of responsibility while maintaining their inalienable Rights. In the same way of attending to the migrants, the Exiles, the displaced persons and refugees

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<sup>34</sup> Francis, *Spes Non Confundit*, 10.

<sup>35</sup> Francis, *Spes Non Confundit*, 11.

<sup>36</sup> Francis, *Spes Non Confundit*, 12.



whom in the international tensions force to emigrate ought to be guaranteed security and enable them to have access to employment and education. They are not to be robbed of the hope for a better life.<sup>37</sup>

7. *The Elderly*: the elderly and the grandparents who frequently feel lonely and abandoned deserve signs of hope. This is demonstrated by holding them in high esteem and treasure their life experiences, acknowledging their accumulated wisdom and the contributions they can still offer the society. The Christian communities are enjoined to cooperate in strengthening the synergy between the generations.<sup>38</sup>
8. *The Poor*: signs of hope is to be extended to the poor and the homeless who lack the essentials of life. They suffer from exclusion and indifference. They are always the victims in need of care and hope.<sup>39</sup>
9. *The Common Good*: the pontiff affirms that the Jubilee reminds the world of the prophetic message that the goods of the earth are not destined for a privilege few, but are meant for everyone. The rich must be generous to those in need especially those who lack water and food. Pope Francis declares the appeal to launch a Global Fund which is able to put an end to hunger and develop the impoverish countries rather than spending on weapons and other military accessories.<sup>40</sup> This intention of Global Find is in the

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<sup>37</sup> Francis, *Spes Non Confundit*, 13.

<sup>38</sup> Francis, *Spes Non Confundit*, 14.

<sup>39</sup> Francis, *Spes Non Confundit*, 15.

<sup>40</sup> Francis, *Spes Non Confundit*, 16.

tradition of the Church. Pope John Paul II took the decisive action in the Jubilee Year 2000. The action was a practical sign of charity whereby the Catholic Church gives the sign of commitment to charity by initiating an endowment fund for the poor which is the outgrowth and seal of love ignited by the Year of Jubilee. The endowment was established so as to become a small stream flowing into the great river of Christian charity. It was meant to flow back to the world in remembrance of the communion experienced during the Jubilee Year.<sup>41</sup>

10. *The Debts of Countries*: for the Jubilee, the pontiff is calling on the affluent nations to forgive and cancel the debts of countries that will never be able to repay them. This forgiveness is more than a question of generosity, rather it is an act of justice, the art of forgiveness that prepares the path to peace in the world.<sup>42</sup>

## **Our Responses to the Celebration of the Jubilee**

1. *Individual*: there is a tendency on the individuals to just move with the flow of the crowd without living and praying through the Year of Jubilee. That is not the intention of Pope Francis. At the heart of this Jubilee 2025 is a call to *metanoia* (*conversion*). It means turning away from hopelessness which is a filtrate of the present condition and situation of the modern time. At this present time, cold and hot wars exist

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<sup>41</sup> John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, (At the Beginning of the New Millennium) Apostolic Letter, Jan. 6, 2001. <https://www.vatican.va>, AAS 93 (2001), 42-47, Accessed: 22/08/2024.

<sup>42</sup> Francis, *Spes Non Confundit*, 16.

in different parts of the world. In order to cease fire of wars, it calls for personal conversion from the heart of the perpetrators and protagonists of war to give up selfishness and control of powers that do not belong to the individual's domain. It is a conviction that God owns the world and human beings and are just stewards to maintain and uphold equilibrium of what God had created.

2. *On the Nations*: the pontiff has called on the nations to make policies based on the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity. It is believed that leaders are on the seat because God permits them to manage and harness the natural resources of the different domains and not to exploit the general masses to whom resources belong. The governing spirit and the wisdom come from God and the wise leaders seek the wisdom from God. When leadership power is utilized effectively, it gives signs of hope to the citizenry and make the world a better place. When the home country is better, there is no need to flee in search of greener pasture elsewhere. When people are seeking for all sorts of securities, they are prone to all kinds of miseries on daily basis. Safer environment is expected from the public authorities in fulfilment of the political mandate which are obligated by the public office holders to the citizens.
3. *The Church*: particular churches have the obligations to celebrate the Jubilee Year canonically and judiciously. It is common place that majority of the faithful might not travel to the City of Rome on pilgrimage. However, those in the home countries are made to gather round the ordinary to be a sign of hope of the world redeemed. St. Cyprian taught that

the Universal Church is in the particular Church and the particular Church is in the Universal Church.<sup>43</sup> Hence, when the Jubilee is well celebrated in the particular Churches, the faithful feel they are celebrating with all the faithful all over the world and this experience foreshadows the heavenly banquet in joyful expectation.

### **The Fruits of the Jubilee**

Fruit is the part of a flowering plant that contains the seeds; it is a products of plant growth. The celebration of the Jubilee Year encompasses series of seed which are planted and is expected to grow and bear fruits in its own seasons. The Jubilee Year 2025 will bear fruits such as:

1. People finding hope in God's grace
2. A deepened understanding of the virtue of hope
3. The ability to view the passage of time with the certainty that the history of humanity and the modern time are not doomed to a dead end or dark abys, but are directed as an encounter with the Lord of glory who redeems all things and directs all things for his glory.<sup>44</sup>
4. In the testimony of St Paul, the apostle, he affirms that if the people continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which was heard; then everyone may be reconciled in Christ Jesus and

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<sup>43</sup> Cyprian of Carthage, Church Fathers: *Treatise 1: 5-7 in The New Advent*, [www.newadvent.org](http://www.newadvent.org) 2023. Accessed 22/08/2024.

<sup>44</sup> Francis, *Spes Non Confundit*, 21.

be presented perfect, holy and blameless above all reproach in the sight of the Lord Christ Jesus.<sup>45</sup>

## **Conclusion**

When the Jubilee Year 2025 is well celebrated according to the will of the Holy Spirit that moves the heart and mind and in the fullness of the grace of God, the faithful are moved to live their lives in the expectation of the return and hope of living forever in Christ Jesus. Thus, people of God are transformed into a life of happiness that is founded in love, the love of Christ from which nothing can separate his people from Him.<sup>46</sup> Living in that kind of aura of faith, hope and charity and sharing it with one another is the goal of the Year of jubilee.

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<sup>45</sup> Col. 1: 19-29.

<sup>46</sup> Rom. 8:38-39.

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## **Hope amid Despair: Pathways to Resilience and Renewal**

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### **Abstract**

*The article examines the multifaceted interplay between hope and despair, highlighting their profound impact on individual and collective well-being. Through an in-depth analysis of the psychological, emotional, and societal dimensions of despair, it emphasizes the pivotal role of hope as a transformative response to adversity. The article outlines strategies for fostering hope on both individual and collective levels, addressing the challenges posed by cynicism, fear, and nihilism. It underscores the importance of resilience as a critical factor in overcoming despair and achieving positive change. Through inspiring case studies and a discussion of effective interventions, the paper emphasizes the transformative*

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*power of hope in shaping individuals and communities. By advocating for a culture of hope, the article calls for a collective commitment to building a more compassionate, equitable, and resilient world.*

## **Introduction**

This article explores the intersection of secular and theological perspectives on hope, emphasizing its role in fostering resilience and human flourishing amidst adversity. Addressing the psychological, emotional, and societal dimensions of despair; it underscores the necessity of cultivating hope as a transformative force for individuals and communities. The discussion highlights resilience as a cornerstone for overcoming despair, offering strategies to foster hope and counter challenges such as cynicism, fear, and nihilism. Recognizing hope as a foundational gift, particularly in theological contexts, the article reflects on its importance in evangelization efforts, especially in regions like Nigeria, where systemic issues such as poverty and violence challenge its presence. It raises critical questions about sustaining hope in the face of profound loss, illustrating the struggle to maintain hope amidst despair. Drawing from secular and Christian traditions, including insights from Thomas Aquinas and Pope Benedict XVI, it emphasizes humanity's intrinsic need for divine connection as a source of enduring hope. The article clarifies hope's conceptual foundations and practical implications through case studies, personal narratives, and research. Ultimately, it calls for a collective commitment to fostering a culture of hope, advocating for a more compassionate and resilient society capable of navigating life's most profound challenges.



## Understanding Despair

The word *despair* comes from the Latin verb *dēspērāre*, which is composed of two parts:

- "dē-" meaning "down from" or "away" (indicating a sense of removal or negation).
- "spērāre" means "to hope" (related to *spes*, the Latin word for "hope").

Thus, *dēspērāre* means "to be without hope" or "to lose hope." Over time, this Latin word passed into Old French as *despirer* and then into Middle English as *despairen*, giving us the modern English term "despair," which denotes a complete loss or absence of hope.<sup>2</sup>

In sociology, *despair* can be understood as a profound sense of hopelessness or powerlessness experienced by individuals or groups in response to social conditions. It often arises from systemic poverty, inequality, discrimination, or social exclusion. Despair in this context, reflects a collective or personal perception that one's social, economic, or political circumstances are unchangeable or overwhelming, leading to feelings of futility or resignation.<sup>3</sup> From a sociological perspective, despair is not just an individual emotional state but is shaped by structural factors that create barriers to well-being and social mobility. It can also manifest in various ways,

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<sup>2</sup> *Despair*, in *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press), accessed October 2, 2024, <https://www.oed.com>.

<sup>3</sup> Emile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, trans. John A. Spaulding and George Simpson (New York: Free Press, 1951), 246-250.

including social withdrawal, apathy, or even protest and resistance as individuals or communities confront oppressive conditions.<sup>4</sup>

In the Catholic tradition, despair is considered a grievous sin against the virtue of hope. It involves the voluntary and complete abandonment of hope for one's salvation<sup>5</sup> and a total mistrust in God's goodness, justice, and mercy. Thomas Aquinas, one of the great fathers of the church, aptly stated that despair is not just a sin but the origin of other sins.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, it is a sin against hope, the individual, and ultimately against God, the source and object of all hope. Despair manifests in various ways, including loss of motivation, pessimism, withdrawal, hopelessness, destructive behaviour, apathy, chronic sadness, neglect of responsibility, and cynicism.<sup>7</sup> These manifestations reflect a deep sense of disillusionment and emotional exhaustion, often stemming from prolonged distress. They significantly hinder personal well-being and growth, perpetuating a negative cycle that makes it challenging to engage positively with life and maintain meaningful connections with others. This laissez-faire attitude can erode the fabric of any community or society. The psychological and emotional consequences of prolonged despair include low self-esteem, anxiety, an increased risk of substance abuse, depression, physical health decline, and suicidal ideation.<sup>8</sup> At this stage, an individual may

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<sup>4</sup> Emile Durkheim, 246 -250.

<sup>5</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2nd ed.* (Vatican City: Vatican Publishing House, 1997), §2091, p. 526.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1920), Pt. II-II Q.20 Art. 1

<sup>7</sup> Aaron T. Beck and Brad A. Alford, *Depression: Causes and Treatment* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 45–46.

<sup>8</sup> Aaron T. Beck and Brad A. Alford, 45–46.

become completely despondent, believing there is no remedy for their situation and that nothing good can come from it. This sense of hopelessness can extend beyond individuals to entire communities or societies, with serious consequences.

When a society experiences widespread despair, the implications are profound and multifaceted. Often, there is massive economic regression and a breakdown in the educational system, resulting in decreased productivity and increased inflation as the workforce loses motivation and efficiency.<sup>9</sup> It is also possible that mistrust in institutions, government, and fellow citizens erodes, weakening social cohesion and stability.<sup>10</sup> This erosion of trust can lead to increased crime and violence, causing social unrest as citizens resort to desperate measures. This is palpable in the Nigerian situation, where citizens are forced to take to the streets to protest against poverty and injustices in the land. Despair also has a devastating impact on family bonds and community ties, including those within faith or religious communities. In families, despair can strain relationships, leading to conflicts, emotional distance, and a breakdown of communication. This environment fosters isolation rather than unity, resulting in weakened family structures. Addressing widespread despair requires comprehensive strategies to restore hope, resilience, and support within families, communities, and faith-based religious groups, ensuring a more hopeful and connected society. Let us proceed by delving into secular research

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<sup>9</sup> John Smith, *The Economic Impacts of Psychological Factors* (New York: Economic Press, 2015), 102-103.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 56.

on hope, focusing on its role as a crucial factor in fostering human flourishing.

### **Hope and Economic Development: A Theoretical Review**

Hope and its importance in economic development have garnered increasing scholarly attention, particularly within the field of development economics, where it is recognized as a pivotal psychological and motivational construct. Researchers examine hope as a multidimensional construct, exploring how it shapes economic behaviors and developmental outcomes. It is understood as a personal experience and a collective societal aspiration, with significant implications for addressing poverty, fostering climate action, and promoting human flourishing. Darren Webb provides a foundational framework for understanding hope, arguing that it is not a singular experience but one that manifests in distinct modes.<sup>11</sup> His typology identifies patient, critical, estimative, resolute, and utopian hope as complementary dimensions, challenging reductionist approaches that treat hope as a uniform phenomenon. Webb situates hope as a universal human experience that bridges disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, anthropology, and theology, harmonizing fragmented perspectives. Building on Webb's work, Julian Cook extends the analysis of hope by connecting individual expressions with broader societal ideals. Drawing on recent scholarship in sociology and anthropology, Cook

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<sup>11</sup> Darren Webb. "Modes of hoping," *History of the Human Sciences* 20, no. 3(2007): 65-83, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0952695107079335>.

emphasizes the material and practice-based dimensions of hope.<sup>12</sup> By linking localized, micro-level expressions of hope to systemic transformation, Cook challenges the dichotomy between utopian and anti-utopian frameworks. His work highlights the potential of small-scale hopes to inspire broader socio-political change, illustrating how individual aspirations can shape collective well-being.

In addressing poverty, the work of Lybbert and Wydick offers a compelling framework for understanding hope within developmental contexts. They distinguish between "wishful hope" and "aspirational hope," emphasizing the latter's importance of pathways and agency. Aspirational hope, rooted in achievable goals, is viewed as a proactive force that helps individuals escape poverty traps. Their concept of the "aspirations gap" illustrates how low aspirations limit opportunities, discouraging investment in education or entrepreneurship. They argue for interventions that nurture hope alongside material resources by integrating positive psychology into development economics, presenting a holistic approach to poverty alleviation. Empirical studies further underscore hope's critical role in economic and social behaviours. Jeffrey R. Bloem and colleagues explore the interplay between hope, self-efficacy, and aspirations, demonstrating that hope fosters agency and resilience within educational and socio-economic contexts.<sup>13</sup> Their research highlights the influence of socio-economic conditions and societal

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<sup>12</sup> Julia Anne Cook, "Hope, Utopia, and Everyday Life: Some Recent Developments," *Utopian Studies* 29, no. 3 (December 2018): 380–397, doi: <https://doi.org/10.5325/utopianstudies.29.3.0380>

<sup>13</sup> Jeffrey R. Bloem, Duncan Boughton, Kyan Htoo, Aung Hein and Ellen M. Payongayong, "Measuring Hope: A Quantitative Approach with Validation in Rural Myanmar," *The Journal of Development Studies* 54 (2018): 2078-2094.

norms, particularly in gendered contexts, where educational and career aspirations are shaped by societal expectations. By framing self-efficacy and an internal locus of control as key components of hope, they emphasize the importance of equitable access to opportunities in fostering human flourishing. From a structural perspective, Blöser critiques the overly individualized focus on hope within development economics, arguing that genuine hope requires supportive institutional structures and systemic equity. Drawing on Kantian ethics, she highlights the interplay between individual agency and societal justice, suggesting that systemic reforms are essential for fostering lasting economic mobility and societal hope. Her analysis reveals the dual necessity of psychological resources and structural support in addressing inequality and despair.

The relevance of hope extends beyond individual and structural considerations into broader economic theory. Pleeing and Burger challenge the traditional homo economicus model, which characterizes individuals as rational and self-interested agents. They argue that this perspective neglects the psychological and subjective dimensions of economic decision-making.<sup>14</sup> By incorporating anticipatory feelings and consumer confidence into economic models, they position hope as a critical driver of resilience and proactive behaviour. Their findings connect higher aspirations to increased effort and achievement, while low aspirations limit opportunities for flourishing. Hope also plays a significant role in addressing environmental sustainability. Pleeing and colleagues examine how hope motivates pro-environmental behaviours,

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<sup>14</sup> Emma Pleeing, and Martijn J. Burger, "Hope in Economics," in *Historical and Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Hope*, ed. S.C.vandenHeuvel (Cham: Springer, 2020): 165-178.

distinguishing between generalized and climate-specific hope. They caution against "false hope," which arises from denial or unrealistic expectations, and advocate for fostering realistic hope through education and empowerment.<sup>15</sup> Their research demonstrates that hope, when rooted in actionable goals, enhances resilience and inspires meaningful engagement with sustainability practices, benefiting individual and collective flourishing.

Efforts to quantify hope have also advanced through studies in developing contexts. Chorieva, Mohapatra, and Swallow introduce a novel measurement tool in rural Tanzania, revealing how hope varies across demographic lines defined by factors such as gender, income, and religiosity.<sup>16</sup> Their findings highlight the heterogeneity of hope and the need for tailored interventions that address its diverse expressions within different communities. By revealing how socio-economic factors shape hope, they underscore its critical role in driving aspirations and motivating progress.

Together, these studies illustrate the multifaceted nature of hope and its profound impact on individual and societal well-being. Hope operates through aspirations, agency, and resilience, influencing economic behaviours and fostering transformative change. However, its realization depends not only on personal effort but also on supportive societal structures and equitable opportunities. As

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<sup>15</sup> Emma Pleeging, Job van Exel, Martijn J. Burger and Spyridon Stavropoulos, "Hope for the future and willingness to pay for sustainable energy," *Ecological Economics* (2020): 106900, doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2020.106900

<sup>16</sup> Nargiza Chorieva, Sandeep Mohapatra, and Brent Swallow, "Hope and Its Distribution in Rural Tanzania," *The Journal of Development Studies* 60, no.11 (2024): 1735–54, doi:10.1080/00220388.2024.2383435.

hope fosters resilience and proactivity, it permeates various dimensions of human experience, from personal ambitions to systemic reforms. Building on this foundation, the discussion now turns to theological perspectives on hope. By engaging with the works of Thomas Aquinas, the Second Vatican Council, and Pope Benedict XVI in *Spe Salvi*, we seek to deepen the understanding of hope's transformative potential. These theological insights will further illuminate how hope addresses despair and fosters enduring human flourishing.

### **Confronting Foes of Hope**

As a theological virtue, hope is central to the Christian life, enabling believers to trust in the promise of eternal life and God's grace to save. Yet the virtue of hope is often considered unrealistic in the face of affliction and other life challenges. In times of difficulty, there is a tendency to give up, retreat from effort, and lose confidence in oneself, others, and God. In Christian theology, Aquinas describes despair as the most direct enemy of hope, where an individual loses confidence in God's mercy and the possibility of salvation. Despair arises from a distorted perception of God's justice, leading one to believe one's sins are too great to be forgiven. This lack of trust in God is a grave sin because it denies the foundation of Christian hope, which rests on God's infinite mercy and omnipotence.<sup>17</sup> In contemporary parlance, despair is generally understood as a severe emotional state of hopelessness or the feeling that no positive outcomes are possible. It often reflects a loss of faith or confidence in oneself, others, or the future. "Despair is a profound state of

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<sup>17</sup> Thomas Aquinas, (*ST II-II*, Q. 20, A. 1).



hopelessness and utter loss of hope, characterized by a belief that no improvement or resolution is possible.”<sup>18</sup> Conversely, presumption occurs when one takes God's mercy for granted, either by expecting forgiveness without true repentance or believing one's capacity to achieve salvation without divine grace. Presumption undermines the balance of hope, which relies on God's grace and human cooperation.<sup>19</sup> Thus, a presumptuous person exhibits excessive arrogance and overconfidence in themselves. They trust in their abilities and knowledge, often ignoring their limitations and dependence on divine providence. This unjustified confidence reflects a refusal to recognize their limitations. Either way, both situations disrupt the balance of hope, leading to spiritual harm. These insights are echoed in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which emphasizes that presumption and despair are sins against faith. The belief in God's infinite love is contradicted by despair, while presumption cultivates a false sense of security that disregards the necessity of contrition.<sup>20</sup>

The Church's responsibility is to serve as a beacon of hope in facing modern challenges such as war, insecurity, banditry, and alienation. The Second Vatican Council, particularly in *Gaudium et Spes*, urges the Church to confront despair, presumption, and nihilism by embodying the hope of Christ's Resurrection and actively working toward social justice and human dignity. "In the face of the modern world's anxieties, the Church offers the hope of salvation that surpasses all expectations. The Church believes that Christ died and

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<sup>18</sup> Merriam-Webster, *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed. (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 2003), s.v. "despair."

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Aquinas, (*ST II-II*, Q. 21, A. 1).

<sup>20</sup> CCC, 1817

rose for all, and the Christian is called to share in this mystery."<sup>21</sup> The Council also linked hope with social action, stating that Christians are called to confront the structures of sin and injustice that are the true foes of hope in society. "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men and women of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted; these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ."<sup>22</sup> Thus, pursuing justice, peace, and the common good is a tangible expression of hope that turns ideas into attainable efforts that improve society and foster positive change. Yet, several factors are mitigating the practice of hope and our conviction for a better future. Broadly, this could refer to despair, presumption, cynicism, nihilism, and fear. These factors threaten our faith, hope, and the practice of love, whether in a religious, social, or personal context. It requires an active struggle to protect and nurture hope during adversities.

### **Embracing Hope: The Journey Forward**

Amid difficult circumstances, recognizing the seeds of hope within despair is challenging but essential. It is often easier to give up trying, cease praying, and disengage from positive action than to remain steadfast in hope. Yet, it is in these moments that resilience and strength are most profoundly discovered. Hope begins with small, positive changes or fleeting moments of joy. Even the faintest glimmer can shift perspectives and spark transformation. This hope,

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<sup>21</sup> **The Second Vatican Council**, *Gaudium et Spes* [Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World], ed. Austin Flannery (New York: Costello Publishing Company, 1996), no. 22.

<sup>22</sup> **The Second Vatican Council**, *Gaudium et Spes*, no.1.

however, is not merely an optimistic sentiment but a living hope rooted in God, the Creator, and the ultimate source of Christian hope.

As emphasized by Pope Benedict XVI in *Spe Salvi*, “Anyone who does not know God, despite entertaining various forms of hope, is ultimately without the profound hope that sustains the entirety of life” (Eph 2:12).<sup>23</sup> People frequently pursue temporary hopes—such as romantic or marital engagement, professional success, or national prosperity—which, though meaningful, ultimately fail to satisfy. These should not distract from the ultimate hope, which is the hope for the kingdom of God.<sup>24</sup> Yet, Christian hope does not ignore temporal realities. While holding on to ultimate hope, believers must also address the immediate needs of their world. Striving for peace, stability, and progress requires individual commitment and collective effort.

Hope transforms how people face life’s challenges. It fosters resilience, perseverance, and contentment while enriching relationships and fostering supportive communities.<sup>25</sup> It is not an isolated virtue but thrives in a communal context, recognizing that no one can achieve true happiness alone. By transcending self-centeredness and embracing a collective mindset, individuals can align their personal aspirations with the good of their communities.<sup>26</sup> Without prioritising the needs and joys of others, personal and societal transformation will remain elusive.

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<sup>23</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, §27, 37.

<sup>24</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, §30, 31.

<sup>25</sup> C. R. Snyder, *The Psychology of Hope: You Can Get There from Here* (New York: Free Press, 1994), 87-89.

<sup>26</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, §14, 25

Christian hope extends beyond the promise of eternal life. It compels believers to engage actively in the world. Pope Benedict XVI highlights St. Bernard of Clairvaux, who inspired his monastery to blend spiritual devotion with service to the Church and society. Traditionally seen as contemplative retreat centres, monasteries under St. Bernard's leadership became places of action. The monks laboured not only for their sanctification but also for the betterment of the world.<sup>27</sup> This synthesis of contemplation and action offers a model for engaging with present challenges while preparing for eternal life. Both personal growth and communal collaboration are necessary for fostering a hope-filled world. Thus, even those dedicated to contemplation—*contemplantes*—engage in agricultural labour. Our spiritual life should be engaging and pragmatic, involving contemplation and concrete actions in preparation for the new paradise. It involves nurturing our inner spiritual life while addressing world needs and challenges.

Hope has a transformative power that helps overcome despair. It is a guiding light, sustaining meaning and purpose in the face of life's difficulties. Cultivating hope requires certain attitudes, such as gratitude, positivity, resilience, prayer, and meditation. Pope Benedict XVI underscores prayer as essential for fostering hope, especially in times of deep despair.<sup>28</sup> Yet, prayer is not about isolation or self-comfort but connects the individual to God and others. It fosters empathy and broadens perspectives, transforming personal aspirations into acts of service and solidarity.<sup>29</sup> True prayer

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<sup>27</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, §15, 25.

<sup>28</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, §32-34, 43-45.

<sup>29</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, §33, 44.

aligns the individual's will with God's, nurturing hope for oneself and the broader community.

Regrettably, suffering, an unavoidable aspect of human existence, often challenges hope. "We shall always have the poor with us" (Matt. 26:11)—the marginalized, the abandoned, and the sick. These are the many sources of suffering and pain in our world today. However, Pope Benedict XVI asserts that how individuals respond to suffering—both their own and that of others—reveals the depth of their humanity.<sup>30</sup> The scope of this principle extends beyond individual contexts, influencing societal dynamics at large. A compassionate society finds meaning in suffering, transforming it into a path of purification and solidarity. To internalize this principle, it is essential to cultivate key virtues, including love, truth, and a commitment to justice. Love enables individuals to share in others' pain and offer consolation. Virtues like truth and justice are essential for upholding the community's integrity. Sacrificing these virtues for personal comfort leads to the decay of communal harmony and the loss of life's deepest meaning.<sup>31</sup> Consequently, upholding truth and justice, even in the face of hardship, is necessary to sustain hope and give meaning to life. St. Thomas Aquinas further identifies the enemies of hope: presumption, cynicism, fear, and nihilism. Cynicism, rooted in spiritual sloth, dismisses the possibility of goodness, while nihilism, denying life's meaning, fosters hopelessness.<sup>32</sup> These attitudes, particularly evident in societies plagued by lawlessness or distrust, exacerbate despair. In Nigeria, for example, widespread scepticism and social instability create a

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<sup>30</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, §38, 50

<sup>31</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, §38, 50

<sup>32</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, Q. 35, Art. 1.

culture of pessimism where hope appears elusive. Overcoming such challenges requires faith in God's mercy and commitment to living virtuously. By fostering resilience, engaging in community, and trusting in God's promises, individuals can combat these forces and restore hope.

### **The Role of Resilience and Resurgence**

The adage "a problem identified is a problem half solved" applies equally to matters of hope. Understanding the enemies of hope is the first step toward overcoming them. Given the evaluation of the factors that affect hope, we must adopt a pragmatic approach focused on resilience and resurgence. This involves strengthening our inner resolve and consistently renewing our sense of purpose and optimism. Resilience is a fundamental component of Christian theology that helps Christians believe in God's promise of eternity even in the face of profound adversity.<sup>33</sup> Hope, as already stated, is that virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength but the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit.<sup>34</sup> This future-oriented perspective provides believers with the strength to overcome hopelessness, thereby supporting resilience. Thomas Aquinas further emphasizes the importance of fortitude, a cardinal virtue that aids individuals in overcoming obstacles and enduring challenges.<sup>35</sup> Resilience is exemplified through resurgence—the ability to bounce back from difficulties and emerge stronger. The Resurrection of Christ serves as a profound model of

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<sup>33</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, §30-33, 40-44

<sup>34</sup> CCC, 1817

<sup>35</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, ST II-II, Q. 123, A. 1

this resurgence. It demonstrates how suffering can be transformative, purifying the soul and leading to a deeper sense of hope and renewal (1 Cor. 15:17).

Practical and communal spiritual activities, such as prayer and meditation, are vital in cultivating personal resilience. These practices help maintain an optimistic attitude and strengthen one's ability to confront and overcome challenges. By grounding individuals in a sense of purpose and fostering inner calm, they provide the emotional and spiritual fortitude needed to navigate life's difficulties. As the Catechism notes, "The Christian community is a place where believers experience the joy of God's presence and the support of their brothers and sisters in the faith."<sup>36</sup> Community support serves as a vital foundation for reinforcing personal resilience, enabling individuals to confront adversity with courage and hope. Resilience, in turn, defies the inclination to succumb to despair, affirming the possibilities of renewal and the sustaining presence of divine grace. It upholds the inherent value of life and the promise of eternity, even in the shadow of nihilism and cynicism. For Christians, resilience not only empowers them to endure hardship but also inspires the transformation of their circumstances through faith and communal solidarity, embodying the transformative power of hope in their daily lives.

A poignant example of the synergy between resilience, renewal, and community support is evident in the response of Bishop Lucius Ugorji of Owerri Archdiocese to the 2023 floods in Nigeria. The catastrophic floods caused widespread devastation and displacement, leaving countless individuals in despair. In this

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<sup>36</sup> CCC, 1820

context, Bishop Ugorji, Archbishop of Owerri and President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), emerged as a steadfast symbol of hope and resilience. Mobilizing church resources, he provided immediate relief, including temporary shelter, food, clothing, medical care, and emotional support for the affected. His compassionate leadership and unwavering commitment transformed despair into hope, illustrating the profound impact of united action during times of crisis.

Beyond emergency relief, Bishop Ugorji's efforts extended to long-term recovery initiatives. He collaborated with local and international organizations to deliver sustained support, establishing community groups, offering counseling services, and facilitating access to resources for rebuilding homes and livelihoods. By prioritizing physical restoration and emotional healing, he inspired a collective spirit of renewal, fostering a sense of belonging and assurance among those displaced. His actions underscored the church's role as a steadfast source of hope and support, embodying its mission to guide communities toward a more promising future.

Equally inspiring is the life of Mrs. Victoria Anumohe, a member of St. Paul Parish in Gwagwalada, Abuja, whose personal story epitomizes resilience and hope. Having suffered the tragic loss of her husband and four children, as well as the unexplained disappearance of another daughter, Mrs. Anumohe has faced profound affliction. Despite these immense trials, her faith has remained unshaken. Even after being evicted from her home, she found strength through the support of her church and community, demonstrating an extraordinary capacity for endurance. Engaged actively in church liturgies and activities, she exudes cheerfulness, friendliness, and a profound openness to God's will. Her steadfast participation and



contributions exemplify resilience in action, offering inspiration to her community and beyond. Together, the remarkable examples of Bishop Ugorji and Mrs. Anumohe illustrate how faith, compassion, and proactive engagement can transform despair into hope. Their lives affirm the enduring strength of individuals and communities united in purpose, demonstrating that even in the face of profound adversity, the human spirit can find renewal through resilience and collective action.

### **Converging Secular and Theological Perspectives on Hope**

The intersection of secular and theological perspectives on hope provides a comprehensive framework for understanding human flourishing and resilience. While differing in foundational principles, both approaches emphasize hope's transformative power in fostering well-being and societal progress. Exploring this intersection highlights how hope can be cultivated across diverse contexts, underscoring its significant impact on personal and communal growth. On the one hand, secular frameworks define hope as a cognitive and social phenomenon, emphasizing goal-setting, pathway identification, and confidence in achieving objectives. Research links hope to positive outcomes, such as academic achievement, career success, and improved health, framing it as a key motivator that enables individuals to actively shape their futures and overcome challenges. Beyond the individual, hope functions as a social resource, inspiring collective action and fostering community resilience to navigate adversity. On the other hand, theological perspectives, particularly within Christianity, regard hope as a virtue rooted in divine grace and the promise of eternal life. Unlike the outcome-driven nature of secular hope, theological

hope emphasizes trust in God's providence, distinguishing true hope from despair, which reflects a loss of trust and presumption, which overestimates human effort. Grounded in faith, theological hope aligns human aspirations with divine will, fostering resilience and spiritual growth even amid suffering. However, both perspectives converge in recognizing hope's essential role in human flourishing, emphasizing its capacity to provide purpose, motivation, and perseverance. Secular approaches, such as cognitive-behavioural strategies, build confidence through goal-setting and positive thinking, while theological traditions foster hope through spiritual practices like prayer, meditation, and community engagement. Remarkably, these approaches offer a holistic understanding of hope, integrating its practical benefits with spiritual depth.

Furthermore, the secular and theological perspectives emphasize the need to combat despair and nurture resilience. They advocate addressing systemic causes of despair, such as poverty and injustice while promoting practices that sustain hope. By cultivating environments that support hope, individuals and communities can recover from adversity with renewed strength and purpose, positioning hope as a personal asset and a catalyst for societal transformation. Ultimately, integrating secular and theological insights creates a multidimensional framework that empowers individuals and communities to flourish, fostering resilience and optimism in the face of life's challenges.

### **Building a Culture of Hope**

It is increasingly essential for individuals, communities, and nations to cultivate a culture of hope at all levels. In today's society, embedding hope in education, healthcare, and community

development is crucial for fostering resilience and progress.<sup>37</sup> To effectively address the myriad challenges we face, it is essential to establish systems and structures that actively nurture hope and resilience.<sup>38</sup> Research and experience have shown that hope not only fosters resilience and positivity but also encourages proactive engagement.<sup>39</sup> Integrating hopeful principles into various aspects of life involves several key areas. Firstly, personal growth is crucial; supporting individuals in setting and achieving personal goals and providing resources, mentorship, and encouragement is foundational.<sup>40</sup> Additionally, fostering a collective vision allows communities to work towards shared goals, creating an atmosphere of hope and unity.<sup>41</sup> Leaders play a pivotal role by articulating a clear, inspiring vision for the future, implementing policies that promote well-being, and encouraging active participation in decision-making processes.<sup>42</sup> This sense of involvement and belonging is vital for nurturing collective hope. A society that embodies hope is grounded in empathy, compassion, and

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<sup>37</sup> Charles. R. Snyder, *The Psychology of Hope: You Can Get There from Here* (New York: Free Press, 1994), 123-125.

<sup>38</sup> Charles R. Snyder, Kevin L. Rand, and David R. Sigmon, "Hope Theory: A Member of the Positive Psychology Family," in *Handbook of Positive Psychology*, ed. C. R. Snyder and Shane J. Lopez (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 259-263.

<sup>39</sup> Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), 101-104.

<sup>40</sup> Martin E. P. Seligman, *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being* (New York: Free Press, 2011), 109-113.

<sup>41</sup> Angela Duckworth, *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance* (New York: Scribner, 2016), 88-92.

<sup>42</sup> James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge: How to Make Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2017), 43-46.

solidarity.<sup>43</sup> By fostering such a culture, we can create an environment that supports resilience, encourages engagement, and upholds a positive and supportive atmosphere. Our faith and trust in providence, along with our commitment to truth, goodness, and justice, are fundamental to this endeavour. Through collective action and personal dedication, we can build a society that genuinely reflects God's kingdom on earth.

### **The Power of Collective Action: Mobilizing Hope Against Despair**

To combat institutionalized and systematic problems that ingrain hopelessness, including poverty, injustice, and corruption, requires collective action—a strong tool. Some scholars have argued that by uniting around a common purpose, individuals and communities can confront these challenges and create pathways to a more hopeful and just future.<sup>44</sup> In Nigeria, we have witnessed firsthand how collective action can drive significant change and shift the narrative toward progress, as demonstrated by various social movements across the country. The transformation of our communities and the realization of the new Nigeria we all desire hinge on our willingness to act together. Silence, as they say, is a killer. Social theorists argue that speaking out against harmful policies or actions that threaten societal values and morals is critical for the health of any democracy.<sup>45</sup> The

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<sup>43</sup> Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead* (New York: Gotham Books, 2012), 234-237.

<sup>44</sup> Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 58-102.

<sup>45</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 27-56.

impact of collective action was demonstrated during the 2020 #EndSARS protests, where Nigerian youths mobilized to demand an end to police brutality and misconduct. This movement not only resulted in the disbandment of the SARS unit but also ignited a broader political awakening among young Nigerians, leading to increased participation in the 2023 national elections.<sup>46</sup> This collective spirit of resilience and advocacy underscores the crucial role of community action in shaping a better future for all.

Mobilizing individuals and communities to confront systemic issues is essential, but the challenge often lies in finding the courage and leadership to take the first step. Fostering collaboration and solidarity aimed at a hopeful future requires sacrifices, selflessness, and a commitment to the common good. One such commitment is storytelling, a powerful tool for building hope and unity, as narratives of resilience and success can inspire and motivate others to act.<sup>47</sup> These stories serve as counter-narratives to despair by demonstrating that change is possible. Achieving systemic change often demands sustained efforts and the ability to adapt effective strategies in response to evolving challenges. This persistence, fuelled by hope, maintains momentum even in the face of setbacks. Many successful stories are anchored in deep values or faith traditions that provide a moral foundation and a sense of purpose.<sup>48</sup> Whether through religious beliefs, community values, or socio-cultural ethics, appealing to these shared values can deepen commitment and unify efforts around a common cause, promoting

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<sup>46</sup>Amnesty International, "Nigeria: Killing of #EndSARS Protesters by the Military Must Be Investigated," Amnesty.org, 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org>.

<sup>47</sup> Francesca Polletta, *It Was Like a Fever: Storytelling in Protest and Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 75-110.

<sup>48</sup> Christian Smith, *Disruptive Religion: The Force of Faith in Social-Movement Activism* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 3-29.

resilience and optimism. In the journey toward a better Nigeria, our collective action, rooted in shared values and driven by hope, is key to overcoming obstacles and building the future we aspire to see.

## **Conclusion**

In the face of poverty, suffering, and trauma, hope emerges as a beacon of light, illuminating the path toward healing and renewal. Yet, the insidious forces of despair, cynicism, and nihilism often threaten to extinguish this flame. As we grapple with these challenges, it is imperative to cultivate a culture of hope that empowers individuals and communities to overcome adversity. The intersection of secular and theological perspectives on hope offers a powerful framework for addressing these issues. Both traditions recognize the transformative power of hope, emphasizing its role in fostering resilience, inspiring action, and promoting human flourishing. While secular perspectives often focus on psychological and social factors, theological perspectives highlight the spiritual dimensions of hope grounded in faith and divine grace. By embracing both secular and theological insights, we can develop a comprehensive approach to cultivating hope. This involves not only addressing individual needs but also addressing systemic issues that perpetuate poverty, injustice, and suffering. It requires a commitment to social justice, economic equity, and environmental sustainability. Ultimately, hope is a collective endeavour. Through collaboration, we can build a world where hope thrives, despair is overcome, and the human spirit prevails. Guided by the enduring power of hope, we can chart a course toward a more just and compassionate future illuminated by the promise of a brighter tomorrow.

## **Consecrated Persons and the Jubilee: Embracing Hope, Conversion and Reconciliation**

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### **Abstract**

*The past four years have constituted difficult moments for humanity. Notable is the outbreak of Covid-19 in 2019 leading to the tragedy of death and the uncertainty and fleetingness of existence. During this period, Christians and people of other faiths endured hardships and limitations. Churches remained closed, as did mosques, schools, factories, offices, shops, and venues for recreation. It generated feelings not only of grief, but also, at times, of doubt, fear and disorientation. Within the same period is the war between Ukraine and Russia, and between Israel and Palestine, alongside other conflicts around the world. Pope Francis has declared the year 2025 the Jubilee Year, and he intends that during this year, humanity will move away from a season of tragedy to an epoch of hope. This paper studies the Jubilee Year declared by Pope Francis alongside other jubilee years. While there are several papers on the 2025 Jubilee Year, this work distinguishes itself by focusing on the implications of*

*the Jubilee Year for Consecrated Persons. For the purpose of achieving the aim and objectives of the paper, it adopts the thematic, hermeneutic and historical approaches in research. It concludes that the 2025 Jubilee Year can contribute greatly to restoring a climate of hope and trust, and a sense of universal fraternity as a prelude to the renewal and rebirth that is so urgently desired by the world.*

**Keywords:** Pope Francis, Consecrated Persons, Hope, Jubilee Year

## **Introduction**

The priestly writers emphasize the Sabbath throughout Genesis, Exodus, and Leviticus. In Leviticus 23, the weekly Sabbath is given top priority among the appointed festivals and holy convocations. The Israelites are to rest on the seventh day, and even the land is granted a Sabbath rest every seventh year, during which it is to lie fallow, with no sowing or pruning allowed. This Sabbath year extends not only to the people of Israel, but also their servants, and livestock, with a promise of abundant food for all<sup>1</sup>. In Leviticus 23, the year of Jubilee is discussed, which is the 50th year after counting off seven Sabbaths of years. The Jubilee year is proclaimed on the Day of Atonement with the blowing of the ram's horn.

The Jubilee, at this time, therefore, becomes a time for Sabbath rest, homecoming, and liberation in Israelite society. During this period, each Israelite returns to their ancestral land, debts are forgiven,

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<sup>1</sup> Enter the Bible. 2024. *Leviticus 25 – The Sabbatical Year and the Year of Jubilee*. <https://enterthebible.org/passage/leviticus-25-the-sabbatical-year-and-the-year-of-jubilee>



slaves are set free, and land is returned to its original owners<sup>2</sup>. The Jubilee is based on the theological claims that the land and people belong to the LORD, and as a result, they are released from any other claims during this time. Leviticus 25 outlines the rules for land and people redemption between Jubilee years, emphasizing economic justice. It allows the nearest relative of a debtor to redeem the land or person sold to pay off debts. If there is no one to redeem the land or people, both are released in the Jubilee year<sup>3</sup>.

This vision of economic justice and liberation has inspired people for thousands of years and has echoes in later biblical texts. It is from this Biblical tradition of jubilees that the Church gave importance to the celebration of jubilees from 1300 to date. The Jubilee Year 2025 declared by Pope Francis, is unique in many ways. It is designed to be an event of great spiritual, ecclesial, and social significance in the life of the Church. It is hoped to be a year to fan the flame of hope that has been given us, and help everyone to gain new strength and certainty by looking to the future with an open spirit, a trusting heart and far-sighted vision. While this paper does not ignore the general understanding of jubilee and the unique spirit of the 2025 jubilee year, it tries to drive an understanding in relation to the Consecrated Life.

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<sup>2</sup> Enter the Bible. 2024. *Leviticus 25 – The Sabbatical Year and the Year of Jubilee*.

<sup>3</sup> Enter the Bible. 2024. *Leviticus 25 – The Sabbatical Year and the Year of Jubilee*.

## Understanding Consecrated Life

*Lumen Gentium* gave due consideration to the role and mission of consecrated life in the life of the Church. Although it speaks of the incorporation of the faithful into the Church, the grace of divine adoption, and the universal call to holiness<sup>4</sup>, it further explains how the vocation of the religious compares with and differs from the common one of the laity and how they express in the Church a type of Christian and evangelical life that is entirely unique<sup>5</sup>. It defined the identity of a religious is defined more in terms of *being* conformed to Christ than of *doing*<sup>6</sup>. The Council's argumentation takes baptism as its starting point, recognizing that with the profession of the evangelical counsels, those who consecrate themselves to the service of God in the Church can derive "more abundant fruit from this baptismal grace"<sup>7</sup>.

Consecrated life is understood as an ecclesial vocation and does not constitute a path of perfection marked by individualism but shows a clear ecclesial rooting. The choice of the evangelical counsels represents for the individual, and for the whole Church, an opportunity for enrichment and a privileged "place" where grace is manifested. It is a spiritual capital that profits not only "the entire

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<sup>4</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, November 21, 1964, 10, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vatii\\_const\\_1964121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vatii_const_1964121_lumen-gentium_en.html), 11, 43, 47.

<sup>5</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, November 21, 1964, 39

<sup>6</sup> Michael Czerny SJ. 2021. Religious Life from Vatican II to *Fratelli Tutti* . Review for Religious: New Series, Volume 1, Issue 1, pp. 87-106

<sup>7</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, November 21, 1964, 44

Body of Christ”<sup>8</sup> but also those who embrace it<sup>9</sup>. The Consecrated life is a reality and also a sign. It is a sign because of the eschatological tension that runs through it<sup>10</sup>, given that the vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience constitute an anticipation of the condition of perfect and definitive communion to which the “children of God” will be introduced in the last times. It is also a reality because the religious, by giving themselves to God without fleeing from the world (*fuga mundi*), also acquire a different freedom in the way they engage themselves, material goods, and others<sup>11</sup>. It reflects the charismatic character of the church, constituting a special gift with which the Spirit has enriched the Church and characterized her charismatic structure, inasmuch as it “undeniably belongs to its life and holiness”<sup>12</sup>.

In 1965, the words “a life consecrated by the profession of the counsels”<sup>13</sup> appeared for the first time in an official Church document. *The document* makes explicit the Christological foundation of religious life<sup>14</sup> and indicates the following of Christ as

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<sup>8</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, November 21, 1964, 43

<sup>9</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, November 21, 1964, 43

<sup>10</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, November 21, 1964, 46; Kanu, I. A. 2011. “A Review of Consecrated: A Vision of the Religious Life from the Viewpoint of the Sacred”. Mary Sylvia Nwachukwu (Author). *African Journal of Contextual Theology*. 3: 161-163.

<sup>11</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, November 21, 1964, 46

<sup>12</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, November 21, 1964, 44

<sup>13</sup> *Perfectae Caritatis*, October 28, 1965, 1, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19651028\\_perfectae-caritatis\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651028_perfectae-caritatis_en.html), 2; Kanu, I. A. 2015. “Consecrated Persons as Agents of Pastoral Care of the Family”. *JORAS: Nigerian Journal of Religion and Society*. 5: 74-84.

<sup>14</sup> *Perfectae Caritatis*, October 28, 1965, 1.

the “highest rule” and the “ultimate norm”<sup>15</sup> which governs it. The primary purpose of the consecrated Life is union with God, to which both contemplation and apostolic zeal must be directed<sup>16</sup>. The multiple forms of consecrated life—contemplative, active, monastic, and lay<sup>17</sup>, show with how great a “variety of gifts” the Spirit embellishes the Church, making her appear “like a spouse adorned for her husband”<sup>18</sup>.

For the purpose of constant renewal, the decree recommends that each institute acquire knowledge of its own origins and history, which will help to attune the original charismatic intuition to “the changed conditions of our time”<sup>19</sup>. It also calls for more respect towards the “common life.” It holds that what binds religious together is love for God, and this unity “is a visible pledge that Christ will return”<sup>20</sup>. It holds that the very fruitfulness of religious life depends on the quality of life in common<sup>21</sup>, since fraternal unity is “a source of great apostolic energy”<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> *Perfectae Caritatis*, October 28, 1965, 2

<sup>16</sup> *Perfectae Caritatis*, October 28, 1965, 5

<sup>17</sup> *Perfectae Caritatis*, October 28, 1965, 7-11

<sup>18</sup> *Perfectae Caritatis*, October 28, 1965, 1.

<sup>19</sup> *Perfectae Caritatis*, October 28, 1965, 2

<sup>20</sup> *Perfectae Caritatis*, October 28, 1965, 15.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Czerny SJ. 2021., 87-106; Kanu, I. A. 2015. “*Africae Munus* and Consecrated Persons”. *The Catholic Voyage: African Journal of Consecrated Life*. 11: 3-14.

<sup>22</sup> *Perfectae Caritatis*, October 28, 1965, 15; Kanu, I. A. 2024. “The Inculturation of Consecrated Life in Africa: Towards a Logic for Promoting Indigenous Gifts of Fidelity”. *The Catholic Voyage: African Journal of Consecrated Life*. 21(1) 245-265.

In the apostolic exhortation *Evangelica Testificatio* of 1971, Pope Paul VI sought to respond to the climate of “anxiety”, “the boldness of certain arbitrary transformations”<sup>23</sup>, and those questioning the usefulness of consecrated life for the present time<sup>24</sup>. The pope reiterates the importance of rediscovering the “charisms of your founders”<sup>25</sup>, because on its identification depend those “fundamental options” which make it possible “continually . . . to revitalize external forms”<sup>26</sup>. Paul VI chose to include, in relation to the vow of poverty, a reference to the preferential option for the poor made by the Council. This requires a constant call to love effectively and to shun selfishness, for conversion of mind and heart and “for liberation from all temporal encumbrances”<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> Paul VI, *Evangelica Testificatio*, June 29, 1971, 2, [http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_exh\\_19710629\\_evangelica-testificatio.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19710629_evangelica-testificatio.html), 2; Kanu, I. A. (2019). “Collaboration within the Ecology of Mission: An African Cultural Perspective”. *The Catholic Voyage: Journal of Consecrated Life in Africa*. 15: 125-149.

<sup>24</sup> Paul VI, *Evangelica Testificatio*, June 29, 1971, 3 ; Kanu, I. A. 2018. “Obedience and Discernment in the Life of Consecrated Persons”. *IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities* (IAAJAH). 4(5) 35-43.

<sup>25</sup> Paul VI, *Evangelica Testificatio*, June 29, 1971, 11; Kanu, I. A. 2018. “Consecrated Persons and Collaborative Ministry”. *The Catholic Voyage: African Journal of Consecrated Life*. 14: 126-135.

<sup>26</sup> Paul VI, *Evangelica Testificatio*, June 29, 1971, 12; Kanu, I. A. 2016. “The Concept of Family as the Contribution of Africa to the Consecrated Life”. *The Catholic Voyage: African Journal of Consecrated Life*. 12: 31-40.

<sup>27</sup> Paul VI, *Evangelica Testificatio*, June 29, 1971, 17; Kanu, I. A. 2016. “*Miserando Atque Eligendo*: The Consecrated Life as a Mission of Mercy”. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*. 7(5) 92-100.

He observed that the Religious are called to live poverty as a choice, making their own the condition of the Son of Man who “has nowhere to rest his head” (Luke 9:58). The work of the religious, therefore, becomes a means to helping the poor and not for self-satisfaction. The duty to “help the poor through work” redefines common life and shows how poverty can be “really lived by pooling goods”<sup>28</sup>. The preferential option for the poor ultimately sheds new light on the way of living the vow of poverty and informs common life<sup>29</sup>.

## Church and the Tradition of Jubilees

### *a. Jubilees From 1000-1500*

On 22 February 1300, with the Bull *Antiquorum habet*, Boniface VIII proclaimed 1300 as a Jubilee year, decreeing that Romans who visit the basilicas of St. Peter and St. Paul 30 times within the year would be granted a plenary indulgence, however, pilgrims arriving from outside Rome would only need 15 visits<sup>30</sup>. In 1343, with the Bull *Unigenitus Dei Filius*, Clement VI, after having received a delegation representing the people of Rome asking him to bring the Apostolic See back to the city and to hold a Jubilee before the typical 100-year period, proclaimed a Holy Year for the year 1350<sup>31</sup>. Despite the scourge of the plague and a disastrous earthquake that struck

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<sup>28</sup> Paul VI, *Evangelica Testificatio*, June 29, 1971, 21; Kanu, I. A. 2015. “*Quitte Ton Pays: On Consecrated Persons and the Challenges of Family Obligations in Contemporary Africa*”. *Jos Studies*. 23: 45-57.

<sup>29</sup> Michael Czerny SJ. 2021., 87-106

<sup>30</sup> Pope Boniface VIII. 1300. *Antiquorum habet*. Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana

<sup>31</sup> Pope Clement VI. 1343. *Unigenitus Dei Filius*. Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana

Rome in 1349, more than one and a half million pilgrims poured into the city for the celebrations.

On 8 April 1389, the Bull *Salvator Noster Unigenitus* of Urban VI established that the celebration of the Jubilee should take place every 33 years, thus, bringing forward the celebrations to 1390<sup>32</sup>. Nicholas V proclaimed the next Holy Year in 1450 with the Bull *Immensa et Innumerabilia*, dated 19 January 1449<sup>33</sup>. This brought the jubilee tradition back to celebrations every 50 years. Given the Pope's canonisation of the great Franciscan preacher, St Bernardine of Siena, the number of pilgrims to Rome increased dramatically.

On 19 April 1470, the Bull *Ineffabilis Providentia*, expressly established that the Jubilee pilgrimage should include visits to the basilicas of St. Peter's, St. Paul's, St. John Lateran, and St. Mary Major. It stated that from 1475 onwards, jubilees should be celebrated every 25 years at the behest of Pope Paul II<sup>34</sup>. With the Bull of 29 August 1473 *Quemadmodum operosi*, Sixtus IV confirmed the Jubilee proclaimed earlier by Paul II, who had in the meantime died<sup>35</sup>.

A special effort was made to mark the Jubilee Year of 1500, given the extra significance of the turning of the new century. On 12 April 1498, the Bull *Consueverunt Romani Pontifices* suspended all

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<sup>32</sup> Pope Urban VI. 1389. *Salvator noster Unigenitus*. Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana

<sup>33</sup> Pope Nicholas V. 1450. *Immensa et Innumerabilia*. Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana

<sup>34</sup> Pope Paul II. 1475. *Ineffabilis Providentia*. Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana

<sup>35</sup> Pope Sixtus IV. 1473. *Quemadmodum operosi*. Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana

further indulgences for that year<sup>36</sup>, and this was later confirmed by the Bull *Inter multiplices* of 28 March 1499. The Bull of 20 December 1499, *Pastores Aeterni Qui*, established that only the penitentiaries of St. Peter's Basilica were granted the faculty to absolve sins<sup>37</sup>. In this year Alexander VI definitively established the complex ceremony of the opening and closing of Holy Years, which until then had not followed any specific liturgical rites. The Pope wanted the beginning to be marked by an event with a powerful impact and he thus implemented the tradition of the opening of a Holy Door. This ceremony is an explicit reference to the words of St John's Gospel: "I am the door. Whoever passes through me will be saved." (Jn 10:9)

*b. Jubilees from 1501-2000*

The Bull of proclamation, *Inter Sollucitudines*, issued by Clement VII, was published on 17 December 1524<sup>38</sup>. It proclaimed a jubilee year to mark 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the traditional jubilee year, first proclaimed by Pope Boniface VIII in 1300. A few days after his election, Pope Julius III opened the Holy Year promulgated by his predecessor Paul III, with the issuing of the Bull *Si Pastores Ovium*, dated 24 February 1550<sup>39</sup>. He also announced the resumption of the Council of Trent for May of the following year. The Jubilee of 1575 was announced on 10 May 1574 with the Bull *Dominus ac*

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<sup>36</sup> Pope Alexander VI. 1498. *Consueverunt Romani Pontifices Inter multiplices*. Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana

<sup>37</sup> Pope Alexander VI. 1499. *Pastores Aeterni Qui*. Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana

<sup>38</sup> Pope Clement VII. 1524. *Inter Sollucitudines*. Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana

<sup>39</sup> Pope Julius III. 1550. *Si Pastores Ovium*. Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana



*Redemptor*. Celebrated after the turmoil of the Protestant reformation, it was an excellent opportunity for Gregory XIII to renew Catholicism in accordance with the decisions of the Council of Trent<sup>40</sup>. This Holy Year gave the Pope the opportunity to highlight the renewed role of the Church in the modern world.

The Bull of 19 May 1599, *Annus Domini Placabilis* proclaimed a holy year. During this Jubilee, Clement VIII offered good example by hearing confessions during Holy Week, climbing the Scala Sancta on his knees, serving meals to pilgrims who had come to Rome, and eating with 12 of the city's poor each day<sup>41</sup>. Likewise, the cardinals renounced wearing their traditional red regalia as a sign of penitence. Many flocked to help the Pope's jubilee efforts.

On 29 April 1624, with the Bull *Omnes Gentes*, Urban VIII proclaimed the Jubilee of 1625. On 28 January 1625 he extended the Jubilee indulgence to those who were unable to travel to Rome, as well as to prisoners and the sick (Bull *Pontificia sollicitudo*)<sup>42</sup>. On 30 January, with the papal encyclical *Paterna dominici gregis cura*, given the danger of the plague that was threatening Rome, the traditional visit to the Basilica of St Paul was dispensed. A visit to the more central church of Santa Maria in Trastevere was done.

To mark this Holy Year proclaimed by the bull *Appropinquat Dilectissimi Filii* of 4 May 1649, Innocent X had the basilica of St.

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<sup>40</sup> Pope Gregory XIII. 1574. *Dominus ac Redemptor*. Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana

<sup>41</sup> Pope Clement VIII. 1599. *Annus Domini Placabilis*. Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana

<sup>42</sup> Pope Urban VIII. 1624. *Omnes Gentes*. Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana

John Lateran restored by the famous architect Borromini<sup>43</sup>. A novelty was introduced for this Jubilee: The Jubilee indulgence was extended to the Belgian Provinces and the West Indies through the Bull *Salvator et Dominus* of 8 and 12 January 1654. About 700,000 pilgrims arrived Rome, and umerous Protestants converted to Catholicism.

On 16 April 1674, Clement X with the bull *Ad Apostolicae Vocis Oraculum* proclaimed a Holy Year. During this period, the Colosseum was reconsecrated, and the permission granted in 1671 to hold bull fights there was rescinded<sup>44</sup>. One of the most prominent pilgrims was Queen Christina of Sweden, who had abdicated her throne in 1655, converted to Catholicism, and moved to Rome to take up residence at the Palazzo Farnese. About one and a half million pilgrims came to Rome this year.

Innocent XII on 18 May 1699, with the Bull *Regi Saeculorum* proclaimed a Holy Year. At the opening of the year, the Pope, due to his precarious state of health, was unable to preside personally<sup>45</sup>. However, on Easter Sunday, despite being seriously ill, imparted the solemn blessing from the balcony of the Quirinale on account of the large number of pilgrims who had gathered. He died shortly afterwards on 27 September 1700 without being able to conclude the year. The conclusion of the Jubilee year was presided over by Clement XI (elected Pope in November 1700). It was the first time

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<sup>43</sup> Pope Innocent X. 1649. *Appropinquat Dilectissimi Filii*. Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana

<sup>44</sup> Pope Clement X. 1674. *Ad Apostolicae Vocis Oraculum*. Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana

<sup>45</sup> Pope Innocent XII. 1699. *Regi Saeculorum*. Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana

that the Holy Door had been opened by one Pope and then closed by another. The influx of pilgrims in the city was such that some writers of the time compared Rome to Paris in terms of visitor numbers.

During the Holy Year of 1725, proclaimed with the Bull *Redemptor et Dominus Noster* of 26 June 1724, Pope Benedict XIII regularly visited the Roman basilicas himself, travelling in modest carriages and taking part in the various practices required to obtain the indulgences<sup>46</sup>. On 15 April 1725, he inaugurated the Roman Synod in St John Lateran's Basilica, whose deliberations ran to 32 volumes. During this year the steps at Piazza di Spagna (the Spanish Steps) were opened to connect the square with the Church of Santissima Trinità dei Monti (Holy Trinity of the Mountains).

On 5 May 1749, the Holy Year 1750 was proclaimed with the Bull *Peregrinantes a Domino*. More than a million pilgrims flocked to Rome, including several ambassadors, and groups from as far West Indies, Egypt and Armenia. The influx was so large that Roman charitable and hospital institutions were forced to rent royal palaces to cope with the number of pilgrims<sup>47</sup>.

On 30 April 1774, with the Bull *Salutis Nostrae Auctor*, a jubilee was proclaimed by Pope Clement XIV, but unfortunately on 22 September that year he died. Pius VI was elected Pope on 15 February 1775 and a few days later, on 26 February, he solemnly inaugurated the Holy Year, which could not be opened as usual on

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<sup>46</sup> Pope Benedict XIII. 1725. *Redemptor et Dominus Noster*. Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana

<sup>47</sup> Pope Benedict XIII. 1750. *Peregrinantes a Domino*. Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana

Christmas Eve because the Papal See was vacant<sup>48</sup>. The Jubilee of 1825 was proclaimed by Pope Leo XII on 24 May 1824 with the Bull *Quod Hoc Ineunte*. More than 325,000 pilgrims from all over Europe came to Rome<sup>49</sup>.

After returning from exile and resuming the government of the Papal States, Pius IX proclaimed a Jubilee on 24 December 1874 with the Bull *Gravibus Ecclesiae*<sup>50</sup>. The troops of King Victor Emmanuel II occupied Rome, and because of this it was not possible to hold the opening and closing ceremonies of the Holy Door. *Properante ad Exitum Saeculo* was the Bull with which, on 11 May 1899, Leo XIII proclaimed the universal Holy Year of 1900. For the first time since the unification of Italy, the King also announced the Jubilee in his ‘Speech of the Crown’<sup>51</sup>. The Pope sent out an appeal for a reawakening of faith in the Christian people throughout the world.

Pope Pius XI, emphasizing the commitment of the Church and all Christians to a better society, proclaimed the Jubilee of 1925 with the Bull *Infinita Dei Misericordia* on 29 May 1924<sup>52</sup>. He gave an impetus to missionary activity around the world, which earned him the title ‘Pope of the Missions’. Pius XI proclaimed an ‘extraordinary Jubilee’ on 6 January 1933, with the Bull *Quod Nuper*, to mark the 1900th anniversary of the death of Jesus<sup>53</sup>. The

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<sup>48</sup> Pope Clement XIV. 1774. *Salutis Nostrae Auctor*. Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana

<sup>49</sup> Pope Leo XII. 1824. *Quod Hoc Ineunte*. Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana

<sup>50</sup> Pope Pius IX. 1874. *Gravibus Ecclesiae*. Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana

<sup>51</sup> Pope Leo XIII. 1899. *Properante ad Exitum Saeculo*. Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana

<sup>52</sup> Pope Pius XI. 1924. *Infinita Dei Misericordia*. Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana

<sup>53</sup> Pope Pius XI. 1933. *Quod Nuper*. Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana

event was celebrated with particular grandeur. The Pope gave as many as 620 speeches and more than 2 million pilgrims poured into Rome.

On 26 May 1949, the Holy Year of 1950 was proclaimed with the Bull *Jubilaenum Maximum*<sup>54</sup>. During the Jubilee celebrations, Pope Pius XII proclaimed the dogma of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into Heaven and transformed the College of Cardinals into a sort of universal representation of the Catholic world, drastically reducing the Italian presence and increasing the number of cardinals from other nations.

Pope Paul VI decided that this Holy Year should be dedicated to reconciliation. He called it with the Bull *Apostolorum Limina* of 23 May 1974. At the opening of the Holy Door on Christmas night 1974, Buddhist monks were also present<sup>55</sup>. It was the first Jubilee to be broadcast worldwide and saw the lifting of historic excommunications with the Church of Byzantium and the participation of the Patriarch of Alexandria Melitone.

With the Bull *Aperite Portas Redemptori*, dated 6 January 1983, John Paul II proclaimed a Jubilee to celebrate the 1950th anniversary of the death and resurrection of Jesus<sup>56</sup>. The same Pope, on 29

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<sup>54</sup> Pope Pius XII. 1949. *Jubilaenum Maximum*. Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana

<sup>55</sup> Pope Paul VI. 1974 *Apostolorum Limina*. Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana

<sup>56</sup> Pope John Paul II. 1983. *Aperite Portas Redemptori*. Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana

November 1998, with the Bull *Incarnationis Mysterium*, proclaimed the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000<sup>57</sup>.

*c. Jubilees from 2001-2025*

With the Bull *Misericordiae Vultus* of 11 April 2015, Pope Francis declared a Jubilee for the 50th anniversary of the end of the Second Vatican Council<sup>58</sup>. The Jubilee was dedicated to mercy. Before the official opening, as a sign of the Church's closeness to the civil war-stricken Central African Republic, Pope Francis opened the holy door of the Cathedral of Notre-Dame in Bangui on 29 November, during his apostolic trip to Africa, anticipating the start of the Extraordinary Jubilee. The holy door of St Peter's Basilica was opened on 8 December 2015, the feast of the Immaculate Conception. For the first time a 'door of mercy' was opened in the world's cathedrals, sanctuaries, hospitals and prisons. For the occasion, the Pope established a group of priests known as Missionaries of Mercy to whom he entrusted the power to forgive sins usually reserved to the Holy Father.

***Jubilee Year 2025***

Since 1300, when Pope Boniface VIII instituted the Holy Year, it has always been a great spiritual, ecclesial, and social event for the Church. In the letter of the Holy Father, Pope Francis to Msgr. Rino Fisichella, President of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of

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<sup>57</sup> Pope John Paul II. 1998. *Incarnationis Mysterium*. Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana

<sup>58</sup> Pope Francis. 2015. *Misericordiae Vultus*. Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana

the New Evangelization, in respect of the Jubilee 2025 on 11 February 2022, the Memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Lourdes, the Pope observed that in the history of the Church that the Jubilee year has always been a celebration serving as a special gift of grace:

Characterized by the forgiveness of sins and in particular by the indulgence, which is a full expression of the mercy of God. The faithful, frequently at the conclusion of a lengthy pilgrimage, draw from the spiritual treasury of the Church by passing through the Holy Door and venerating the relics of the Apostles Peter and Paul preserved in Roman basilicas<sup>59</sup>.

The Jubilee Year of 2025 takes up a great significance when seen from the background of the happenings in the last two years, during which the world has been plagued by the sudden outbreak of Covid-19 leading to a retinue of tragedies. During this period of uncertainty and hardships, Pope Francis writes:

Together with all our brothers and sisters, we Christians endured those hardships and limitations. Our churches remained closed, as did our schools, factories, offices, shops, and venues for recreation. All of us saw certain freedoms

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<sup>59</sup> Pope Francis. 2024. *Letter of the Holy Father Francis to Msgr. Rino Fisichella, President of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, for the Jubilee 2025*. Rome, Saint John Lateran, 11 February 2022, Memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Lourdes. <https://www.iubilaeum2025.va/en/giubileo-2025/lettera-di-papa-francesco.html>

curtailed, while the pandemic generated feelings not only of grief, but also, at times, of doubt, fear and disorientation<sup>60</sup>.

From the foregoing, Pope Francis thought that the time has come to “fan the flame of hope that has been given us, and help everyone to gain new strength and certainty by looking to the future with an open spirit, a trusting heart and far-sighted vision”<sup>61</sup>. It is in this sense that the Roman Pontiff believes that the forthcoming “Jubilee can contribute greatly to restoring a climate of hope and trust as a prelude to the renewal and rebirth that we so urgently desire; that is why I have chosen as the motto of the Jubilee, *Pilgrims of Hope*”<sup>62</sup>. This year will not only be a moment of hope but for “recovering a sense of universal fraternity and refuse to turn a blind eye to the tragedy of rampant poverty that prevents millions of men, women, young people and children from living in a manner worthy of our human dignity”<sup>63</sup>. This also involves a new approach towards the care of the earth- our common home, which the Lord has charged us to till and keep (Gen 2:15), given that the care for creation is an essential expression of our faith in God and our obedience to his will<sup>64</sup>.

In preparation for the Jubilee Year, Pope Francis desires that the year 2024 be devoted to a great “symphony of prayer”<sup>65</sup>. He writes:

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<sup>60</sup> Pope Francis. 2024. *Letter of the Holy Father Francis to Msgr. Rino Fisichella*.

<sup>61</sup> Pope Francis. 2024. *Letter of the Holy Father Francis to Msgr. Rino Fisichella*.

<sup>62</sup> Pope Francis. 2024. *Letter of the Holy Father Francis to Msgr. Rino Fisichella*.

<sup>63</sup> Pope Francis. 2024. *Letter of the Holy Father Francis to Msgr. Rino Fisichella*.

<sup>64</sup> Pope Francis. 2024. *Letter of the Holy Father Francis to Msgr. Rino Fisichella*.

<sup>65</sup> Pope Francis. 2024. *Letter of the Holy Father Francis to Msgr. Rino Fisichella*.



Prayer, above all else, to renew our desire to be in the presence of the Lord, to listen to him and to adore him. Prayer, moreover, to thank God for the many gifts of his love for us and to praise his work in creation... Prayer that makes it possible for every man and woman in this world to turn to the one God and to reveal to him what lies hidden in the depths of their heart. Prayer as the royal road to holiness, which enables us to be contemplative even in the midst of activity<sup>66</sup>.

The jubilee year of 2025 was proclaimed with the Bull *Spes Non Confundit*, which in English means “Hope Does Not Disappoint”.

### **Pope Francis’ *Spes Non Confundit***

*Spes Non Confundit* (Hope Does Not Disappoint) is a Bull of Indiction of the Ordinary Jubilee of the Year 2025 which was given in Rome, at Saint John Lateran, on 9 May, the Solemnity of the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ, in the year 2024, the twelfth year of the Pontificate of Pope Francis. In this bull, Pope Francis emphasizes the importance of hope in the face of challenges and difficulties<sup>67</sup>. The major points in this document include:

1. *Hope as a theological virtue*: Pope Francis stresses that hope is rooted in faith and trust in God's love. By exploring hope as a

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<sup>66</sup> Pope Francis. 2024. *Letter of the Holy Father Francis to Msgr. Rino Fisichella*.

<sup>67</sup> Pope Francis. 2024. *Spes Non Confundit* (Hope Does Not Disappoint); a Bull of Indiction of the Ordinary Jubilee of the Year 2025. Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1-5.

theological virtue, he encourages believers to deepen their trust in God, cultivate communal support, and live with confidence in God's promises. He defines hope as a theological virtue that enables believers to trust in God's promises, goodness, and providence. It is rooted in God's promises, not human expectations<sup>68</sup>; it is communal, therefore, shared among believers, inspires action, and motivates to work towards God's kingdom.

2. *The experience of hope*: Pope Francis shares personal experiences of hope from his own life and the lives of saints, emphasizing that hope is a personal, intimate experience with God rooted in concrete experiences of His presence; and that hope changes us, making us more like Christ. It has the following elements: it shines brightest in darkness; it sustains us through suffering, and trusts God's plan, even when uncertain. This is evident in the lives of saints, martyrs and ordinary people<sup>69</sup>.
3. *Hope in the face of darkness*: The Pope encourages believers to hold onto hope even in the midst of suffering and adversity. He acknowledges that darkness is real, manifesting itself through suffering (Physical, emotional, or spiritual pain) and hardship (Social, economic, or environmental injustices). However, he also believes that hope shines brighter, and has the capacity to

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<sup>68</sup> Pope Francis. 2024. *Spes Non Confundit* (Hope Does Not Disappoint), 19-21

<sup>69</sup> Pope Francis. 2024. *Spes Non Confundit* (Hope Does Not Disappoint), 5

illuminate any degree of darkness. He, therefore, calls for confidence in God's goodness and providence, resilience during enduring hardship, and supporting others in darkness. In this sense, hope does not become a denial of the reality of darkness, or an escape route from darkness<sup>70</sup>. Rather hope is transformational, becoming an opportunity for growth.

4. *The community of hope*: Pope Francis emphasizes the importance of community in fostering and sustaining hope. This is based on the understanding that the community is a source of hope, as believers support one another; shared experience of hope helps the community to deepen understanding and inspire one another<sup>71</sup>; and communal support through prayer, witness and encouragement and solidarity is essential for hope to be kept alive.
5. *Hope and mission*: Pope Francis links hope to evangelization, encouraging believers to share the Gospel message. He explores the connection between hope and mission within the contexts of Hope inspiring mission, that is, compelling believers to share the Gospel, and also within the understanding of mission sustaining hope<sup>72</sup>. In the sense that evangelization renews and strengthens hope. Thus, while hope inspires mission, mission sustains hope.

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<sup>70</sup> Pope Francis. 2024. *Spes Non Confundit* (Hope Does Not Disappoint), 4

<sup>71</sup> Pope Francis. 2024. *Spes Non Confundit* (Hope Does Not Disappoint), 13-15

<sup>72</sup> Pope Francis. 2024. *Spes Non Confundit* (Hope Does Not Disappoint), 23

The major themes in this document include: Hope and faith, community and solidarity, evangelization and mission, trust in God's providence, and overcoming adversity and suffering. The implications of these perspectives is that it encourages believers to cultivate hope in their lives, emphasizes the importance of community support, it inspires evangelization efforts, provides guidance for navigating difficult situations and, reiterates the Pope's focus on mercy, compassion, and joy<sup>73</sup>, and emphasis hope as a fundamental aspect of the Christian life, encouraging believers to trust in God's love and providence.

### **Consecrated Persons and the Jubilee Year**

Despite the emphasis on hope, the jubilee year is a moment of holiness and renewal. The moment has, therefore, once again arisen to reflect on the value of the consecration of consecrated persons in a profound manner. The jubilee year is a moment for reflection on the vocation of the consecrated person within the context of a Christ-like existence, which the consecrated life already provides. Thus, Pope John Paul II teaches that this can be achieved “only on the basis of a special vocation and in virtue of a particular gift of the Spirit. For in such a life baptismal consecration develops into a radical response in the following of Christ through acceptance of the evangelical counsels”<sup>74</sup>.

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<sup>73</sup> Pope Francis. 2024. *Spes Non Confundit* (Hope Does Not Disappoint), 5-25.

<sup>74</sup> Pope John Paul II. 1996. *Vitae Consacrata*. Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 16

In this way the consecrated person is called to become, even in his frail humanity, a living, transparent image of Christ. Pope John Paul II adds, that:

In the consecrated life, then, it is not only a matter of following Christ with one's whole heart, of loving him more than father or mother, more than son or daughter (Mt 10:37) - for this is required of every disciple - but of living and expressing this by conforming one's whole existence to Christ in an all-encompassing commitment which foreshadows the eschatological perfection, to the extent that this is possible in time and in accordance with the different charisms<sup>75</sup>.

In another text, the Roman Pontiff writes that:

Consecrated persons make visible, in their consecration and total dedication, the loving and saving presence of Christ, the One consecrated by the Father, sent in mission. Allowing themselves to be won over by him (Phil 3:12), they prepare to become, in a certain way, a prolongation of his humanity. The consecrated life eloquently shows that the more one lives in Christ, the better one can serve him in others, going even to the furthest missionary outposts and facing the greatest dangers<sup>76</sup>.

Consecrated persons, therefore, in a radical and even more evident way, are called to become living *icons* of Christ during this jubilee year: their special consecration is nothing other than the call to

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<sup>75</sup> Pope John Paul II. 1996. *Vitae Consacrata*, 14

<sup>76</sup> Pope John Paul II. 1996. *Vitae Consacrata*. Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 75

becoming progressively like Christ, the sacrament of Christ's presence in the world "by allowing themselves to be guided by the Spirit on an endless journey of purification"<sup>77</sup>. Consecrated persons need to allow themselves to be penetrated even more by the power of the Spirit in order to effectively fulfil their mission in the world. Even though this is true of every disciple, in a special way, it is true of those who, in the manner that characterizes the consecrated life, are called to follow Christ 'more closely', and to make him the 'all' of their lives<sup>78</sup>.

This is also the moment to reflect deeply about community life among consecrated persons. This is not unconnected with hope. The quality of life lived together determines the quality of hope among the members of the community. Pope Francis speaks of the Hope that never fails as a hope that is fostered and sustained by the community. This is based on the understanding that the community is a source of hope, as believers support one another; shared experience of hope helps the community to deepen understanding and inspire one another; and communal support through prayer, witness and encouragement and solidarity is essential for hope to be kept alive.

The life in common must be nourished every day through faithful personal and communal prayer, through a constant listening to the Word of God, a sincere review of life that draws from the sacrament of reconciliation the strength for a continuous rebirth and hope. It is in this sense that Pope Francis refers to the Jubilee year as a year of

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<sup>77</sup> Pope John Paul II. 1996. *Vitae Consacrata*, 19

<sup>78</sup> Pope John Paul II. 1996. *Vitae Consacrata*. Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 72

“reconciliation, conversion and sacramental penance”. Only if the Spirit takes possession of our humanity, of our heart, of our need for love and tenderness, will religious communities be the churches in miniature, a sign of the Spirit's presence and hope. In this dynamic of fraternal life, an absolutely central place must be given to the Eucharist.

According to Pope John Paul II:

This is the heart of the Church's life, and also of the consecrated life. How can those who are called, through the profession of the evangelical counsels, to choose Christ as the only meaning of their lives, not desire to establish an ever more profound communion with him by sharing daily in the Sacrament which makes him present, in the sacrifice which actualises the gift of his love on Golgotha, the banquet which nourishes and sustains God's pilgrim people?<sup>79</sup>

It is important that consecrated persons realize that it is impossible for them to be witnesses of communion unless their own life finds its centre in the Eucharist. Pope John Paul II refers to the Eucharist as the centre of the consecrated life.

By its very nature the Eucharist is at the centre of the consecrated life, both for individuals and for communities... By means of the Eucharist all consecrated persons are called to live Christ's Paschal Mystery, uniting themselves to him by offering their own lives to the Father through the Holy Spirit<sup>80</sup>.

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<sup>79</sup> Pope John Paul II. 1996. *Vitae Consacrata*, 95

<sup>80</sup> Pope John Paul II. 1996. *Vitae Consacrata*, 95

It is within this context that Pope Francis asked that 2024 be made a great ‘symphony of prayer’.

## **Conclusion**

A Jubilee is a unique year of grace and conversion that takes place every 25 years, or at other times as the Pope requests. This is evident in the different jubilees proclaimed by the Pope in the history of the Church. It is a period that involves prayer, fasting, and sacramental reflection. It has its roots in the scripture, particularly in Leviticus, and this offers fantastic opportunity to appreciate those roots even more. A cursory glance at the history of jubilees in the Church reveals that the Great Jubilee of 2000 was the most recent (ordinary) celebration of a jubilee. However, the Holy Year of Mercy in 2015 was the most recent Extraordinary Jubilee Year. The purpose of a jubilee year is to inspire and foster holiness of life among the faithful and, by extension, to increase the Church’s witness to God’s loving mercy in and for the world through a sequence of tangible ceremonies, deeds, and commitments.

While the 2025 Jubilee Year will involve a series of event that concern the entire people of God, this paper has attempted to relate this jubilee year to the particular concerns of consecrated persons. It is in this sense that it becomes for consecrated persons a period to reflect on the value of their consecration in a profound manner. It is a period to reflect on the vocation of the consecrated person within the context of a Christ-like existence. It is also a period to think about the quality of life in



community. This is important as the quality of life lived together determines the quality of hope among the members of the community.

Given the connection between community and hope, Pope Francis teaches that hope is fostered and sustained by the community given that the community is a source of hope, as believers support one another. More so, shared experience of hope helps the community to deepen understanding and inspire one another; and communal support through prayer, witness and encouragement and solidarity is essential for hope to be kept alive. The quality of hope that consecrated persons are able to offer the world at this difficult moment is depended on the quality of hope that they are able to cultivate within their various communities. These notwithstanding, this jubilee year for consecrated persons is also a season of peace, reconciliation, and a time to be more attentive to the cry of the poor and be committed to the care of our common home: the environment.

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## **The Teaching of Consecrated Life in Major Seminaries in The African Context: Its Needs, Challenges and Prospects**

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### **Abstract**

*The gift of consecrated life to the church going back centuries, maintains its uniqueness and intrinsic values right from the era of Christ, through the era of Christian monasticism till the present age. Albeit consecrated life is countercultural, it contributes immensely to the span of cultures found in the world. As such, the African culture is not left out. Thus, is there a synergy between consecrated life and African culture? Can consecrated life be taught in the African context? Is the major seminary a fitting place to teach consecrated life? What are the needs, challenges, and prospects of teaching consecrated life in major seminaries in the African context? These are not just mind-boggling questions but also status questionis to be developed within the academic system and curriculum framework, especially in the major seminaries.*

*In light of the richness of consecrated life, are the major seminaries undoubtedly platforms through which the importance and richness*

*embedded in consecrated life in the African context are preserved and consecrated persons formed as pilgrims of hope on the path to peace? While so many works have been written on consecrated Life as a unique form of life, less attention has been given to teaching this form of life in major seminaries in the African context. Arguably, to address this lack, this work of art seeks to establish and underscore the need to teach consecrated life in the Major Seminaries in the African context, the challenges and prospects involved.*

**Keywords:** Consecrated Life, Major Seminary, and Africa.

## **Introduction**

A Major Seminary is an educational institution whereby candidates are formed for the Sacred Priesthood and consecrated life. The seminary formation of candidates to the priesthood and consecrated life in the Catholic Church is a tradition going back centuries to the era of Jesus and his College of Apostles. Thus, Jesus could be said to be the first Vocations Director and formator, then the apostles as the seminarians.<sup>1</sup> What used to be an apprenticeship in the early centuries was transformed into a former and well-organized institution called the ‘Seminary’ by the council of Trent in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (1545-1563). The *modus operandi*, policy in admission, curriculum, and training recommended by the Council of Trent are periodically updated to meet the challenges of the time suitable for the priesthood and consecrated life respectively in the various continents. In line with this flexibility, the teaching of consecrated

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<sup>1</sup> Habila T. Daboh, “The Evolution of Seminary Formation from the Apostolic Era to the Council of Trent,” *Journal of Religion and Society*, vol.10 (June, 2020): 137, <https://acjcol.org/index.php/joras/article/view/2064/1977>

life in the African context needs to be included in the periodic update of the curriculum in the major seminaries in Africa.

Benezet Bujo; an African theologian identifies one tendency in the African Theology today which dwells exclusively on the African cultural heritage. He asserts that this heritage must be one aspect of a genuinely African Theology and that any attempt to incarnate the Christian message in African culture must be considered.<sup>2</sup> This tendency seeks the understanding of the faith without any reluctance to the African cultural values. However, Pope John Paul II, in his Post-Synodal apostolic exhortation '*vita consecrata*', draws our attention to the teaching of the Church that says consecrated life is deeply rooted in the example, and teaching of Christ; a gift of God the Father to his Church through the Holy Spirit,<sup>3</sup> it is undoubtedly lived amidst the various cultures in the world of which Africa becomes a bone of contention in this matter. We could vividly say, the seed of the Word of God is sown in the African culture thus, making the culture become one with the Gospel of Christ; who lived a life of consecration and total dedication to God. In *ratio cohaerens*, Africa becomes a seed ground for consecrated life and consecrated persons as agents of hope and evangelization.

The approach towards, and understanding of Consecrated Life in the Church in Africa has a record of poor statistics. Thus, the reflection and information contained in this article are *ad rem*. It is important to know that, Africans who respond to the call to consecrated life must first of all be taught the ideal principles of this unique form of

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<sup>2</sup> Benezet Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context* (Nairobi, Pauline Publications Africa, 1999), 15.

<sup>3</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, no. 1.



life, and importantly be formed in a manner whereby the positive characteristics in the African culture would not just be appreciated but also serve as *Instrumentum laboris* to the effective witnessing of a life consecrated to God on the African continent. *Sine sensu*, why should consecrated life be contextualized in Africa? What is unique and valuable in the African cultural milieu? Why should consecrated life, Africanized be taught in the major seminaries? Should there be prospects and challenges in fusing this ingenuity into the seminary curriculum, what are they? Thus, these are the key questions this article seeks to address in its novelty as a wise pedagogue for the uninitiated and scholars alike.

### **Identifying the African Cultural Values**

Africa is a vast continent; the second largest in the world, multiracial and multicultural. Looking at African ethnicity, there are over 3,000 ethnic groups in Africa with over 2,000 languages and rapid cultural variations that collectively contribute to a cohesive sense of African identity and social cohesion. However, the cultural values in the various cultures have both the noble and ignoble sides of them. The nobility of the African culture is valued immensely on African soil and around the globe despite the nefarious machinations against its values.

To cut to the chase, a chunk of these values corroborates with other cultural and traditional values not undermining the obvious differences based on the different regions and ethnic groups. They can serve as lenses through which one sees and comprehends the ideals of the various aspects of human life. Some of the core values shared across many African cultures include the sense of community living and shared humanity, respect for elders, extended family, and

kinship ties, respect for nature and environment, spirituality and religion, oral tradition and storytelling, work ethics and diligence, hospitality and generosity, art and aesthetics, cultural continuity, adaptability, and ethical values, etc. The submission that Africa is blessed with multifaceted gifts that cut across every sphere of her life as a continent is no fluke on the premise that the richness of her cultural heritage is a proof that God inspired all cultures. Despite the depravity in the African culture which has led many Anti-Africans to denigrate the African cultural value system, John Paul II; a pure Latitudinarian whose papacy endeared humility and gravitas, condemned the denigration, especially by the Western world of the pangs and stigma of slavery, racism, a poor democratic system, inability to reason, inadequate health facilities plagued on African cultural system and traditional values.<sup>4</sup> These denigrations which became *jus ad rem* to the first special African Synod in 1994 are not enough to suppress the values in the African culture.

In addition, these values do not just have sociological importance as their central cohesive source of stability but, according to Pope Paul VI the Church sees in them the providential basis on which to transmit the evangelical message and start the construction of the new society in Christ. He added that the teaching of Christ and its redemption constitutes the fulfillment, renewal, and perfection of everything good in human tradition. This is why when an African becomes a Christian takes up the ancient values of tradition in spirit and truth<sup>5</sup> because the Christian life is anchored in hope. Therefore, consecrated life as a form of life rooted in Christ does not deny cultural values but studies them to discern the noble values, and

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<sup>4</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 14.

<sup>5</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Africae Terrarum*, no. 14.

adopts them like crude to be refined in the refineries of consecrated persons to give them a new dimension. From this backdrop, consecrated life can be thought of from an African perspective.

### **The Consecrated Life; A cursory Glance from The African Perspective**

The term consecration is derived from the word ‘holy’ or ‘holiness’ which translates the Hebrew word ‘*qadosh*’ and its Greek equivalent ‘*hagiozo*’ are translated as “to consecrate, to make holy or to sanctify”. Consecration, therefore, relates to ideas like “total dedication” to God, and “separation for God’s service”.<sup>6</sup> Equally profound, Consecrated Life according to the code of canon law is described as a stable form of life by which the faithful, following Christ more closely under the action of the Holy Spirit, is dedicated to God who is loved most of all, so that, having been dedicated by a new and special title to his honour, to the building of the church and 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 heavenly glory.<sup>7</sup>

From a historical perspective, this form of life was embraced by the early African ascetics such as Anthony of Egypt, Pachomius, etc. Knowing that early Africans embraced this form of life is a pride that sets the African continent on a pedestal of legacy and honour. They were the 3rd-century ascetics who are considered the heroes of the origin of Christian monasticism. In other words, they responded

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<sup>6</sup> Simeon Nwobi, "Consecrated Life in Nigeria and the Call to Wake Up the World," *The Catholic Voyage: African Journal of Consecrated Life*. Vol. 18, no. 1 (January 2021): 211.

<sup>7</sup> *Code of Canon Law*, 573 § 1.

radically to Christ's invitation to follow him (Matt. 16:24) by living an anchoritic and coenobitic lifestyle in the desert.<sup>8</sup> They are described as wandering ascetics who wandered in the desert for the love of God. In contrast, this form of life uniquely differs from other forms of life in the Church by the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience professed by consecrated persons.<sup>9</sup>

A cursory glance at the African tradition and cultural milieu reveals that Africa practices some purification rites for mystical experiences. These mystical experiences are a quintessential part of the cultural heritage of the traditional Africans. Such experiences form part of formative encounters that influence their worldviews and general orientation about life done through some sacred phenomena understood to be consecrated or made sacred. Before the emergence of Christianity, the idea of separation, sanctifying, and the offering of a thing, person, animate or inanimate objects, place, and time to a deity already existed in primitive African cultures. Thus, both in consecrated life and in the African culture, the setting apart connotes exclusively a withdrawal from profanity to the state of purity. More so, the synergy between the African consecration and the religious consecration lies in the purpose for which phenomena are set apart and the conscious reverence for the sacred. While consecrated life emphasizes on the call to holiness of life, Africa also prime the idea of 'Sacred' which spur mystical experiences and call for holiness.

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<sup>8</sup> Isaac Padinjarekuttu, *Consecrated Life through Two Millennia* (Mumbai: Bandra: Pauline Pub., 2008), 8-9.

<sup>9</sup> Pope Paul X, *Perfectae Caritatis*, no. 1.

## **Consecrated Life and The African World**

The word vocation is from the Latin word ‘*vocare*’ which means to call. The theology of vocation begins with a God who calls and the consequential logic is a response from the one called. This interplay makes it a divine encounter that involves a Superior Being who initiates the calling; the Supreme is the Subject while the recipient; a finite being who receives the call is the object. The call is geared towards embracing any of the three states of life in the Church<sup>10</sup>: the Laity<sup>11</sup> (married or single), Priesthood<sup>12</sup>, and Consecrated Life<sup>13</sup>.

As sagacious as many traditional Africans are, most Africans avidly perceive the consecrated life as a namby-pamby, and strange lifestyle reserved for the Western world. In this ill and sentimental perception, they discourage the vocation to the consecrated life and even the priesthood. The church’s reaction to this disposition is not hostile rather in her wisdom, she encourages and calls for the Africanization of consecrated life by inculturating authentic and noble African values to prove that Africans can also embrace this form of life. Interestingly, the Congregation for Institute of Consecrated Life and Society of Apostolic Life asserts that the Africanization of consecrated life with no staggering authority requires that the consecration to God is lived in the social-cultural

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Canon Law*, no. 207 § 1.

<sup>11</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici: On the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World*, no. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Vatican Council II, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, no. 1.

<sup>13</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, no. 1.

context proper to Africa and that it may be seen by those around as a manifestation of real love of God and neighbours.<sup>14</sup>

From a lucid study of Africans and their consciousness of the Divine, Africans truly understand that human life is a gift from God and that what they do with their life is an appreciation back to God. With a deep connection to the Divine, Africans believe that human life has a purpose for which it is created. While Africans feel the nudge of what God wants of them in human society, God calls them to participate in life beyond them, to contribute to the growth of human society, to care for God's creation, and to be life-giving. As such, Africans are not just attached to the inner call of embracing a life of holiness, also Vocation to the consecrated life is flourishing in Africa.

Interestingly, within the purview of the theology of vocation, the vocation to the consecrated life is the willful embrace of a unique state of life rooted in Christ to attain holiness of life and an intimate relationship with God; a course also valued by the Africans. While the Africans attain this through some ancient African cultural tenets, consecrated persons attain this height through faithful adherence to the evangelical counsels and other characteristic traits of consecrated life which are also reflected succinctly in the African culture and tradition.

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<sup>14</sup> Congregation for Institute of Consecrated Life and Society of Apostolic Life and the Congregation for the Evangelization of People as *Message to Religious Men and Women of Africa*, October 1976, published 3 June 1978, n.3.

## **Characteristic Traits of Consecrated Life**

The consecrated life is meant to make the characteristic traits of virginal, poor, and obedient Jesus visible<sup>15</sup> which reflect the evangelical counsels. More so, other characteristic traits include community life, mission, charism, apostolate, etc. Definitively, consecrated life in the Church is made by and effected by means of these characteristic traits. Since we are doing an African study, an African view of these characteristic traits would be invaluable and reveals why consecrated life needs to be taught in African context in the major seminaries.

### *The Evangelical Counsels*

The evangelical counsels are the core pillars of consecrated life. By evangelical counsels, we mean the profession of the vows of Chastity, Poverty, and Obedience. They are called evangelical counsels because they pave way to the perfection of charity which according to Aquinas is the end of the religious state.<sup>16</sup> These counsels in the contention of Monica are within a permanent state of life recognized by the Church, and they characterize the life consecrated to God.<sup>17</sup> Lumen Gentium maintains that: The evangelical counsels of chastity dedicated to God, poverty and obedience are based on the words and examples of the Lord. They

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<sup>15</sup> Congregation for Institute of Consecrated Life and Society of Apostolic Life: *The Service of Authority and Obedience*, Rome, 2008, 1,

[https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccsclife/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccsclife\\_doc\\_20080511\\_autorita-obbedienza\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccsclife/documents/rc_con_ccsclife_doc_20080511_autorita-obbedienza_en.html)

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, secunda secundae partis, Q. 187, art. 2.

<sup>17</sup> Monica Roland, Approach to Deepening the Knowledge and Understanding of Consecrated Life among the Laity in the Church in Nigeria, *The Catholic Voyage: African Journal of Consecrated Life*, vol. 11 (2015): 93.

were further commanded by the Apostles and Fathers of the Church, as well as by the doctors and pastors of souls.<sup>18</sup> They are means through which holiness of life is attained by consecrated persons. The profession of the evangelical counsels constitutes a special consecration rooted in the baptismal consecration of every consecrated person as a fuller expression of it. This gift of themselves to the Church awakens their sense of dedication and service to the Church, fostering the practice of virtues such as humility and obedience, fortitude, and chastity as a way of emptying themselves.<sup>19</sup>

The code of canon law acknowledges the profession of evangelical counsels as an act that makes consecrated life a stable form of living;<sup>20</sup> an espousal act with absolute restrictions from whatever would affect its stability. As such, authentic African culture and traditional values are not ignorant of rules, laws, regulations, decency, and discipline as regards the sexuality of Africans, obeying elders and authority, moderate lifestyle and their lives generally. Like the evangelical counsels that guard the lives of those consecrated to God, there are also moral norms and customs guarding the lives of Africans. Thus, evangelical counsels reflect the African ethical framework and social norms that guide the behavior of Africans, to be conscious of the Divine and a life of holiness.

*Chastity:* By the vow of chastity, consecrated persons permanently offer up marriage, physical and sexual intimacy, and procreation, in the imitation of Christ who was chaste and invited those who have

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<sup>18</sup> Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 43.

<sup>19</sup> *Perfectae Caritatis*, no. 5.

<sup>20</sup> Canon Law, 573 § 1.



been given the grace of the same path to follow. It is total abstinence, sacrifice, and unity of one's will with God permanently.<sup>21</sup> Across African cultures, sexuality, and chastity have an etch mark on the lives of the young and old in the African society. Before the Western religious introduced the vowed life of chastity to Africa, the life of purity was already embedded in the cultural heritage of Africa which is reinforced by the African belief in morality and tenets of good behaviour<sup>22</sup>. Thus, the culture protects, nurtures, and reveres the "*traditional*" vow of chastity.

In some African cultures, within the corridors of the palace of the king, in as much as the Church does not support castration, the palace slaves are forced into sexual abstinence by being castrated. This is done to prevent them from sexual promiscuity with any of the king's numerous wives. Betrayal of the throne with sexual interaction between the king's wives and slaves is a taboo and attracts death penalty to the victims. Hence, celibacy and chastity in the palace were by compulsion. From a relatively specific stance, the Yoruba culture values legitimate procreation for the sake of continuity in the family, and the procreation of illegitimate children otherwise known as bastards attracts repercussions in Yoruba culture. Contaminated blood of the royal lineage could bring curses on the community and the lineage. The only way to restrain and control the mingling of the forbidden blood on the future throne is the castration of the slaves. Significantly, the African Eunuch mentioned in (Acts 8:26-40) was a model of African cultural chastity. It is emphatic that African culture had the morals of chastity and enforced them. A eunuch

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<sup>21</sup> Perfectae Caritatis, no. 14.

<sup>22</sup> Theresa Olaitan, "African Perspective of Chastity" (Seminar Presentation, Abuja, African Institute of Consecrated Life, 13 February, 2022). Accessed on 15 July, 2024.

castrated for a trusted servitude to a king to prevent sexual activity in the palace is an African tradition that Consecrated life has emulated with novelty highly dignified.

More so, for certain sacrifices to be accepted by the gods and goddesses in some African cultures, they must be offered by virgins. A quintessential example is the age-long Osun Oshogbo festival in the western region of Nigeria which demands that the “*Arugba*”, also known as the 'calabash carrier', has a large calabash on her head that contains the sacrifices of the entire community and those offered by the people in attendance to the goddess of Osun River. Every “*Arugba*” must remain a virgin (Chaste) during her time in the role. Her virginity is sacred and powerful as that could only be worthy of appeasing the goddess for the entire community.<sup>23</sup> The Consecrated persons who imitate the chaste Christ are challenged to appease “God” who invites them to a radical followership of Him with their chaste life by living out the vowed life. The rich cultural heritage of African culture contributes immensely to living out the vowed life of chastity. Consecrated persons in Africa must live out the cultural heritage of chaste life within a life consecrated to holiness. In the contemporary world of homogenization of culture and sexuality, religious must nurture and protect the value of chastity as the bedrock of vowed life in Africa.

*Poverty*: The Evangelical Poverty embraced in imitation of Christ, who for our sake was made poor, entails a life that is poor in reality and spirit, sober and industrious, and a stranger to earthly riches.<sup>24</sup> It is a commitment consecrated persons make to live without the quest

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<sup>23</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-49367967>

<sup>24</sup> Canon Law, 600

for personal wealth and material possessions. Through this vow consecrated persons imitate the life of Jesus who was born poor in a manger,<sup>25</sup> living in poverty had nowhere to lay his head,<sup>26</sup> died, and was buried in a borrowed tomb.<sup>27</sup> Such life can be summed up as an austere lifestyle suitable as a blueprint for the life of poverty embraced by consecrated persons.

Furthermore, the vow of poverty is not a recession into a state of wretchedness or an irrational denial of some basic human needs by consecrated persons. Rather, the vow of poverty entails a total dependence on God's divine providence, and limitation in the use and disposition of goods according to the law of the institute they belong. The necessity, which is so imperative today, of fraternal sharing must preserve its evangelical value. According to the expression in the *Didache*, "If you share eternal goods, with all the more reason should you share the goods that perish."<sup>28</sup> According to Paul VI, poverty lived by pooling goods, including pay, will testify to the spiritual communion uniting them; it will be a living call to all the rich and will also bring relief to their needy brothers and sisters. The legitimate desire to exercise personal responsibility will not only find expression in the enjoyment of one's income but in the fraternal sharing of the common good.<sup>29</sup>

The contention of Paul VI mirrors not just the benefits entailed in the praxis of the vow of poverty but also in a sublime way points to the African traditional practice of frugality and the communal sharing of

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<sup>25</sup> New Jerusalem Bible, Reader's Ed., Luke 2:7

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, Luke 9:58

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, Luke 23:50-56

<sup>28</sup> *Didache*, IV, 8; cf. Acts 4:32.

<sup>29</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Evangelium Testificatio*, no. 21

common goods for all. A practice that corroborates Paul's theology of *kenosis*; the self-emptying of Christ who is rich but made himself poor so that we might be rich.<sup>30</sup> The traditional Africans have a heart of compassion and looking out for the others, and discomforting themselves for the comfort of others. In the rich tapestry of the African culture, it is believed that a life not shared is a life not lived. This is a grassroot African cultural practice highly valued.

*Obedience*: Etymologically, the word obedience is from the Latin word *ob-audire* meaning to listen intently or to open one's ear to heed in practice. It designates the willingness to hear others and do their will. It refers to hearing God and obeying the divine will which manifests itself in the will of other persons in authority.<sup>31</sup> The evangelical counsel of obedience, undertaken in the spirit of faith and love in the following of Christ, who was obedient even unto death, obliges submission of one's will to lawful superiors, who act in the place of God when they give commands that are in accordance with each institute's own constitution.<sup>32</sup>

The obedience of Jesus is the core theological foundation of religious obedience. Gerard Nwagwu affirms that the vow of obedience is founded on the "example of Christ who was obedient to the Father until death, death on a Cross (Phil 2:8).<sup>33</sup> Thus, Christ is the model of obedience for all religious institutions as one who serves, as one to whom consecrated persons profess their unalloyed faith, and as

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<sup>30</sup> 2 Cor. 8:9

<sup>31</sup> John W. Crossin, "Obedience" in *The New Dictionary of Theology* Joseph A. Komonchak et al (eds) (Bangalore: Theological Publications, 1996) 720.

<sup>32</sup> Canon Law, 601.

<sup>33</sup> Gerard Nwagwu, *Consecrated Life in the Church: Discipline and Praxis*, (Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt, 2013) 167.

one to whom consecrated persons offer their free will in obedience. It is so interesting to know that the entire life of Jesus on earth is centered on listening to the Father; his food is to do the will of his Father.<sup>34</sup> Like Christ, consecrated persons through a constant saying of YES place their will in the hands of the Father to make a perfect and pleasing sacrifice to him. Thus, obedience is one pillar of consecrated life because it offers valid assistance to live the commandment of love in the daily lives of persons consecrated to God.

Obedience and the loyal submission of one's will to a higher authority is not a strange practice in African culture. It is considered a virtue in the African culture understood in a wider context of respect and obedience to parents, elders, hierarchy, and authority. Obedience in African culture is not meant to be servile. It is marked by a deep sense of moral responsibility and uprightness. Children in Africa are taught to obey and respect their parents, elders and authority from their early stage. They are trained to unconditionally respect anyone who is older than them. Therefore, elders in Africa are regarded equal to authority and as such have to be respected. Africans are taught blind obedience whereby they are not to question nor argue about the decisions, rules, teachings, or dogma shoved into them. An objection to given instruction is considered disobedience to instituted authority and an insult in the African culture. Sequel, African culture produces obedient children who turn into obedient adults who do not have the guts to stand up to authority. This is cultural disability which the evangelical counsel of obedience has illuminated. This is why John Paul II states that "Obedience, practiced

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<sup>34</sup> John 4:34

in imitation of Christ, whose food was to do the Father's will shows the liberating beauty of a dependence which is not servile but filial, marked by a deep sense of responsibility and animated by mutual trust, which is a reflection in history of the loving harmony between the three Divine Persons."<sup>35</sup>

### *Community life*

In the first century, the Christian life was largely influenced by two motives in the Jewish culture which are the idea of a shared community living and an outright withdrawal from the world (*fuga mundi*). A section of the history of the early Christians written by the evangelist Luke articulates the communal lifestyle embraced by the Christians as at the time. Luke emphasized that all the believers continued together in close fellowship and shared their belongings with one another. They would sell their property and possessions, and distribute the money among all, according to what each one needed.<sup>36</sup> In a remarkable turn of events, some individuals in the early centuries decided to live life of holiness in the bid to pursue salvation by withdrawing into the deserts. These early deserters influenced by the prevailing preexisting hermitic traditions, were from Egypt, and they pursue holiness of life through mortification, fasting, selflessness and meditation. As they grew, there emerge two groups of monks: anchorites and cenobites who led communal lives. The word cenobitic is rooted in the Greek word for community. From this historical trace, community life is an important aspect of consecrated life whereby members of various religious communities share in common some values such as prayer, meals, regular worship, etc. this aspect of their life fosters unity and love

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<sup>35</sup> Vita Consecrata, no. 21

<sup>36</sup> Acts 2:44-45

exemplified in the life of Jesus and his Apostles and the early desert fathers.

Importantly, this idea of communal living is evident in the African culture. The communal nature of the African society has its linchpin on the believe that all human beings are members of one family. This principle brings to the fore the popular dictum of the African philosopher, Mbiti; I am because we are, and since we are, therefore, I am. The place of community amongst Africans has a dignifying place so much so that Africans are mutually supportive and have the natural quest to contribute to the community for their well-being.

### **The Need of Teaching Consecrated Life in Major Seminaries in the African Context**

From the above African overview on consecrated life, the rich treasures imbedded in this unique vocation in the African world can be preserved by teaching this form of life in major seminaries in Africa. This is unarguably a necessity as the seminary is considered a seed ground for nurturing and preserving vocation to the priesthood and consecrated life. The major seminaries which contain both the diocesan and religious seminarians, should meticulously teach and guard the Sacred Tradition of the Church; a gift of God to the Church. This gift includes the gifts of the sacred priesthood and consecrated life.

Speaking on the collaborative ministry, both the religious and diocesans through the teaching of consecrated life in major seminaries would be adequately equipped to promote vocation to the consecrated life especially to Africans who wish to embrace this form of life. It is quite absurd if diocesans have no clue of what

consecrated life entails when aspirants approach them for clarity and accompaniment while discerning their vocation. Since there are both diocesan seminarians and religious brothers studying in major seminaries, there is a great need to foster first of all a healthy relationship between the Diocesans and the Religious for effective collaborative ministry in a more contextualized manner. Such a noble course would improve the unified forces in order to maximize and purify certain aspects of the African culture.

In furtherance, the teaching of the theology of consecrated life in the African context attracts a serious demand since it entails the exploration of the African culture whereby without bias, the noble aspects of the culture are synchronized with the principles of consecrated life. This would pave way to better understand the African culture, her strength and weakness so as to bring in novelties where needed by making the encounter between consecrated life and the ancient African tradition and culture alive and effective. In point of fact, they must imbibe in their lives and the seminary/religious communities all that is true and noble in the African culture that can enrich consecrated life some of which include the adoption of locally made instruments, and musical lyrics weaved with the fabrics of African local dialects to animate the liturgy; the summit through which the activities of the Church are directed<sup>37</sup> and those of consecrated persons. More so, the adoption of the African arts as one of the noblest activities of Africans into the liturgy for the Church has always been the patron of the fine arts who seeks their noble ministry, to the end especially that all things set apart for use in

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<sup>37</sup> *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 10.



divine worship should be worthy, becoming and beautiful, signs and symbols of things supernatural.<sup>38</sup>

The consecrated life eloquently shows that the more one lives in Christ, the better one can serve him in others, going even to the furthest missionary outposts and facing the greatest dangers. Thus, consecrated persons in Africa must realize that by the virtue of their call are at the service of humanity especially in Africa as pilgrims of hope. They imitate Christ on a journey of hope and stretch *ad infinitum* the humanity of Christ who out of love for humanity made himself servant, promote peace, and holiness of life in a broken society like Africa.<sup>39</sup> By their call, they encourage works of solidarity and fraternal communion in the society like Africa where hopes are almost dashed into the tin air.

## **Challenges and Prospects**

### *The seminary structure*

In times past, the structure in the major seminaries in Nigeria lacked the teaching of consecrated as a course. The absence of Consecrated Life as a course in the seminary curriculum is serious challenge to consecrated life not just as a course but importantly as a vocation. Such absence has created a huge vacuum, especially in the African Church. Faced with such a vacuum, the valuation placed on Consecrated life as the charismatic dimension of the Church is undervalued by many especially those who are not called to embrace this form of life; clergy and lay faithful alike.

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, no. 122.

<sup>39</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, no. 76.

In this challenge, two things are to be considered. The structure itself and those who define the structure. An existing structure is a picture of those who construct them. It speaks of the wide range experience of those who define them, their flexibility and vision. Thus, consecrated life as a course can be included in the curriculum. The inclusion of this discipline into the structure of the major seminaries in Nigeria would pave way for many prospects in the major seminaries and in the field. Persons define the structure and make necessary adjustments subsequently according to the signs of times. As such, before such inclusion is done, those who define the structure must be open and docile to accepting the richness of this noble discipline without which such innovation will not fester. More so, it will bring about a balanced structure which would be more inclusive.

*Trained and qualified personnel*

The consecrated life is, and has been approved as a vital aspect of theology in the Church. Thus, it is now a discipline to be studied title ‘The Theology of Consecrated Life’. In this discipline, theologians explore in a profound manner the charismatic nature of the life of Christ and the ascetic lifestyles of the early hermits down to the present century. This exploration includes the proper study of the foundation, nature, and characteristics/properties of consecrated life especially in the African context. This intellectual exploration is a cognitive prospect and add-on in the theological scope of the Church. However, the obvious challenge is that trained personnel in this field of study are relatively scarce to take up the task of teaching the theology of consecrated life in the African context in major seminaries.

As observed, those who take up consecrated life are canonists who have gone through wilder study of the canonical jurisprudence of the Church. Their approach to the sections of the canon law on consecrated life are not in-depth, they are more statutory and juridical. The properties of consecrated life are found in other documents of the Church published specifically on consecrated life which touch the nature and characteristics of consecrated life and the lived experience as a religious is ultimately essential. This gap would necessitates training more personnel in this field.

*Cooperation in collaborative ministry*

Diocesan priests are to work in collaboration with consecrated persons as pilgrims of hope on the way to peace in every local Church. Time and again, consecrated persons are seen as rivals or competitors in what supposed to be collaborative ministry. In the ecclesial dimension of the Church, a diocese is said to be incomplete without the presence of the consecrated persons. John Paul II emphasized clearly on the fundamental importance of cooperation between consecrated persons and Bishops for the organic development of diocesan pastoral life. The charisms of the consecrated life can greatly contribute to the building up of charity in the particular Churches. More so, a Diocese which lacked the consecrated life would not only be deprived of many spiritual gifts, of suitable places for people to seek God, of specific apostolic activities and pastoral approaches, but it would also risk a great weakening of that missionary spirit which is characteristic of the majority of Institutes. There is a duty then to respond to the gift of

the consecrated life which the Spirit awakens in the particular Churches, by welcoming it with generosity and thanksgiving.<sup>40</sup>

Thus, the teaching of consecrated life in seminary in the African context would foster a healthy relationship between the Diocesan priests and consecrated persons. This healthy relationship should be built right from the seminary formation before they are lunched into the ministry. It will spur both consecrated persons and diocesans seminarians as joint forces towards a fruitful missionary witnessing within the local Church as pilgrims of hope especially in the African world.

## **Conclusion**

Africa, *ex novo* is a seed ground for sacredness. Her cultural heritage is woven in a way that she tends toward the Divine. The presence of consecrated persons in a culture richly blessed expects nothing but a life oriented towards God. This is why the Church in Africa is blessed with the presence of many religious and consecrated persons. Bridled with the consciousness of the Divine, consecrated persons in Africa understand that the call to consecrated life is always the fruit of a personal encounter and love with the mystery of Christ; an extension of the baptism in which consecrated persons become more prophetic.

Thus, we have established herein that consecrated Life is unarguably a gift to the Church in Africa. Its nature and characteristics, when faithfully lived contributes immensely to the African culture. The

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, no. 48.

richness of this form of life is best preserved in the major seminaries through the very act of teaching. Such pedagogical necessity in the curriculum of the major seminaries when contextualized in Africa enriches the span of African cultural milieu, invites consecrated persons to promote holiness of life, strengthen faith and fraternal communion within the African Church.

To Africanize consecrated life, consecrated persons must toe firmly the paths of justice and peace, reconciliation and sacramental penance, solidarity in mission, and the joyful experience in the service of God. This form of life, which depicts the charismatic nature of the Church, endears major contributions to both the Church in Africa. Owing to this importance, its inclusion in the curriculum of the major seminaries, that is, teaching it in the African context is ultimately needed.

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## **Priestly and Religious Vocations in The Light of Genesis (2:5-9): Insights and Actions for the Jubilee Year**

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### **Abstract**

*This article presents a study of religious vocations within the context of Genesis 2:5-9. The historical, literary, and theological implications of this text, particularly in relation to the understanding of vocations, and the interpretation of contemporary vocations crisis was explored. While there are several works on the understanding*

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*of religious vocation, the present piece distinguishes itself by its understanding and interpretation of the present experience within religious vocations in the light of the Book of Genesis. Through careful analysis of the Hebrew text and adequate interaction with scholarly perspectives, the article argues that this passage of Genesis offers a rich, multi-layered view of religious vocation. The study adopts the historical critical approach of exegesis and the analytical method of research for the achievement of the aim and objectives of this work. This study reveals how the creation narrative in Genesis 2:5-9 emphasizes stewardship and divine-human partnership, which are fundamental for various understandings. These insights are then applied to contemporary religious life, offering recommendations for reimagining priestly and religious vocations in the light of modern challenges.*

**Keywords:** Religious Life, Priesthood, Scripture, Genesis, Vocations

## **Introduction**

The creation narrative in Genesis 2:5-9 has long been a wellspring of theological insight, offering profound perspectives on human nature, our relationship with the divine, and our role within creation (Middleton, 2005). While substantial scholarly attention has been directed towards the cosmological and anthropological aspects of this text, less focus has been given to its implications for understanding religious vocation, particularly in the context of contemporary challenges facing priests and religious (Witherington, 2011). This article seeks to address this gap by presenting a comprehensive exegesis of Genesis 2:5-9, with a specific focus on its relevance for modern conceptions of religious vocation. Analysis

employed draws on historical-critical scholarship, literary analysis, and theological reflection to unpack the rich layers of meaning embedded in this ancient text.

The historical context of Genesis 2:5-9 is crucial for understanding its significance. Composed during the post-exilic period, likely in the 6th or 5th century BCE, this text emerged from a time of profound theological reflection as the Israelites sought to understand their identity and relationship with God in light of the exile experience (Carr, 2021). Recent scholarship further emphasizes the text's engagement with broader ancient Near Eastern traditions, suggesting a complex interplay of cultural influences in its formation (Gnuse, 2019). This historical setting provides an important context for interpreting the passage's themes on human purpose and divine-human partnership. Literally, Genesis 2:5-9 is part of the Yahwist (J) source, characterized by its more intimate and anthropomorphic portrayal of God. The passage's narrative style, moving from a state of absence to fulfillment, reflects common patterns in ancient Near Eastern creation myths (Baden, 2012). Recent literary analyses have also highlighted the text's sophisticated use of wordplay and intertextual allusions, suggesting a highly crafted narrative designed to convey complex theological ideas (Batto, 2022).

Theologically, the researchers argue that Genesis 2:5-9 presents a multifaceted understanding of human vocation that has profound implications for contemporary religious life. Our exegesis focuses on four key themes: Creation-Oriented Vocation, Relational Aspect of Vocation, Stewardship and Service, and Holistic Understanding of Vocation. The concept of Creation-Oriented Vocation emerges from the passage's framing of human creation within the context of a world requiring cultivation and care. This suggests that religious

vocation should be understood primarily in terms of creative and nurturing work within God's creation (McFague, 2021). Recent eco-theological interpretations have further emphasized the relevance of this theme for addressing contemporary environmental challenges (Conradie, 2023).

The relational aspect of vocation is grounded in the intimate act of God breathing life into Adam, providing a basis for understanding vocation as fundamentally rooted in relationship with the divine. Scholarship has explored how this relational understanding of vocation can inform spiritual practices and community formation in religious life (Wang et al., 2023; Cunningham, 2019; Schneiders, 2019; Cunningham, 2016). The theme of stewardship and service is derived from the dual role assigned to humanity in relation to the garden, offering a framework for understanding all human work, especially religious vocations, as a form of divine service. Recent studies have examined how this concept of stewardship can be applied to issues of social justice and ecological responsibility (Peppard, 2021). Finally, the holistic understanding of vocation emerges from the integration of physical and spiritual elements in human creation, suggesting that religious vocations should encompass both material and spiritual aspects of existence. Theologians have explored how this holistic view challenges dualistic tendencies in religious thought and practice (Johnson, 2022; Equina & Longchar, 2019; Du Toit, 2006; Martell, 2016). By exploring these themes, the researchers aim to demonstrate how an exegesis on Genesis 2:5-9 contributes to ongoing discussions on the nature and purpose of religious vocation in the modern world, demonstrating the enduring relevance of this ancient text for

informing and inspiring new understandings and approaches towards religious vocations in the face of contemporary challenges.

### **Vocation: Priesthood and Religious Life**

Generally, vocation is a call from God to a distinctive state of life, in which the person can reach holiness. It comes from the Latin word *vocatio*, which means ‘a calling’, ‘summoning’. Vocation is from the verb- *vocare*, ‘to call’. The Second Vatican Council made it clear that there is a “Universal call [*vocatio*] to holiness in the Church” (*Lumen Gentium*, 39). In this case, the priestly, religious and lay states are all vocations. However, for the sake of this paper, the focus is on the priestly and religious states of life in the Church.

The Catholic priesthood is a sacramental ministry and a vocation in the Catholic Church, wherein men are ordained to serve as spiritual leaders, intermediaries between God and humanity, and representatives of Christ. One becomes a priest through priestly ordination, which is a sacrament, conferring sacred authority. Priests receive authority through an unbroken line of bishops tracing back to the apostles, and act in *persona Christi* (in the person of Christ), representing Him in worship, teaching, and service. The Catholic priesthood is based on the following scriptural foundations: Matthew 10:1-4 (Jesus appoints the apostles); 1 Corinthians 11:24-25 (the institution of the Eucharist); John 20:21-23 (Jesus sends out his disciples) and 1 Timothy 4:14 (laying on of hands). The primary responsibilities of priests include: Leading during worship, celebrating the sacraments (especially Eucharist); providing counsel, reconciliation, pastoral care, proclaiming the Gospel, interpreting the scripture, and administering sacraments, blessings, and sacramentals (CCC 1536-1600).

Apart from the priestly vocation, there is also the religious life. The religious life refers to a vocation within the Catholic Church where individuals dedicate themselves to a life of prayer, service, and community, living according to the evangelical counsels of poverty (which involves, renouncing material possessions and desires), chastity (embracing celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom), and obedience (submitting to the will of God and community leaders) (Usman and Paul, 2024; Kanu 2011, 2015 and 2016). The religious life begins with a public commitment to follow Christ more closely. This state of life could be monastic, involving mainly the contemplative life, focusing on prayer and work, or a combination of the monastic and apostolic life (CCC 916-933; *Perfectae Caritatis* 1-25; *Vultum Dei Quaerere* 1-37; Kanu 2018, 2019 and 2024).

### **Exegesis of Genesis 2:5-9**

#### *Historical and literary context of Genesis 2:5-9*

The historical and literary context of Genesis 2:5-9 is crucial for understanding its significance and interpreting its message for contemporary readers. This passage is part of the second creation account in Genesis, which offers a more intimate and detailed narrative of human creation compared to the cosmic scope of Genesis 1. Historically, the text of Genesis 2:5-9 is believed to have been composed during the post-exilic period, likely in the 6th or 5th century BCE (Carr, 2021). This period was marked by significant theological reflection as the Israelites sought to understand their identity and relationship with God in the light of the exile experience. According to Blenkinsopp (2011), the creation narratives in Genesis 1-11 were likely compiled and edited during

this time, incorporating older traditions and myths into a coherent theological framework.

The literary context of Genesis 2:5-9 is equally important. This passage is part of what scholars often refer to as the “J” or Yahwist source, characterized by its use of the divine name YHWH and its more anthropomorphic portrayal of God (Friedman, 2017). The narrative style of this section is more intimate and focused on human experience compared to the majestic, cosmic perspective of Genesis 1. Baden (2012) argues that the literary structure of Genesis 2:5-9 follows a pattern common in ancient Near Eastern creation myths, moving from a state of absence or lack to fulfillment. The passage begins by describing what is missing (no shrub, no plant, no rain, no human to work the ground) and then narrates how these lacks are addressed through divine action.

The garden motif in this passage also has significant literary and cultural resonance. As Stordalen (2000) notes, the garden in Eden serves as an archetypal sacred space, echoing themes found in other ancient Near Eastern literature. The description of the garden and its rivers (though not explicitly in verses 5-9) connects this local, intimate creation account to the broader world, suggesting a cosmic significance to the seemingly localized events. The linguistic play in this passage is also noteworthy. The Hebrew words for “man” (adam) and “ground” (adamah) create a wordplay that emphasizes the connection between humanity and the earth (Alter, 2004). This linguistic feature underscores the theological point about humanity’s intimate connection to and responsibility for the created world.

Furthermore, the passage’s emphasis on the absence of cultivation and its remedy through human action sets the stage for understanding

human vocation in terms of partnership with divine creative activity. As Fretheim (2005) argues, this portrayal of creation as incomplete without human participation has profound implications for understanding the human role in the world. Indeed, understanding Genesis 2:5-9 within its historical and literary contexts, reveal a rich tapestry of theological reflection, cultural engagement, and literary artistry. This passage, composed and compiled in a time of national crisis and identity formation, draws on ancient traditions to articulate a profound vision of human nature and vocation that continues to resonate with readers today.

*English Text of Genesis 2:5-9*

Genesis 2:5-9 presents a nuanced account of creation that offers rich insights into the nature of human vocation, particularly relevant to contemporary priests and religious. The passage reads:

When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up – for the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground – then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (ESV)

*Analysis of Gen 2:5-9*

The Hebrew creation narrative in Genesis 2:5-9 provides rich linguistic and conceptual insights into the nature of human vocation, particularly in relation to religious and priestly roles. The text employs several key terms that illuminate the relationship between humanity, the divine, and the natural world. To begin with, the wordplay between *'ādām* and *'ādāmâ* (ground) in v. 5 is fundamental to understanding the human condition and purpose as presented in Genesis (Wenham, 1987). This linguistic connection emphasizes humanity's intimate relationship with the earth, suggesting that human vocation is intrinsically tied to stewardship of creation. The very essence of human identity is thus linked to the soil, implying a profound responsibility towards the environment (Alter, 1996).

The verb *la`āböd*, meaning “to work” or “to serve,” in the same verse 5 and carries significant theological weight. Interestingly, this same root is used elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible to denote religious service, implying that human work, including agricultural and priestly duties, is fundamentally a form of divine service (Sarna, 1989). This linguistic connection elevates everyday labour to the realm of sacred activity. The concept of *nūšamâ* (breath of life) breathed into Adam, presents a unique perspective on human creation and vocation. This divine breath can be interpreted as the source of human vocation, suggesting that all callings, including religious vocations, stem from this intimate act of divine gifting (Cassuto, 1961). The implication is that humanity's very existence is imbued with sacred purpose.

The “*Gan*”, or garden, in v. 8 represents an ordered and cultivated space, contrasting with the uncultivated land beyond its boundaries.



This juxtaposition suggests that human vocation involves participating in and extending God's creative and ordering activity (von Rad, 1972). The garden becomes a microcosm of divine order, with humanity as its caretaker, mirroring the role of priests and religious in maintaining sacred spaces. In this regard, v. 15 sheds more light by employing the phrase *lū`obdāh ūlūšomrāh*, meaning "to work it and keep it" (v. 15), is also an added insight that is crucial for understanding the vocation described in the creation narrative. These terms, which describe humanity's role in Eden, also appear in later texts to describe priestly duties (Milgrom, 1991). This linguistic parallel suggests that the primordial human vocation encompassed elements that would later be formalized in religious institutions.

Thus, it is noteworthy, that the Hebrew text of Genesis presents a multi-layered understanding of human vocation that transcends simple categorizations of the secular and sacred. Through careful word choice and linguistic connections, the narrative portrays humanity's role as inherently tied to both the earth and the divine, with implications for understanding religious and priestly vocations in particular. This holistic view of human purpose continues to influence religious and philosophical thought to this day.

## **Theological Implications from Genesis 2:5-9**

### *a) Creation-Oriented Vocation*

The creation narrative in Genesis 2:5-9 presents human creation within the context of a world that requires cultivation and care. This framing suggests that vocation, including religious vocation, should be understood primarily in terms of creative and nurturing work within God's creation. This perspective has profound implications for how we conceptualize religious calling. The text portrays a scene

where the earth is barren, lacking vegetation due to the absence of rain and, significantly, human cultivation (Westermann, 1994). This sets the stage for humanity's entrance not merely as passive inhabitants, but as active participants in the flourishing of God's work and gift. The implication is that human vocation, at its core, is intimately tied to the stewardship and development of the divine gift (Brueggemann, 2010).

The image of God planting a garden (verse 8) and placing the human within it to work and keep it (verse 15) presents a model of divine-human cooperation in the care and development of creation (Fretheim, 2005). This implies that religious vocation should be understood not as separate from the material world, but as deeply engaged with it. This creation-oriented perspective on vocation also has implications for how we understand human creativity and innovation. As Middleton (2005) argues, the text presents humans as created in the image of God, implying that human creative activity is a reflection of divine creativity. This suggests that scientific, artistic, and technological pursuits can be seen as expressions of religious vocation when they contribute to the flourishing of creation. In this way, the Genesis 2:5-9 passage presents a rich theological foundation for understanding vocation as fundamentally oriented towards creative and nurturing engagement with God's creation. This perspective challenges us to reconsider traditional notions of religious calling, expanding our understanding to include a wide range of human activities that contribute to the care and development of the world.

*b) Relational Aspect of Vocation*

The creation narrative in Genesis 2:5-9, particularly the intimate act of God breathing life into Adam, provides a profound basis for

understanding vocation as fundamentally rooted in relationship with the Divine. This perspective has significant implications for how we conceptualize religious callings, especially for priests and other religious vocations. The text describes God forming man from the dust of the ground and breathing into his nostrils the breath of life (Genesis 2:7). This act of divine inbreathing is unique in the creation account and suggests a special, intimate connection between God and humanity (Wenham, 1987). As Brueggemann (1982) notes, this “breath of life” is not merely a biological animation but implies a sharing of God’s own life-giving spirit with humanity.

This intimate act of creation implies that vocation, at its core, is about relationship with God. Fretheim (2005) argues that this relational aspect of creation sets the stage for understanding all human activity as potentially reflective of divine-human partnership. For those in religious vocations, this underscores the primacy of their relationship with God as the foundation of their calling. The relational nature of vocation is further emphasized by the setting of the garden, where God places the human (Genesis 2:8). Von Rad (1972) suggests that this garden setting symbolizes a place of intimate divine-human interaction, a prototype of later sacred spaces. This implies that religious vocation involves cultivating a space—both literal and metaphorical—for divine-human encounter.

For priests and those in religious life, this relational understanding of vocation has profound implications. As Heschel (1955) argues, their primary calling is not to perform rituals or maintain institutions, but to cultivate and model this intimate relationship with the Divine. Their vocation becomes, in essence, an invitation to others to enter into this relational space with God. Moreover, the relational aspect of vocation extends beyond the individual’s connection with God.

As Verdianto (2022) points out, the creation of humanity in God's image (Genesis 1:27) implies that human relationships also reflect divine relationality. This suggests that religious vocation includes fostering community and nurturing relationships among people as a reflection of the divine-human relationship.

The idea of vocation as relationship also challenges traditional notions of work-life balance in religious vocations. Rather than seeing spiritual practices as separate from "work," this perspective suggests an integration of relationship with God into all aspects of life and service (Peterson, 2005; Kanu et al., 2024). For priests and religious, their entire life becomes an expression of this foundational relationship. By and large then, the intimate creation of humanity in Genesis 2:5-9 provides a theological basis for understanding vocation, particularly religious vocation, as fundamentally relational. This perspective emphasizes the primacy of the divine-human relationship in religious calling, shaping how we understand the nature and purpose of priestly and religious vocations.

*c) Stewardship and Service*

The dual role assigned to humanity in relation to the garden in Genesis 2:5-9, provides a profound basis for understanding vocation in terms of stewardship and service. This perspective has significant implications for how we conceptualize all human work, especially religious vocations, as a form of divine service. The text describes God placing the human in the garden of Eden "to work it and keep it"; further down in v. 15. These two verbs, to work or serve and to keep or guard, are richly significant in Hebrew thought and usage. Walton (2001) notes that these terms prefigure the later priestly roles of service and guardianship in the Temple.

This linguistic connection between the primordial human vocation and later priestly duties, suggests a fundamental continuity between all constructive human work and divine service. Milgrom (1991) argues that this parallel elevates all human labour to the status of sacred activity. For those in religious vocations, this implies that their service is not fundamentally different from, but rather a specialized form of, the universal human calling to stewardship and service. The concept of stewardship implied in these verbs is particularly significant. As Wright (2004) points out, the idea of humanity as God's stewards of creation challenges both the notion of absolute human dominion over nature and the idea that the material world is somehow separate from spiritual concerns.

The pairing of work with keeping or guarding suggests a balanced approach to stewardship that involves both active cultivation and protective care. Fretheim (2005) argues that this dual responsibility reflects God's own activity in creation, implying that human stewardship is a participation in God's ongoing creative and sustaining work. For those in religious vocations, this perspective on stewardship and service provides a framework for understanding their role. As Brueggemann (1982) suggests, religious leaders are called not only to perform rituals or teach doctrine but to model and facilitate this fundamental human vocation of stewardship and service.

The connection between everyday work and divine service challenges the traditional dichotomy between sacred and secular vocations. Volf (2001) argues that this perspective suggests that all human work, when done in the spirit of stewardship and service, can be understood as participation in God's purpose for creation. The implications of this understanding extend to how we conceptualize

religious institutions and practices. If all work is potentially sacred, then religious vocations and institutions should not be seen as separate from the world but as catalysts for the sanctification of all human activity (Peterson, 2005). In conclusion, the Genesis account of humanity's role in the garden provides a rich theological foundation for understanding vocation in terms of stewardship and service. This perspective elevates all human work to the status of divine service, while also providing a specific framework for understanding religious vocations as specialized forms of this universal calling.

*d) Holistic Understanding of Vocation*

The creation narrative in Genesis 2:5-9 presents a holistic view of human nature and vocation, integrating both physical and spiritual elements. This perspective has profound implications for how we understand religious vocations, suggesting that they should encompass both the physical and spiritual dimensions. The text describes humanity's creation as a two-fold process: being formed from the dust of the ground and receiving the breath of life from God (Genesis 2:7). This dual nature of humanity - at once earthly and divine - provides a framework for understanding vocation as inherently holistic (Wenham, 1987). The physical aspect of human creation, being formed from dust, grounds human vocation in the material world. Brueggemann (2010) argues that this connection to the earth implies that religious vocations cannot undermine the tangible or physical aspects of existence and formation. This challenges any notion of spirituality that seeks to escape or denigrate the material world.

Simultaneously, the divine breath infused into humanity suggests a spiritual dimension to human nature and vocation. Von Rad (1972)

posits that this “breath of life” represents not just biological animation, but a sharing in God’s own spirit, implying that religious vocations, should reflect this divine connection. This holistic understanding of human nature and vocation has significant implications for the priesthood and religious life. According to Fretheim (2005), it suggests that religious vocations should not be limited to purely “spiritual” activities but should engage with the full spectrum of human experience, including physical, psychological, emotional, and social dimensions. Moreover, this perspective challenges the traditional dichotomy between contemplative and active religious life. McFague (1993) argues that the integration of physical and spiritual in the creation account suggests that authentic religious vocation involves both contemplation and action, both “being” and “doing.”

The holistic nature of vocation also has implications for how we understand religious leadership and ministry. Cahalan (2005) suggests that this perspective calls for religious leaders who can integrate spiritual insight with practical wisdom, addressing both the spiritual and material needs of their communities. Furthermore, this holistic understanding of vocation has ecological implications. Habel (2011) thinks that the connection between humanity and the earth in the creation account suggests that care for the environment should be an integral part of religious vocation, not an optional add-on. In the context of modern society, this holistic view of vocation challenges the compartmentalization of life into separate “spiritual” and “secular” spheres. Volf (2001) argues that it suggests that religious vocation should seek to integrate faith with all aspects of life, including work, relationships, and civic engagement. In conclusion, the Genesis account presents a holistic understanding of

human nature and vocation that integrates both physical and spiritual elements. This perspective calls for a reimagining of religious vocations as encompassing the full breadth of human experience, engaging both the material and spiritual dimensions of existence in service of God and creation.

### **Contemporary Application**

The closer look at Genesis 2:5-9 offers several crucial insights that can profoundly shape the understanding and living out of religious vocation. First of all, their vocation is rooted in the very act of creation, giving it profound significance. This understanding can provide a deep sense of purpose and meaning, especially in times of challenge or doubt. Crosby (2005) holds that this creation-based understanding of vocation situates the priesthood and religious life within the broader context of God's ongoing creative activity, infusing it with cosmic significance. In fact, Rolheiser (2019) suggests that this perspective can help priests and religious to see their vocation as a participation in the ongoing evolution of creation, thereby linking their personal calling to the grand narrative of cosmic development.

Their calling involves stewardship of both the natural world and the spiritual realm. This holistic view of vocation challenges the false dichotomy between "spiritual" and "worldly" concerns, calling for an integrated approach to ministry that addresses both material and spiritual needs (Pilani, 2023; McFague, 1993). Expanding on this, Delio (2013) proposes that this integrated understanding of stewardship calls for a "new monasticism" that engages deeply with scientific and ecological concerns as part of spiritual practice. Additionally, Hart (2004) argues that this holistic stewardship



extends to the realm of culture and society, calling religious individuals to engage in the transformation of social structures as part of their vocation.

The intimate breath of God implies a deep, personal relationship as the foundation of their vocation. This perspective emphasizes the primacy of personal encounter with the Divine over institutional roles or expectations (Peterson, 2005). Building on this, Schneiders (2013) suggests that this relational understanding of vocation calls for a reimagining of religious formation, focusing on fostering intimacy with God rather than merely imparting knowledge or skills. Moreover, Radcliffe (2005) argues that this relational foundation of vocation should extend to human relationships within religious communities, seeing them as reflections of the divine-human relationship (Kanu et al, 2024).

Their work, whether in ministry, education, or service, can be seen as a continuation of God's creative and ordering activity. This view elevates all aspects of religious life to the status of divine collaboration, infusing even mundane tasks with sacred significance (Cahalan, 2005; Richard, 2024). Expanding on this, Johnson (2018) proposes that this understanding of vocation as divine collaboration calls for a radical rethinking of traditional hierarchies within religious institutions. Furthermore, Sheldrake (2019) argues that this perspective on vocation as divine collaboration should lead to a more contemplative approach to action, seeing all work as a form of prayer and communion with God. The creation narrative's emphasis on humanity's connection to the earth implies that care for the environment is an integral part of religious vocation. As Berry (1988) argues prophetically, the ecological crisis calls for a new understanding of vocation that includes "Great Work" of

transitioning to a mutually enhancing human-earth relationship. Building on this, Boff (1995) proposes that religious vocations should be at the forefront of developing an “ecological spirituality” that sees care for creation as central to religious life.

The ongoing nature of the tasks given in Eden (to work and keep the garden) suggests that vocation is not a static state but a dynamic process. Hahnenberg (2010) avers that this calls for an understanding of vocation as a lifelong journey of discernment rather than a one-time decision. Furthermore, Schillebeeckx (1981) proposes that this dynamic understanding of vocation allows for a more flexible and responsive approach to ministry, adapting to changing needs and contexts. These insights from Genesis 2:5-9 offer a rich theological foundation for reimagining priestly and religious vocations in the contemporary world. They call for a deeper, more holistic, and more engaged understanding of religious life that responds to the complex challenges of our time while remaining rooted in the foundational narrative of creation.

## **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are presented for priests and religious to apply the theological insights from Genesis 2:5-9 to practical aspects of contemporary priestly and religious life, fostering a more holistic, engaged, and dynamic approach to vocation.

- i. Religious institutions should embrace a cosmic perspective by integrating the understanding of vocation as rooted in creation into spiritual practices, teachings, and ecological ministries. This should include developing retreats, formation programs, and environmental stewardship initiatives that explore the

- connection between personal vocation, cosmic evolution, and ecological justice.
- ii. Formation programs should be reimagined to emphasize personal relationships with the Divine, increasing time for contemplative practices and spiritual direction while also integrating ongoing vocational discernment throughout religious life.
  - iii. There is need for religious communities to promote interdisciplinary dialogue by engaging with scientific and social disciplines, organizing symposiums and collaborative projects with experts in fields like ecology, psychology, and social sciences to inform and enrich religious life.
  - iv. Deeper contemplative action needs to be cultivated by developing practices that integrate mindfulness and reflection into daily work and ministry, fostering a deeper connection between spiritual life and practical service.
  - v. It is important for community relationships to be prioritized, emphasizing the importance of nurturing connections within religious communities as a reflection of the divine-human relationship. This should include implementing community-building practices and conflict resolution strategies.
  - vi. The promotion of an ecological spirituality is of great significance, through the development of liturgies, prayers, and spiritual practices that celebrate and deepen connection with creation, including new rituals that honour the natural world.
  - vii. Religious institutions should ensure implementation of changing contexts by flattening hierarchies, exploring more collaborative and inclusive models of leadership, and

developing mechanisms for regularly assessing and responding to evolving societal needs. This is to help religious communities stay responsive to evolving challenges.

## **Conclusion**

The analysis of Genesis 2:5-9 has yielded profound insights that reshape our understanding of religious vocation in the contemporary world. This ancient text, when examined through historical, literary, and theological lenses, reveals a multifaceted view of human calling that challenges traditional dichotomies and offers a more integrated, ecologically conscious framework for religious life. Four primary insights emerge from this study. Human vocation is framed within the context of cultivating and caring for creation, elevating environmental stewardship to a central aspect of religious calling. The intimate act of divine inbreathing underscores the fundamentally relational nature of vocation, emphasizing deep connections with both the Divine and creation. The mandate to “work and keep” the garden provides a framework for understanding all human work as a form of divine service, dissolving the boundary between sacred and secular work. The integration of physical and spiritual elements in humanity’s creation suggests that religious vocations should encompass both material and spiritual dimensions of existence.

These insights have significant implications for vocational discernment and formation in contemporary religious contexts. They call for formation programs that incorporate ecological awareness, emphasize authentic relationships, see all work as participation in God’s creative activity, and aim for the integrated development of the whole person. While this study has yielded valuable insights, further research is needed to explore cross-cultural resonances,

facilitate interdisciplinary dialogue, examine practical implementations, trace historical evolutions of vocational understanding, and develop specific practices of ecological stewardship. In conclusion, this fresh perspective on Genesis 2:5-9 offers a holistic, creation-oriented, and relational understanding of vocation that is both ancient and remarkably relevant to contemporary challenges. It invites religious individuals and communities to reimagine their role as co-creators and stewards, working in partnership with the Divine to nurture the flourishing of all creation.

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## **The Practice of The Works of Mercy as Signs of Hope and Gratitude**

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### **Abstract**

*This article explores the transformative power of the Works of Mercy. These Works of Mercy are selfless acts rooted in compassion and empathy, in bringing hope and gratitude to a world filled with darkness and despair. This work touched some of the biblical foundation and references of the both corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Through the practice of Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy, individuals are able to demonstrate love for God and neighbour in a significant manner. This will lead to fostering a sense of community living, genuine compassion, and unwavering love for one and all. The article in a diminutive detail, demonstrates the impact of Works of Mercy on both the giver and receiver. On the side of giver, it depicts the attitude of love and gratitude whereas, on the side of the receiver, it brings about relieves, hope and joy. It went further to demonstrate how genuine works of mercy encourage*

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*empathy, breaks down barriers of isolation and individualism, and transforms lives for a better and harmonious society. By the implementation of these selfless acts, individuals can easily become beacons of hope and gratitude without restrictions, making a positive impact on the world. The article concludes by emphasizing the importance of putting Works of Mercy into practice, becoming givers of hope and gratitude to a world in need.*

## **Introduction**

In a world filled with darkness and despair, the practice of the works of mercy shines like a beacon of hope and gratitude. They are selfless acts, rooted in compassion and empathy. They have the power to transform lives and bring light to those who are mostly in need of it. In his apostolic exhortation (*Evangelii Gaudium*) Pope Francis opines that, “The works of mercy are the most concrete and tangible ways to express our love for others.”<sup>2</sup> They are that tangible way we show solidarity to our fellow men. And without solidarity, suicide will be on acceleration in our society on daily basis. Statistics has it that before a suicide there is that hopelessness, despair or despondent which are the results of individualism, selfishness and insensitivity to people’s plights. To this effect, the fathers of the Second Vatican Council affirmed,

The joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community of

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<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel* (*Evangelii Gaudium*), 2013, no. 231

people united in Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit in their pilgrimage towards the Father's kingdom, bearers of a message of salvation for all of humanity. That is why they cherish a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history.<sup>3</sup>

Hence to care, and to show mercy is panacea to despair and suicide. Our Lord Jesus Christ therefore told Maria Faustina that, Divine Mercy is the last hope of man<sup>4</sup> and for salvation. This is a call to us to lift people from their hopelessness, their despair and give them hope. That simple act is love. This love is accessed through our practices of works of mercy.

This article however is a voyage of appraising hope and gratitude as a by-product of works of mercy. To continue this expedition, we shall look at the term mercy for a better understanding of the topic.

## **Mercy**

The term Mercy is of Latin origin, which is *miser cordia*. It is combination of two words: *misereri*, “to have pity on” or “compassion for” and *cor*, “heart” (genitive case - *cordis*: “of the heart”). Mercy, therefore, carries the idea of having compassion on someone with all one’s heart. The latter phrase expresses the idea: From the very inmost depth (or core) of one’s being.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Second Vatican Council. *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), 1965, no. 1

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Maria Faustina Kowalska. *Diary: Divine Mercy in my Soul*, Ent. 1228

<sup>5</sup>Cf. Seraphim Michalenko. *The Meaning of Mercy*. <https://www.thedivinemercy.org/articles/meaning-mercy> 0#:~:text=The%20Latin%20word,of%20one%27s%20being.%22. accessed 3/9/2024

Mercy is a fundamental concept in Christianity, particularly in the Catholic Church. It refers to God's benevolence, forgiveness, and compassion towards humanity. It is godly to be merciful because, mercy is an attribute of God, "The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love (Psalm 103:8)." This highlights God's merciful nature. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches us to be merciful; in his words, "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy" (Matthew 5:7).

According to Saint Thomas Aquinas, mercy is a virtue that inclines us to relieve the misery of others.<sup>6</sup> This form of relief is often holistic but not automatic. It brings back and strengthens sense of purpose and belonging, to the beneficiary. Also, in an encyclical *Dives in Misericordia*, Pope John Paul II emphasizes the importance of mercy in our lives, when he states, "Mercy is the very foundation of the Church's life."<sup>7</sup> This aligns with this idea that, "Mercy is the flower that blooms in the garden of hope".<sup>8</sup> And this mercy is shown in few things we do: works of mercy.

## **The Works of Mercy**

Works of mercy are basically divided into two - the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. They are sets of practices that have been parts of Christian tradition for centuries. They have strong biblical foundation. They are divided into two categories as earlier stated:

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<sup>6</sup> Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Bros., 1947), II-II, q. 30, a. 1

<sup>7</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1980), no. 14

<sup>8</sup> Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska. *Diary: Divine Mercy in My Soul*, trans. Joseph A. Pyzdek (Stockbridge, MA: Marian Press, 2005), entry 1577



corporal and spiritual works of mercy. The corporal works of mercy take care of the physical needs of others, and the spiritual works of mercy, nurture the spiritual well-being of others.<sup>9</sup> Let us therefore proceed to list these works of mercy and their biblical references.

*The Corporal Works*

The corporal works of mercy, which takes care of the physical needs of others, are:

- Feeding the hungry (Matthew 25:35)
- Giving drink to the thirsty (Matthew 25:35)
- Clothing the naked (Matthew 25:36)
- Sheltering the homeless (Matthew 25:35)
- Visiting the sick (Matthew 25:36)
- Visiting the imprisoned (Matthew 25:36)
- Burying the dead (Tobit 1:18-20)

*Spiritual Works of Mercy*

The spiritual works of mercy, which nurture the spiritual well-being of others, include:

- Counselling the doubtful (Romans 14:1)
- Teaching the ignorant (1 Peter 3:15)
- Admonishing the sinner (Matthew 18:15)
- Comforting the sorrowful (Romans 12:15)
- Bearing wrong patiently (cf. Matthew 5:38-42)
- Forgiving injuries (Matthew 6:14-15)
- Praying for the living and the dead (2 Thessalonians 1:11)

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vatican, 1997), no. 2447

## **Works of Mercy as Signs of Hope**

Hope is a fundamental aspect of the human experience, enabling us to persevere in the face of adversity. The practice of works of mercy embodies this hope, demonstrating that we value and cherish human life and thus create a harmonious environment. As St. Augustine said, “Hope has two beautiful daughters; their names are anger and courage. Anger at the way things are, and courage to see that they do not remain the way are.”<sup>10</sup>

The corporal and spiritual works of mercy are tangible and intangible expressions of hope, providing comfort and support to those in need. The practice of the works of mercy is a powerful sign of hope in a world that often seem to avoid basic considerations. By caring for the physical and spiritual needs of others, we demonstrate that we value and cherish them; and that we believe in the inherent dignity and worth of every one of them. Care is one of the most needs of man. Hence, Mother Teresa of Calcutta said, “The hunger for love is much more difficult to remove than the hunger for bread.”<sup>11</sup> Let us therefore relieve people of this very hunger by our daily practices of the works of mercy. These works of mercy remind us that, we are not alone in our struggles (Matthew 25:35-36). This is hope.

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<sup>10</sup> Augustine of Hippo. (416-417 CE). Homily on the Gospel of John, Tractate 50, Section 6 (John 15:18-21). In J. W. Rettig (Trans.), *Tractates on the Gospel of John* (Vol. 12, pp. 277-278). Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press.

<sup>11</sup> Mother Teresa. *A Simple Path*. Compiled by Lucinda Vardey. (London: Rider Books, 1993), p. 134

## **Works of Mercy a Signs of Gratitude**

The practice of works of mercy is also an expression of gratitude for the blessings we have received from God. As St. Ignatius of Loyola noted, “Gratitude is the memory of the heart.”<sup>12</sup> Remembering all or some of the benevolences one received from God, by giving to others. We acknowledge the gifts we have been given. And express our thankfulness for whatever we are and have, by extending hands of love/mercy to others. This stance of gratitude encourages a sense of humility and recognition of our place in the world. It helps us to stay grounded and focused on what truly matters.<sup>13</sup>

The corporal and spiritual works of mercy are tangible expressions of gratitude, demonstrating our appreciation for the gifts we have received. Through them, we acknowledge the blessings we have received and express our thankfulness for the abundance in our lives (cf. Matthew 25:35-36).

This sense of gratitude, motivated by the practice of works of mercy helps one to recognize the interconnectedness between our lives and the blessings we have received. It is therefore obvious that “The works of mercy are the best way to show our love for God and for our neighbour.”<sup>14</sup>

Works of mercy is a powerful sign of gratitude, expression and acknowledgment of the blessings we have received from God and humanity\_ thankfully for the abundance in our lives. By embracing

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<sup>12</sup> Ignatius of Loyola. (1548). *Spiritual Exercises*. Annotation 20. In G. Ganss (Trans.), *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*. (Chicago: Loyola University Press). pp. 42-43

<sup>13</sup> Cf. St. Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, 1548

<sup>14</sup> Pope Francis. *Misericordiae Vultus* (The Face of Mercy): Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015), no. 15

these selfless acts, we grow deeper in us the sense of gratitude and appreciation for the gifts we have received. This is why “The smallest act of kindness is worth more than the grandest intention.”<sup>15</sup> This is a call for one to value gratitude in the domain of relationship no matter the level.

### **The Impact of the Works of Mercy**

This ancient practice; works of mercy has a profound impact on both the giver and the receiver. It fosters a sense of consideration, community living and connection. Consideration in that it helps the giver to giving attention to the good this act will do to the receiver and society at large. Fostering a sense of Community living in that, it promotes togetherness among the people. Connection because, it does not only bring people together physically, it makes them to be of one mind and one heart (cf. Acts 4:32). When all these are fostered, we will be able to break down barriers of selfishness, lonesomeness and “might makes right” in our society.

*Impact on the Receiver:* - The works of mercy provide comfort, support, and hope to those in need, transforming their lives in meaningful ways. Feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, and visiting the sick demonstrate that we value and cherish human life; and that we believe in the inherent dignity and worth of every human person (Matthew 25:35-36).

*Impact on the Giver:* - The practice of works of mercy has profound impact on the giver, cultivating a sense of empathy, compassion, and love. By engaging in these selfless acts, we become more aware of the needs of others and more sensitive to their

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<sup>15</sup> St. Teresa of Calcutta, *A Simple Path*, 1993

struggles. We become like our heavenly Father (cf. Luke 6:36). And St. Augustine said as I quoted earlier, “The measure of our love for God is the measure of our love for our neighbour.”<sup>16</sup> This resonates with what Apostle John wrote in his first letter, “if anyone says, ‘I love God; and hates his brother, he is a liar...’” (cf. 1 John 4:20-21).

The works of mercy generally have profound impacts on both the giver and the receiver, fostering a sense of community, compassion, and love. By embracing these selfless acts, we can transform lives, cultivate empathy and compassion, and become more aware of the needs of others.

## **Conclusion**

The practice of the works of mercy is a powerful way to live out our faith and values as Christians and fellow human beings. And thus we make a positive impact on the world around us. By caring for others and demonstrating hope and gratitude, we bring light and joy to those who need it most, and create a ripple effect of kindness and compassion that can spread far and wide. And as I have pointed out before in the writing of Pope Francis, “The works of mercy are the best way to show our love for God and for our neighbour.”<sup>17</sup>

We have those who talk about deeds of mercy, those who talk about those who carry out works of mercy and those who performs works of mercy. It is often easy to identify these categories of people in every society. In all these three categories be you, ‘those who performs the works of mercy.’ Thus be, you a giver of hope to the

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<sup>16</sup> St. Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, Tractate 17, Section 8 (John 7:16-18)

<sup>17</sup> Pope Francis. *Misericordiae Vultus*, no. 15

darkened and despaired humanity/world and gratitude to God the giver of all that is good. Stay blessed.

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## **Serving the Common Good of Society: Reflections for the Socio-Political Transformation of Nigeria**

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Christians who occupy positions of responsibility are to be carefully prepared for political, economic and social tasks by means of a solid formation in the church's social doctrine, so that in their places of work they will be faithful witnesses to the gospel. – *Ecclesia in Africa*, #90

At the core of what has come to be known in Catholic Christianity as the Social Doctrine of the Church, following the publication of Leo XIII's ground-breaking encyclical, *Rerum Novarum* is St Thomas Aquinas' doctrine of the Common Good, a vision of society where the good of each member is bound to the good of the whole. It is considered the *raison d'être* of all politics. It consists primarily of having the social systems, institutions, and environments in which we all depend, work in a manner that benefits all the people. Ordinarily, the common good is a good to which all members of society have access, and from whose enjoyment no one can be easily excluded. It



may as well be described as the collective good. This means that politics is expected to cater for the needs of all and of each member of society. This is why in what is known as the principle of subsidiarity, society or the State is expected to provide social safety nets for the most vulnerable and to serve as helping hand to those who have the will to achieve a place in the sun but simply lack the means. The common good is so important that if it is lost sight of, politics becomes sterile and bastardised and loses its soul and the weak in society become objects in the hands of the powerful, who invariably end up as in the days of the prophet Amos, grinding the face of the weak in the dust and selling the poor for a pair of sandals. And this generally eventuates when politics is excised from morality.

Wherever you have the aberration of a country that is not poor – recall that a few years ago, our president said that Nigeria was not poor because it has the highest number of private jet owners in Africa – yet features the highest concentration of poor people anywhere in the world (poverty capital, so-called), as is the case with Nigeria, the common good has not been achieved – because something counts as a common good only to the extent that it is a good to which all have access. Now for the majority of our people, the fruits or so-called democracy dividends have remained elusive. For these disinherited Nigerians poverty is not merely an academic notion but an existential reality. Where the larger society is rich yet the citizens are poor, the common good has not been achieved.

So, shall we begin with the self-evident? At the very heart of the topic for our reflection is the idea of the common good – a simple idea that has eluded every attempt to codify it into a universally accepted definition. And the common good is not a value easily understood in modern culture. In fact, until the genial intellect of Pope St John Paul

II came up with a very simple presentation, to which we shall return later, the various presentations of the idea proved not very satisfactory to both scholars and statesmen. For now, let us look at what the common good is and why it is important.

According to GS, #26, “the common good refers to the sum total of social conditions which allow people either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily.” On the other hand, when he reflected on the Christian virtue of solidarity, John Paul II talked about “a firm determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and the good of each individual, because we are all responsible for all.”<sup>1</sup>

The kind of being that we are makes the common good a necessity. We are not created to live a solitary life. Human flourishing is always communal and social. We are created to live in social unity. Indeed, we have been created to be members of a certain community. As *Gaudium et Spes*, puts it: “... by his innermost nature man is a social being; and if he does not enter into relations with others, he can neither live nor develop his gifts.”<sup>2</sup> The human person is a rational being, therefore, he sees the need for a well organised society (government) where his essential needs can be met. The thriving environment must be one in which the society is a common project to which everyone contributes. On a team your individual good and the good of the team are not really separable – or if you try to separate them the team will break down. A good illustration will be the situation in a small town. In that set up doing a favour for the hardware store owner may not simply be looking out for another,

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<sup>1</sup> John Paul II: Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, #38.

<sup>2</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, #12.

since it may be reciprocated and make your life easier the next time your refrigerator or bicycle breaks down. The phrase that Catholic Social Doctrine uses to express this relationship is “the common good.” A common good suggests that you and others are not simply isolated individuals pursuing isolated goals, but also that you and your neighbours are not simply cogs in a larger social collective. Rather, there is a shared good that belongs to everyone. What this means is that tied to the concept of the common good is the conviction that the welfare of society is the corporate responsibility of all its members in their rank and file – all share in their different capacities and competencies for the upkeep of the society. (Obodoechina, p.103)

The communitarian character of human existence means that the good of each person is bound up with the good of the community. Thus, the obligation of justice and love will only be fulfilled when each person contributes to the common good in accord with his or her abilities and in the light of the needs of others. The common good is a social reality in which all persons should share through their participation in it. And the common good is not achieved until all are able to share in and contribute to the social systems and conditions necessary for human fulfilment and human flourishing.

In Catholic Social Teachings (CST), social justice is understood in terms of participation. Since humans are called to live socially, each individual is responsible for promoting the conditions that will allow for the authentic development of all. This is why in the thinking of the Council Fathers, “Every group must take into account the needs and legitimate aspirations of other groups, and still more of the human family as a whole. (GS, #26). This implies that persons have an obligation to be active and productive participants in the life of

society and that society has a duty to enable them participate in this way. This is why the common good demands that society should provide a level playing field for all. The principle of participation is rooted or grounded in the created dignity of the human person, who is endowed with freedom and charged with self-determination, and in the obligation of a just community.

The principle of participation is important in achieving the common good because it empowers persons and even nations to have a voice in the decisions that affect them.

Back to the idea of the good of all and the good of each individual which John Paul II canvassed (or enunciated). The common good is not the same as Jeremy Bentham's utilitarian greatest good for the greatest number, because that is compatible with the exclusion of some persons from participation in it. According to John XXIII, participation of all in the common good is particularly important in a world characterised by a 'daily more complex interdependence of citizens.' (MM, 59).

### **Christian participation in the realisation of the common good**

Recognising that the modern world presented Christianity with formidable new complexities, the Second Vatican Council committed the Church to a process that Pope John XXIII had called *aggiornamento*, literally updating. This also extends to our consideration of politics.

As far as the magisterium is concerned, there can be no doubt as to what Christians should do toward the achievement of the common good. The present-day Magisterium in various pronouncements unambiguously affirms that the church and individual Christians are

to be engaged in the work of transforming the world. Thus, in what is perhaps its most quoted passage, the 1971 Synod of Bishops on Justice in the world declared that:

Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world is a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel, or in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every form of oppressive situation.

This simply means that the Gospel is not preached if justice is not done and if Christians do not participate in building up a more just and loving society. And this is because the work for the liberation of man is not foreign to evangelisation.<sup>3</sup> We should note that the expression "constitutive dimension" employed by the synod is an arresting term and not one that can be thrown around easily. This is because the Church's self-understanding is that she is mandated to act as leaven of society. Thus, as Catholics we are called to be "salt, light and leaven" in society. In fact, it has been well observed that "At three levels, Christianity has a mandate in the world. The first level is the injunction to be good Christians; to be salt and light in the world (Mt.5). *This is the essential reason why Christ left us in the world; to affect the world positively for good.* At the second Christianity has a responsibility to project the message of love, hope, joy and perseverance to a world of godless modernity circumscribed by drugs, crime and deadly materialism defined around money and the fast life. And lastly, exemplary Christianity must necessarily also speak through a life of professionally calling as a calling of duty and responsibility – in such a way that our professional calling can be not

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<sup>3</sup> Paul VI: Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, #30.

only a means of livelihood but also as an exemplary lesson of how our well-being ought to become a source of blessing to others.”<sup>4</sup> The point being made is that as Catholics we have a duty to take part in public life according to our God-given abilities. Catholics cannot simply withdraw from civic affairs. The reason is simple. The classic civic virtues named by Cicero – prudence, fortitude and temperance – can be renewed and elevated to the benefit of all citizens, by the Christian virtues of faith, hope and love. Therefore, political engagement is a worthy Christian task and public office is an honourable Christian vocation (Chaput and John Paul II in *Vademecum*)

From the very beginning the Christian faith has intimately affected social as well as personal conduct, and the main Christian tradition has always carried with it a massive body of social teaching.

The word “politics” may be ambiguous or off-putting, yet we cannot gloss over the importance of politics, because ultimately in the social and economic fields, both national and international, the ultimate decision rests with political power. Because politics is the arena where important decisions that impact the life of all are taken. It is therefore understandable that the Magisterium’s appreciation of politics run deep. Perhaps the Catholic Church’s most counter-cultural teaching is that politics is a good thing. In its best form, politics is nothing more – and nothing less – than making decisions about how we want to structure our communities. Figuring out how

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<sup>4</sup> Tunji Olaopa: “Spirituality and Good Governance in Nigeria Part 2, *The Guardian*, 16<sup>th</sup> October, 2017. (italics mine).

to live well together is one of the most fundamentally human things we can do.<sup>5</sup>

In modern times, we begin with John XXIII. He wrote: “Once again we deem it opportune to remind our children of their duty to take an active part in public life.” (*Pacem in terris?*). He practically affirmed that through active participation in public life one contributes towards the attainment of the common good of the entire human family, as well as to the individual’s own political community. In the wake of John’s encyclical, the Second Vatican Council, through its Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes* said: “The Church regards as worthy of praise and consideration the work of those who, as service to others, dedicate themselves to the public good of the state and undertake the burden of this task.” (GS, #75). The same Constitution could not have been more emphatic when it said: “They are mistaken who, knowing that we have here no abiding city but seek one which is to come think that they may therefore shirk their earthly responsibilities. For they are forgetting that by their faith itself they are more obliged than ever to measure up to these duties each according to their proper vocation. Nor, on the contrary, are they any less wide off the mark who think that religion consists in acts of worship alone and in the discharge of certain moral obligations and who imagine they can plunge themselves into earthly affairs as to imply that these are altogether divorced from religious life. ... Therefore, let there be no pernicious opposition between professional and social activities on the one hand, and religious life on the other. Cryptic and to the point was John Paul II’s definition of politics. In his 1981 social encyclical *Laborem Exercens*, he defined

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Michael Jordan Laskey: “A Good Catholic Meddles in Politics” *Church Life Journal*, 28<sup>th</sup> September, 2016.

politics as “a prudent concern for the common good.”<sup>6</sup> Before him, Paul VI had also evinced that politics “is a demanding way – but not the only one – of living the Christian commitment to the service of others.”<sup>7</sup> The Catechism of the Catholic Church also insists that “as far as possible citizens should take an active part in public life.” (CCC, #1915). In 1996, the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales published a statement where, among other things, spoke of politics in glowing terms and urged Catholics to go into politics. They exhorted:

We are especially grateful to Catholic citizens who join and play an active part in the political party of their choice, provided they take their Catholic principles, ... with them. We offer them every possible encouragement. (...). The fact that some politicians from time to time fall short of the highest standards is not ground for dismissing the whole class of politicians as unworthy of respect.

Besides, the US Bishops’ Conference averred that “volunteering time, talent and money to work for greater justice is a fundamental expression of Christian love and social solidarity.”<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the church’s position regarding the participation of Catholics in politics is abundantly clear. Politics is the intelligent regulation of common life for the sake of the common good. This is why it is very important that we understand the principle of the common good.

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<sup>6</sup> John Paul II: Encyclical Letter *Laborem Exercens*, #20.

<sup>7</sup> Paul VI: Apostolic Letter to Maurice Cardinal Roy on the Eightieth Anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, *Octogesima Adveniens*, #46.

<sup>8</sup> U.S Catholic Bishops’ Conference Pastoral Letter *Economic Justice For All*, #119.



Again, the bishops of England and Wales made some important observations that need to be quoted at some length. In their 2010 Statement, *Choosing the Common Good*, they wrote:

The common good is about how we live well together. It is the whole network of social conditions which enable human individuals and groups to flourish and live a full, genuinely human life. (...). The principle of the common good expands our understanding of who we are and opens up new sources of motivation. The fulfilment which the common good seeks to serve is the flourishing of humanity expressed in the phrase “integral human development.” Such development requires that people are rescued from every form of poverty, from hunger to illiteracy; it requires the opportunity for education. ... It calls for active participation in economic and political processes...

From the perspective of the above statement, that Catholics are expected to participate actively in politics. Voting in elections, for instance, is the minimum required, that is passive citizenship; participation in the full sense of the term needs much more than that and demands active citizenship.<sup>9</sup> It is very clear therefore that active participation is a daunting exercise that is aimed at the promotion of the human person. And in fact, politics does exact great personal cost from those who engage in it and from their families.

Following from the above assertions we can intuit or surmise that politics is intimately linked to the great commandment of the Lord – love of neighbour. Thus, for those who engage in political activities

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<sup>9</sup> Dennis Chiles: *Christianity And Politics*, (London: CTS Publications, 1989), p.25 (italics mine)

it is a means to love one's neighbour. We know that all of Christian life is tied up with the exhortation "go and do likewise." This means that our being called to right belief (orthodoxy) and right living (orthopraxis) are inevitably linked to putting the care of neighbour at the centre of our lives. It follows that if it is intimately linked to the commandment of love, there can be no way a Christian will despise politics or set political involvement aside. As it is, there is no way a Christian can possibly follow Jesus without following him into politics and public policy. This is because "For Catholics – the pursuit of justice and the common good – is part of the history of salvation."<sup>10</sup> (**Chaput:** Render, p.6). After all, the issues that drive public policy and politics include homelessness, poverty, immigration, wages, (un)employment, etc. Who better than the Christian who is mandated by the Lord to care for the needs of his neighbour should occupy him/herself with politics which is the pre-eminent forum where solutions to these issues are addressed? The implication is that not to be involved in the political pursuit to bring about a more just society would be a lack of love. Thus, the religious commitment of the Christian becomes the very foundation on which he or she grounds his/her political involvement.

Catholics participate in politics inasmuch as they are citizens who have a programme for the common good which, inspired by the SDC can (and should) find consensus among persons of good will (or right conscience) who do not share the Catholic faith. In fact, the great ethical themes such as human rights (beginning with the right to life and religious freedom), promotion of the family and bioethics are not

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<sup>10</sup> Charles J Chaput: Render unto Caesar,

confessional, rather they are properly human according to a correct anthropology. These issues resonate even with people of no faith.

While all of us cannot engage in active politics, we are all called to a common commitment to ensure that political life serves the common good and the human person. This is why we must all ensure that we vote during elections. We are not all called to be members of the legislature or the local councils, but we are called to be citizens and as such to be conscientious in the performance of our duty to vote in the elections. This is why, according to Vatican II, “every citizen ought to be mindful of his/her right and his/her duty to promote the common good by using his vote” (GS, #75). The idea of politics is tied up with the common good because it is its *raison d’etre*. The common good, from what we have seen, calls for a better running of the public space so that all may benefit from an equitable sharing of the resources. This is why all must be concerned about electing those to whom the running the public space will be entrusted. Participating in elections is therefore both a duty and a responsibility. The faith does not call us to abandon the world but to help shape it by working for a just order. Therefore, in order to promote a just order in society no one can renounce participation in politics. Citizens cannot morally remove themselves from this serious commitment of promoting a just order in which the rights of all will be guaranteed. Refusal to pay attention to their duties in the political arena has serious consequences, for as was stated by the Council Father in *Gaudium et Spes*: “The Christian who neglects his temporal duties neglects his duties towards his neighbour, neglects God himself and endangers his eternal salvation.” (#43). The Christian involvement in public life is an important way to exercise responsible citizenship. Thus, the choice

of abstaining is morally not acceptable because it means abandoning the responsibility toward achieving the common good.

Seeing the importance of what is at stake, in the work of transformation of society, Catholics must be present today, even more than in the past. Christians are expected to vote with freedom, awareness and the coherence demanded by the faith. They are expected to vote with freedom because the act of voting is always and essentially a free act of the citizen that demonstrates the will of the people through civic channels. They are to vote with awareness because since this is their way of contributing toward the common good, before they exercise their franchise, they are expected to examine the candidates and their political parties and the extent to which their policies correspond to our fundamental vision of the dignity and worth of the human person. It should be very clear to all that when we exercise our right to vote, we determine to a large extent the wellbeing of society. Therefore, when voting, Christians are expected to do so with this question in mind: 'How can my vote best serve the common good?' This is because responsible citizenship means making choices, not simply voting the way my parents did. This is why when the Catholic goes into the voting booth, s/he shouldn't leave his or her faith outside. His or her identity as a Catholic should permeate every decision of his or her life, especially one of great importance like voting.

Citizenship is an exercise in moral judgement, not tribal or clan loyalty. Understandably, the right to vote carries with it a corresponding obligation to exercise that vote responsibly, and so to affirm political leadership as valued and necessary for the common good. Christians are expected to vote coherently because the exercise of freedom is inseparable from the duty to choose well. This is

because no political option is morally neutral. From this point of view, all Christians must be involved in politics with respect to the human, moral and Christian values that are supposed to mould society. This means shouldering the responsibility of political participation in a responsible manner.

But there are also those who take part in active politics, i.e., those who take upon themselves the task of contesting to gain power so as to govern society. This is where many Catholics have serious misgivings. It should be noted that church law forbids clerics and members of religious institutes from taking part in party politics. I dare suggest that the church's position here is a wise one. Public life is primarily the realm of laymen and women.

Admittedly, careerism, idolatry of power, egoism and corruption that have often been associated with certain politicians tend to lead many to see participation in public life as an absolute moral danger. That a number of politicians may have, by their conduct, contributed to a climate of distrust must not lead to a broad-brush painting of all politicians as corrupt. One of the unintended results of such an attitude could be the discouragement of those contemplating a political career. As Christians, we must recognise that politics and public life, like all other institutions, retain their God-given purposes to assist one's neighbour to live peaceably and justly in this world and to find eternal life. In other words, politics and other social institutions are less than perfect but they retain their original call to work for the common good understood as the good of all and the good of each person taken as a whole. Therefore, politics must be seen as the pursuit of power to advance the common good.

No true man or woman of good will can despise politics because that may amount to leaving the conduction of the *res publica* to forces that may care less for the common good. Besides, if these are Christians, they must feel challenged to bring the light of Christ into the sensitive arena of public policy. This gives him or her ample opportunity to manifest his or her Christian values in the public space. Ordinarily, being in public office must be seen as providing one with an opportunity to make impact on the lives of the people, because it is also about the power of ideas.

We cannot reasonably doubt that some of those who engage in politics exhibit traits that are less than noble and in fact, it is this that makes the political vocation come across as an immoral endeavour. But this, it must be said, is false because in itself politics cannot be immoral since it follows upon human nature which is ontologically social. {One must therefore feel concerned because politics....}. this is the reason why the Church does not tire of calling on the faithful to play an active role in politics. To dispel any doubts about how the church feels about participation in political activities, the position of the Bishops of England and Wales comes handy again. In their widely publicised Statement, *The Common Good and the Catholic Church's Social Teaching*, they said:

... Politics is an honourable vocation, which exacts great personal cost from those who engage in it, and from their families. ... An attitude of cynicism towards those engaged in public life is one of those tendencies against which we feel we must speak out. Not the least of its harmful consequences could be the discouragement of those contemplating a political career. It is the teaching of the church that all rightful authority comes from god, and therefore those who exercise legitimate

political authority are worthy of respect. It is not ignoble to want a successful political career, nor dishonourable for politicians to seek political power. #359

It is understandable that Vatican II urged that those with a talent for the difficult yet noble art of politics, or those whose talent in this matter could be developed, should prepare themselves for it, and, forgetting their own convenience and material interests, they should engage in political activity (GS, #75).

According to George Cardinal Pall, “Lay people are powerfully assisted in this work by the social teaching (doctrine) of the Church and the political ethics that it has developed over the century.”<sup>11</sup> But then, we must ask:

### **Social teachings, what are they?**

This may sound provocative or irreverent, but we must admit that we do not have a Catholic ethos in Nigeria – and we have never created one. For many years the Church in Nigeria has raised a generation of Catholics who have avoided politics like a plague under the pretentious claim that politics is a dirty game. The nobility of politics was never addressed in our catechesis. A generation of ineffective catechesis has produced Catholic “politicians” who are nothing short of baptised pagans. This explains why there is no difference between Catholic politicians and the rest. Any wonder, then, that the few Catholics who venture into the political terrain go there with a “buffet mentality” where people are called to go and serve themselves?

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<sup>11</sup> Pell, George: *God And Caesar: Selected Essays on Religion, Politics and Society* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), p.26.

Let us turn to our hierarchy. Our bishops issued a communique at the end of their plenary meeting in 2001 and said, among other things, that “we commit ourselves to a nation-wide programme of education in the social teachings of the Church.” Again, in February 2002, they declared: “... in accord with the social teachings of the Church, we encourage Catholics to enter into the difficult world of politics. Through JDPC/ Committees and Catholic Social Forum (CSF), the Church will provide political education and formation both for candidates vying for office and the electorate. One imagines that this was because they were convinced about the importance of the social teachings and that it was something all Catholics ought to know about. To my knowledge, both declarations were observed in the breach. Until the emergence of the experience such as the one we are having now, it was clear to me that the Nigerian church had failed to realise that to a large extent, the impact of the Church in the public space will be determined by the capacity of Catholics to participate actively in “scrutinising the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel.”<sup>12</sup>

The Church’s vision of a just society, if assimilated and applied by Catholics in politics, has the capacity to transform our nation. And this is something that the universal Church demands of us. But as John Paul II asked in *Ecclesia in Africa*, “Has the Church in Africa (read Nigeria) sufficiently formed the lay faithful, enabling them to assume competently their civic responsibilities and to consider socio-political problems in the light of the Gospel and faith in God? And the great pontiff was convinced that “This is certainly a task belonging to Christians: to bring to bear upon the social fabric an

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<sup>12</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, #4.



influence aimed at changing not only our ways of thinking but also the very structures of society, so that they will better reflect God's plan for the human family."<sup>13</sup> It is part of the mandate of our higher churchmen to see to it that the flock entrusted to their care is well grounded and also interested in the running of the secular space. Every adult Catholic has the responsibility to devote some attention to politics and government. As followers of Christ and citizens of a democratic regime, we bear responsibility for justice and the common good. We need to recall here that our politics is an interpretation of *who we are, what we are and the things or values we stand for*. Hence, it is expected of the Christian that he or she will shed the light of the Gospel on politics. This is why it is a given that a distinctively Catholic political voice will be defined by its strong moral commitments.

There can be no doubt that the Nigerian church has failed woefully to harness the enormous spiritual, ethical and intellectual resources entrenched in the Catholic Social teachings. Simply, she has not inculcated in the faithful those noble values that will elevate politics and make political activity attractive. This is why she has not encouraged her children to go into politics and thus transform politics from within. There can be no doubt that there is an urgent need for conscientisation. John Paul II wished that "Christians must be formed to live the social implications of the Gospel in such a way that their witness will become a prophetic challenge to whatever hinders the true good of the men and women of our time."

What are the signs that show that the Catholic church in Nigeria has not measured up to expectation in this field? A few examples will do

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<sup>13</sup> John Paul II: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*, #54

here. In response to the exhortation of *Ecclesia in Africa*, a number of Catholic universities have been established. The Nigerian hierarchy has established the Veritas University, Abuja; and together with this a number of other universities that boast of having some affiliation to the Catholic church litter the country. In the light of what both *Ecclesia in Africa* and *Africae Munus* say about such universities and the importance of having the social teachings of the church disseminated, it will be interesting to see how many of these universities offer CST in their curriculum. This would be the case also in many of our seminaries. Of course, it goes beyond having the course in our seminary curriculum. The question is: of those teaching it how many effectively qualified in this field? Remember the famous Latin *nemo dat quod non habet*. I am also aware that there are bishops who would have their priests study anything but Catholic social teachings.

At this point, I like to propose an interesting experiment in a number of our parishes on a typical Sunday. With the permission of the parish priest, ask the congregation whether they have been presented with the riches of the social doctrine of the church? And you are most likely to get for an answer an affirmation such as: “we have never been told that there was anything like a social doctrine” (Acts 19:2). No doubt, many of you must have heard about “Our Best Kept Secrets.” Prod them on and you are likely to hear; “Sir, give us this water (social doctrine) so that we would not thirst again” (John 4:15). And the thing is, for us here in Nigeria, we cannot possibly argue that Nigeria’s public space is informed by the spirit of the Gospel. This is also why as Christians, we must be actively involved in the public space.

## **What is the way out of this quagmire?**

After some twenty-five years of another attempt at democratic rule, the Nigerian state is still groping and wobbling on all fours. No doubt, the broken state of the nation is in part due to the absence or refusal of good people to take part in politics. We must remember that the price paid by the wise for refusing to take part in politics is to be ruled by the unwise. These are certainly not the best of times for our country. The uncertainty about the future of Nigeria is certainly due to the fact that the political terrain is peopled by individuals who privilege their personal good over the common good. Nigeria is clearly on the road to being a failed state today and the temptation, for many, is to throw up their hands in desperation. But the question is: Can Christians who are men and women of hope succumb to this state of despair? Surely, not you who belong to the category of those that Fr Obodochina calls *the people of value* and *men and women of light*. Giving in to despair is not an option, also because a new Nigeria is possible.

The evils that have come to characterise our polity, such as the monetisation of politics, violent behaviour of politicians, etc are an indication of a political class that has lost sight of the common good. And so, one can say with the Psalmist:

*... their deeds are corrupt, depraved,  
Not a good man is left.  
No, not even one.* (Psalm 52:1&3).

This situation has made the re-appropriation of the common good an urgent necessity. This is where the active participation of well-formed Catholics in politics becomes imperative. The attempt towards nation building to which we should all be involved cannot be

achieved (or come about) through prayer and exhortation alone. This has to be followed by concrete action as is being suggested by the Catholic Social Forum. A very important fact that cannot be overlooked is that the transformation – be it socio-political, economic or cultural – of Nigeria must begin with the personal transformation of its citizens. This is because the aggregate well-being of a society depends on the collective efforts of its members.

There can be no doubt that there is a lot to be done. Fr Obodochina in his seminal work of the same title as our colloquium has put before us great intuitions that need our attention. At the heart of our discourse is the welfare of our society which he sees as the corporate responsibility of all its members in their rank and file – all share in their different capacities and competencies for the upkeep of the society. Our interdependence and even survival as a country call for a re-awakening of interest in the common good. Because every member of our society is a major stakeholder in the life and activities of the society. The degree of our responsibility may not be the same but we are each part and parcel of the entire system.<sup>14</sup> Each person, then, has the responsibility to use his or her gifts for the betterment of society and to participate in creating a more just community.<sup>15</sup>

Nigeria is certainly not in good shape. Many of Nigeria's problems are the result of a manner of governing often driven by corruption. Nigerians are hurting. It has to be said that in recent years, in more ways than one, the various political leaders have shown that their agenda are not for the common good. Unfortunately, when that

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<sup>14</sup> Paul VI: Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, #17.

<sup>15</sup> J. Milburn Thompson: *Justice & Peace: A Christian Primer*, (New York, Maryknoll Orbis Books, 1997), p191.

happens government loses its *raison d'être*. Nothing shows this more poignantly than the fact that every Nigerian becomes a local government by providing himself with the basic necessities of life like energy for which today, apart from being the poverty capital of the world, Nigeria is also the *generator* capital of the world. The Nigerian is also expected to sink his own borehole for water and also provide his own security. Poverty in what should have been a land of plenty is a symptom of things gone wrong. Ours is a litany of woes. Nigeria's democracy is at the verge of collapse, and the nation risks collapsing with it. There is a loss of confidence in the electoral system of the country. When one looks at the socio-political situation in Nigeria, there is a general agreement with the phrase "things cannot go on like this." The nation needs re-fixing or transformation and this must start with a return to the idea of the common good. And the Church believes that with her social doctrine she has something to offer in the attempt to fashion out a more humane and just society for the benefit of God's children. A necessary step in this all-important endeavour will be a recommitment on the part of the Church's hierarchy to see to the dissemination of the riches of the Church's Social Teachings to all nooks and crannies of the land. Secondly, committed Catholics formed in the moral teachings of the church have to put themselves forward for elective office in the service of the people. And I hear the Lord saying: "who shall I send?" This is where I see our presence here today as a breath of fresh air and indeed a ground-breaking endeavour. For who better than the agents of the church's prophetic message can come up with the soothing balm of Christ's gospel to heal the fractured and cracked walls of our nation? And I think I can hear you all saying: "here I am Lord, send me." Thanks for your patience. I rest my case.