

# Without Roots: If You Denigrate the Family, What Do You Do to Consecrated Life?

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## Introduction

In July 2014, I was invited by the Association of the Religious Major Superiors in Tanzania to deliver a talk on the present-day challenges that confront consecrated life. I was to address myself both to the African milieu in general and in a more specific manner to the Tanzanian context.

Since the day I received the invitation from the Chairperson of the Association, Rev. Fr. Wolfgang Pisa, OFM Cap., I was walking about in a quandary:

Why would the Major Superiors wish to hear me talk to them about challenges? If challenges are providing the foci of my talk, then there must be a kind of crisis. Yes, consecrated life must be in crisis. Why would a state of life that is explicitly meant to be holy reach the point of a crisis?

At this very moment, I arrived at a sad but true insight:

It is the society in general that is gripped in the throes of crisis. Indeed not only is it the society-at-large. The family itself is wallowing in crisis.

Analogous to the saying: “like father like son”; it can also be said “like society like consecrated life”; “like family like consecrated persons”. There is no need of reminding you that recently we celebrated the Year of the Family. An important highlight for the Church during the course of the year was the Bishops’ Synod on the family that took place in Rome.

The truth of the matter is that our families have suffered tremors from many directions. One cannot bypass the fact that globalisation

has given birth to many challenges that disintegrate the family. The traditional family is ill and needs a truly effective therapy. The high rate of divorce in the big cities shows evidence of this.

The Synod on the Family occasioned a number of emotionally tinged self-evaluations on the part of certain theologians. They were asking themselves: Are we going to allow remarriage? Are we going to allow divorced people to receive communion? How are we going to answer the issue of gender?

African theologians did not excuse themselves from asking troubling questions: How are we going to respond to the ever-present institution of polygamy? What kind of answer are we going to give to trial marriage(s)? Is there such an option as a marriage without getting children? Is African marriage between two persons or between two families? How do we Africans understand Genesis 2:24: “That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body”?

The People of God anticipate responses to these questions that fortify – not destroy – the integrity of the family. All these questions touch also the fabric of consecrated life because consecrated life plants its roots in the family. Without family, there is no consecrated life. Whatever threatens family, threatens at the same time consecrated life.

Family and consecrated life walk together. Tell me what is happening in family life today, and I will tell you what seems to be transpiring in consecrated life. That is why we need a deep reflection on the family in order to make projections about consecrated life. Rightly indeed does Pope St. John Paul II express his conviction and the conviction of the Church by reminding us of an affirmation coming from the heart of St. John Chrysostom:

Whoever denigrates marriage also diminishes the glory of virginity. Whoever praises it makes virginity more admirable and resplendent.<sup>1</sup>

When marital sexuality is not regarded as a great value given by the Creator with divine thoughtfulness, the renunciation of it for

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<sup>1</sup> As cited by JOHN PAUL II in *Apostolic Exhortation “Familiaris Consortio”* (22 Nov 1981), 16, [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va). (Referred in the article as *FC*).

the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven loses its meaning. Pope St. John Paul II has understood this. Pope Francis has understood this. That is why Pope Francis has dedicated 2015 as the Year of Consecrated Life from 28 November 2014 up to 02 February 2015 just after the Year of the Family.<sup>2</sup>

What are the challenges of consecrated life? Whatever they are, they are the same for family life. These challenges are arising from where? The answer is obvious for me. They are coming from a tendency to abandon God: that is the reason why we have lost our moral compass point.

It is a horrible thing to live without roots. We are rootless when we live without Christ, our fulcrum of truth who reveals the Father. Is there any Christian life without Christ?

In other words, if a spotlight on challenges in our lives as consecrated religious manifests a certain decadence in the way we live, we may conclude that as a human family we are moving further and further away from God. Instead, we have planted our roots in that which is not God, and so have closed ourselves from the true growth that takes place only in the true Vine, who is Jesus. My reflection is supported by the effort that Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger and Professor Marcello Pera have expended in order to analyse the constellation of Christian cultures that once seemed to have enlivened Europe. The life is no longer there: Europe seems to be suffering a great fatigue because she has abandoned her Christian Roots and grafted herself onto values that separate her from Jesus.

At this point in my presentation, I intend to use Europe as a metaphor to explain the state of consecrated life in Africa.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> FC 16

<sup>3</sup> It is worth noting Pope Francis' use of images and metaphors in his artful description of what the Church really is, in his recent interview with a representative of the Italian Jesuit Journal, *La Civiltà Cattolica*. First he said: "The image of the Church I like is that of the holy, faithful people of God." Here he was referring to the vocabulary of the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. Then Pope Francis became more emphatic: *This Church with which we should be thinking is the home of all, not a small chapel that can hold only a small group of selected people. We must not reduce the bosom of the universal church to a nest protecting our mediocrity... The Church is **Mother**; the Church is **fruitful**. It must be.*

## 1. The Star of the Magi: Is God Still a Guide?

Recently I offered a course in the format of a seminar entitled *Reading Ratzinger* with second-year philosophy students. In tandem with the purpose of the seminar, we read together a small book with a thought-provoking title, namely, *Without Roots: The West, Relativism, Christianity, Islam*.<sup>4</sup> This book is actually the result of a dialogue that took place in May, 2004, between Professor Marcello Pera, a philosopher and president of the Italian senate, and Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, i.e., the future Pope Benedict XVI. At that time of their exchange, the Cardinal was the Prefect of the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

Can a civilization exist without any sense of the sacred? Can a civilization survive if it refuses to accept God as a Guide? These are the questions at the heart of *Without Roots*.

What is a civilization? Is our understanding of civilization derivable from its artifacts? Can we understand European civilization, for example, simply by looking at what Europe

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The most striking image in that interview was the image of the Church as **a field hospital after battle**. "I see clearly," the pope goes on saying, "that the thing the Church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the Church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds, heal the wounds.... And you have to start from the ground up".

This last image made me to think twice and brought me back to the scholastic period which considered the sacraments as remedy (*sacramentum medicina est*). It provoked in me the great desire of studying in depth the ecclesiology of Pope Francis. At the meantime, I came to realize that one of Pope Francis's gifts as a communicator may be his peculiar feel for memorable images. As we know, images often speak more than words. So, I decided to go through many of his speeches and homilies in order to pinpoint images or metaphors or models that Pope Francis used to explain the Church. It was for me a very exciting work. I came to find out that during the General Audiences from May to October 2013, when he pursued the theme "*I believe in the Church*", he used a series of vividly meaningful images that help the People of God to understand more easily the nature of the Church.

<sup>4</sup>J. RATZINGER – M. PERA, *Without Roots: The West, Relativism, Christianity, Islam*, New York: Basic Books 2006. This book offers an insightful foreword by Pope John Paul II's biographer, George Weigel.

"produces" technologically, agriculturally, and aesthetically? Or is that merely "civilization" in a very superficial sense of the word? Might the sources of European civilization coincide with a distinctive encounter that the greater part of a continent has experienced with the sacred, or at least with an identifiable idea of the sacred?

Indeed, is it possible to imagine that anything that is properly called civilization lacks a sense of the sacred?

Though the juxtaposition of the talks chronologically was purely coincidental, the two leaders arrived at strikingly similar conclusions about the spiritual, cultural, and political crises facing the West.<sup>5</sup> Both explain how a Europe without a history, without 'roots', is likely to disappear; and the disappearance of Europe with its Christian backbone would mean a damage to the global ethos. Europe's demise could call into question such notions as liberty, freedom, democracy, equality and solidarity that European figures like St. Francis of Assisi and St. Robert Bellarmine have communicated to the world.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> On the 13<sup>th</sup> of May 2004, Cardinal Ratzinger addressed the Italian Senate on the current state of the West. He addressed the issues of moral and cultural relativism, loss of religious identity and practice, the spread of radical Islam and other topics contiguous with these. Just the day before, i.e., the 12<sup>th</sup> of May, Marcello Pera, at that time the president of Italy's Senate, delivered a lecture at the Lateran Pontifical University on the very same theme, formulating remarks about the same issues with an amazing similarity to the ideas of the Cardinal. Because both the Cardinal and Pera noticed this coincidence, they decided to correspond back and forth with a series of letters that expanded upon the issues about which they had spoken in their respective addresses. The original lectures together with the ensuing letters were compiled into the book that the author is referring to as *Without Roots*.

<sup>6</sup> People from the far-flung regions of the world have all recognized St. Francis as a model of one who placed at the centre of his personal vision the dignity of each and every human being, particularly the most fragile and vulnerable of society and even the enemy. St. Robert Bellarmine was a Cardinal of the Catholic Church who enunciated political principles for freedom, equality, and democracy in language that became the groundwork for such democratic republics as the United States of America. See Part One of the Appendix to G. TAMBALA, "Will Africa Survive Secularism?", *Africa Tomorrow*, 16/1 (2014), 59-62.

Both Pope Benedict and Marcello Pera see Europe today in a crisis of identity that has made it largely unable and unwilling to defend its culture against the intransigency of Islam. Both call for revivifying Christian identity. Both take a look at the effects relativism has had on European culture and offer their advice on how to shake off the malaise that is covering the continent.

In short, I can say that this small book convincingly points out the danger that Europe faces because of its turn away from Christ as the Author of salvation and the Source of moral strength. It also discusses the dangers we face in the world, including all of us in Africa, if we were to follow European trends. As Pope Benedict and Pera speak of Europe's fall, they both acknowledge a staunchly Christian-underpinning for Europe, an underpinning which is necessary to have roots for the sake of survival. Bringing together their unique vantage points as leaders of Church and State, Ratzinger and Pera challenge us to examine anew the fate of a civilization that has abandoned its spiritual roots.

The authors' ability to identify historical trends and tie together the loose ends of history, to achieve an insightful theological reading of that history, and to formulate thoughtfully the policies we must pursue to maintain the integrity of our Christian conscience carry me to the conclusion that this book is a must read for all Christians.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> J. RATZINGER – M. PERA, *Without Roots...* Europe is not only in a coma. She is literally dying. The World Fact Book published by the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), known for its rigorously thorough methods for collecting information, updates us on fertility rates throughout the world. They make the critical remark that a study of the numerous sources that report data on birth and fertility has established a stable norm of 2 births per woman as the indicator that a country is not dying but can remain stable. "The total fertility rate (TFR)... shows the potential for population change in the country. A rate of two children per woman is considered the replacement rate for a population, resulting in relative stability in terms of total numbers. Rates above two children indicate populations growing in size and whose median age is declining. ... Rates below two children indicate populations decreasing in size and growing older." <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2127.html> Accessed June 2018.

Let us just compare Europe with Africa as we keep in mind the stability norm of two children per woman. In 2017 fertility rates in various countries

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Can a civilization exist without any sense of the sacred? That is the fundamental question and it concerns every kind of Christian

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of Europe were as follows: Albania, 1.51 (a dramatic drop from its 1965 statistic of 5.77); Austria, 1.47; Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1.33; Bulgaria, 1.46; Croatia, 1.4; Czech Republic, 1.45; Hungary, 1.45; Ireland, 1.97; Italy, 1.44; Poland, 1.35; Portugal, 1.53; Romania, 1.35; Serbia, 1.44; Spain 1.5; United Kingdom, 1.81; Greece, 1.43; France, 2.07; Germany, 1.45. It is not difficult to decipher from these statistics that France is the only country that shows promise of population stability. The European Union showed a fertility rate of 1.61 in 2016. That means the European Union is fading away. What continent shows the most promise of population stability and growth? Consider the fertility rate of just some of the African nations: Burkina Faso, 5.71 children per woman; Burundi, 5.99; Republic of the Congo, 4.59; Malawi, 4.65; Nigeria, 5.59; Tanzania, 4.77; Zambia, 5.63. The only Middle Eastern country that seems to compare with Africa is Iraq with a fertility rate of 4.43.

A consideration of the annual rate of population growth in a number of European countries (the rate of births in comparison with the rate of deaths per 1000 people) verifies the conclusions one can draw from the fertility statistics. Italy, Germany, Great Britain, and France show modest growth in population – a statistic that loses its foothold in the demographic reality of the low fertility rates in these countries. Meanwhile Spain, Portugal, Poland, Albania, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Romania, Hungary, Serbia, and Greece are only some of the countries that show a decline, not a growth, in population. We know that the fertility rates in most European countries are just a little more than one child per woman. If one considers the fertility rates of only indigenous Europeans, without including recent immigrants, the number seems to be closer to .25, that is to say, for every four European Christian women, only one will have a child. The CIA proposes that Europe will not exist with its current demographic structure in 50 years. Instead Europe will be with a Muslim majority. Not only is this a very real fact but the urban landscape of Europe is already manifesting the presence of a Muslim majority. Recent riots, violence and criminality have shown the dangers that are upon Europe; also the rise of anti-Semitism, racism, intolerance, religious discrimination and just plain hatred show what is happening to Europe. Cardinal Ratzinger co-authored this sad, soul-searching text that explains how a Europe without a history, without 'roots' is likely to fade away. He suggests that the disappearance of European people in Europe will mean a damage to the world because it calls into question those ideas like liberty, freedom, democracy, equality and solidarity that St. Francis, St. Robert Bellarmine, St. Thomas More, St. John Paul II and other important Christian figures from Europe have articulated for the world.

life, both family life and consecrated life. Therefore, the question exudes a sense of urgency not only for Europe but for all of us here present, i.e., for everyone in his or her own sector of life. What has happened in Europe seems to become a striking metaphor for the present situation of consecrated life in Africa.

## **2. What Motivates Consecrated Life in Africa?**

The book *Without Roots* raises a series of questions: Can consecrated life exist without any sense of the sacred? Can consecrated life or religious life exist without Christ?<sup>8</sup> What motivates consecrated persons in the world of today? What motivates your life as a consecrated person? What constitutes your world? These questions are urgent for all of us present here and especially for you, Major Ministers of God. What is the state of religious life in your province? What motivates your religious communities? What motivates your apostolate? In a word, what is the driving force of your life in all its dimensions? These questions may help to give direction to the life of the consecrated persons who live under your authority.

When I asked my students, “What motivates your religious life, your religious community, your apostolate, your province and your congregation?” I was amazed at their reactions. First of all, for them, the question has to be understood in two ways: First, what in fact motivates today’s consecrated life? And secondly, what should motivate our consecrated life? They have preferred to start by the second question because they are totally convinced that Christ must be the one to motivate our consecration; Christ is the wellspring of our consecration: from his Heart flow the living waters of the Spirit. Unfortunately, however, there are other cisterns that do not hold living water that have contaminated the essence of consecrated life (cf. Jer 2:13).

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<sup>8</sup> The Catholic Church recognizes the possibility that a person may be consecrated through a profession of chastity, poverty and obedience – usually in a private manner – even outside the milieu of religious life. Secular institutes are often of this type. See especially *Codex of Canon Law*, cc. 710-730, available at [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).



### 3. What Should Motivate Religious & Consecrated Life?

Whoever decides to join consecrated life is somehow aware that Christ is or should be at the centre of his/her longing. Through the various stages of formation, this personal longing will be purified so that the candidate may be able to confess like Saint Paul that "I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20) or "For me life is Christ" (Phil 1:21). In other words, the consecrated person has decided freely and totally to live for Christ and to be with Christ. Like Saint Paul, the consecrated person declares:

Whatever gains I had, these I have come to consider a loss because of Christ. More than that, I even consider everything as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have accepted the loss of all things and I consider them so much rubbish, that I may gain Christ (Phil 3:7-8).

The Church has always taught the centrality of Christ in the consecrated life. She reminds consecrated people that "they have dedicated their entire lives to God's service. Therefore, they ought to seek God and God alone, before all else; they should engage in contemplation, by which they cleave to God by mind and heart... in all circumstances they should take care to foster a life hidden with Christ in God".<sup>9</sup> That means the teaching and example of Christ provide the foundation of the consecrated life.<sup>10</sup>

The consecrated life is rooted in Christ with such completeness that there is no consecrated life without Christ. Our heavenly Father so loves the consecrated person that he gives Jesus to the person (cf. John 3:16). The consecration originates in the call and action of Jesus; Jesus gives himself by means of spousal love to the person who responds to the call. The consecrated person, in turn, offers his or her life to Jesus as a gift. Pope John Paul II speaks of the spousal character of this love:

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<sup>9</sup> PAUL VI, *Degree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life "Perfectae Caritatis"* (28 Oct 2065), 5-6, [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)

<sup>10</sup> VATICAN II, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church "Lumen Gentium"* (21 Nov 1964), 43, [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va). (Referred in the article as *LG*).

When Christ “looked upon you and loved you,” calling each one of you, dear religious, that redeeming love of His was directed towards a particular person, and at the same time it took on a spousal character: it became a love of choice. This love embraces the whole person, soul and body, whether man or woman, in that person's unique and unrepeatable personal “I.” The One who, given eternally to the Father, “gives” Himself in the mystery of the Redemption, has now called man in order that he in his turn should give himself entirely to the work of the Redemption through membership in a community of brothers or sisters, recognized and approved by the Church. Surely it is precisely to this call that St. Paul's words can be applied: “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit...? You are not your own; you were bought with a price” (1Cor 6:19-20).

Yes, Christ's love has reached each one of you, dear brothers and sisters, with that same “price” of the Redemption. As a consequence of this, you have realized that you are not your own, but belong to Christ. This new awareness was the fruit of Christ's “loving look” in the secret of your heart. You replied to that look by choosing Him who first chose each one of you, calling you with the measurelessness of His redeeming love.<sup>11</sup>

The mutuality of the gift is what the vow/promise of chastity represents. *Vita Consecrata* expresses it in a very lucid manner:

The consecrated life, deeply rooted in the example and teaching of Christ the Lord, is a gift of God the Father to his Church through the Holy Spirit. In every age there have been men and women who, obedient to the Father's call and to the prompting of the Spirit, have chosen this special way of following Christ, in order to devote themselves to him with an “undivided” heart (cf. *1 Cor* 7:34). Like the Apostles, they too have left everything behind in order to be with Christ and to put themselves, as he did, at the service of God and their brothers and sisters. In this way, through the many charisms of spiritual and apostolic life bestowed on them by the Holy Spirit, they have helped to make the mystery and mission of the Church shine forth, and in so doing have contributed to the

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<sup>11</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Apostolic Exhortation “Redemptionis Donum”* (25 Mar 1984), 3, [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

renewal of society.”<sup>12</sup> At this point, there is no doubt at all that Christ is the apex and the climax of our desire. I can say with Saint Augustine: “My heart is restless until it rests in you.”<sup>13</sup>

#### 4. What Motivates Today’s Consecrated Persons & Religious in Africa?

*Table 1: Ordinary Consecrated Persons*

No.	Motivators	Responses (x/60)	%
1.	Money	44	15
2.	Power	35	12
3.	Globalisation & Means of communication	30	10
4.	Egocentrism & Individualism	30	10
5.	Tribalism	29	10
6.	Jealousy & hatred	27	9
7.	Witchcraft	25	8
8.	Desire to study	21	7
9.	Rumours	16	5
10.	Inter-cultural Experience	14	5
11.	Unfaithfulness & lies	9	3
12.	Community Life	7	2
13.	Jesus	7	2
14.	3 vows: Chastity-Poverty-Obedience	3	1
15.	Prayer	3	1
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>300 Responses</b>	<b>100</b>

As you can guess from the table above, I have made a simple, one-question investigation among sixty consecrated persons in order to get a clear picture of what motivates consecrated life in our country. I asked both the ordinary consecrated persons and the major superiors: “According to you, as a religious or as a consecrated person [as a major superior of your Order, your Congregation, or your Society], what drives the consecrated life nowadays?”

<sup>12</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation “Vita Consecrata”* (25 Mar 1996), 1, www.vatican.va. (Referred in the article as *VC*).

<sup>13</sup> St AUGUSTINE, *Confessions*, I, 1.

**Table 2: Major Superiors**

No.	Motivators	Responses (x/19)	%
1.	Money, Power – Economic Motivation and Social Security – Social Status	17	17
2.	Freedom-Individualism-Secularism-consumerism-egoism	14	14
3.	Community Life	10	10
4.	Strong Desire for further Studies	9	9
5.	Vows in crisis: Chastity and Poverty	9	9
6.	Missionary Life – Apostolate	7	7
7.	Globalization – New Technologies	6	6
8.	Care for the poor – Social Work	6	6
9.	Material Comforts	5	5
10.	Prayer Life	4	4
11.	Religious identity - Spirituality and Charism	4	4
12.	To seek God	3	3
13.	Unfaithfulness – Lie	3	3
14.	Person of Jesus	2	2
15.	Division – Tribalism – Racism	1	1
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100 Responses</b>	<b>100</b>

## 5. Real Picture of Consecrated Life from the Respondents' Point of View

These tables reveal that, according to the opinions and/or convictions of those who responded to my question, consecrated life is in trouble. There is a great malaise. There is a feeling of sickness; a feeling of no satisfaction; a feeling of unhappiness; a feeling of betrayal; a feeling of being there without really being there; a feeling of self-hatred; a feeling of having everything except Christ. If this table accurately reflects what is happening in religious communities and apostolic societies, consecrated life is in a serious crisis.

At this moment I draw forth from a stockpile of fertile insights and ideas that I presented some years ago in Kinshasa to an assembly of both men and women major superiors – much like you – on *Consecrated Life, the Salt of the World*. I concluded my exposition with the words of *Vita Consecrata* where Pope St. John

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Paul II suggested that for an overall picture of the essential characteristics of consecrated life, it is "singularly helpful to fix our gaze on Christ's radiant face in the mystery of the Transfiguration." Here are the Pope's words:

The evangelical basis of consecrated life is to be sought in the special relationship which Jesus, in his earthly life, established with some of his disciples. He called them not only to welcome the Kingdom of God into their own lives, but also to put their lives at its service, leaving everything behind and closely imitating his own *way of life*.

Many of the baptized throughout history have been invited to live such a life "in the image of Christ". But this is possible 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, the first and essential of which is the sacred bond of chastity for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven... In the Gospel, many of Christ's words and actions shed light on the meaning of this special vocation. But for an overall picture of its essential characteristics it is singularly helpful to fix our gaze on Christ's radiant face in the mystery of the Transfiguration. A whole ancient spiritual tradition refers to this "icon" when it links the contemplative life to the prayer of Jesus "on the mountain" ... Even the "active" dimensions of consecrated life can in a way be included here, for the Transfiguration is not only the revelation of Christ's glory but also a preparation for facing Christ's Cross. It involves both "going up the mountain" and "coming down the mountain". The disciples who have enjoyed this intimacy with the Master, surrounded for a moment by the splendour of the Trinitarian life and of the communion of saints, and as it were caught up in the horizon of eternity, are immediately brought back to daily reality, where they see "Jesus only", in the lowliness of his human nature, and are invited to return to the valley, to share with him the toil of God's plan and to set off courageously on the way of the Cross.

... *All are equally called to follow Christ*, to discover in him the ultimate meaning of their lives, until they are able to say with the Apostle: "For me to live is Christ" (Phil 1:21). But those who are

called to the consecrated life have a *special experience of the light which shines forth from the Incarnate Word*... “Lord, it is well that we are here” (Matt 17:4). These words bespeak the Christocentric orientation of the whole Christian life. But they also eloquently express the *radical* nature of the vocation to the consecrated life: how good it is for us to be with you, to devote ourselves to you, to make you the one focus of our lives! Truly those who have been given the grace of this special communion of love with Christ feel as it were caught up in his splendour.<sup>14</sup>

A consecrated person is the one who lives within the light of Jesus Christ. “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matt 6:21). The unique treasure of the Kingdom gives rise to desire, anticipation, commitment and witness.

A colleague among the Major Superiors took me aside and told me that he did not at all appreciate my talk and that he thought I was too optimistic. He brought me to the refectory and asked me to observe how the tables were dressed and he left me there looking at the tables without seeing anything special. During the time of personal meditation, I walked again towards the refectory, but unfortunately I did not see anything particular on the tables. I earnestly requested that he accompany me to the refectory so that he could give me some more light on his attitude about my talk. This he did.

Next he asked me to read what was written on various tables. The tables were set to serve more than 300 consecrated persons. Two-thirds of the tables had a notice “without”: without salt; without sugar; without milk; without wheat; without tomatoes; without chili; without onion; without oil; without alcohol; without water; without cassava flour; without maize flour ... My colleague asked me: “Do these table settings with their signs say anything to you?” “Not at all,” I replied. He added: “This is the icon of our consecrated life today.”<sup>15</sup>

Life without love, without faithfulness; without humility; without peace of mind; without community life; without happiness;

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<sup>14</sup> *VC* 14, 15.

<sup>15</sup> Here, of course, the interlocutor is not using icon in the technical sense of the word; rather he is using it to mean “metaphor”. (Editor’s Note)

without poverty; without chastity; without obedience; without care for one another; without praying together; without authority; without a model; without an Absolute Truth; without sharing meals together; without having recreation together; without meditation; without any reference; without any monthly recollection; without a yearly retreat; without common recreation; without common life; without a master; without any struggle for holiness; without work; without any initiative; without celebrating the Holy Eucharist. In a word, consecrated life has become arid, without roots. It is a consecrated life without Christ.

Because no human being can live without the sacred, if individuals dispense with the truly life-giving, sustaining roots that Christ provides, they will either wittingly or unwittingly plant weeds in the soil of their lives. Hence they gradually damage the inner desire to be for Christ, with Christ and in Christ.

## **6. African Family, a Network of Interpersonal Relationships**

“The future of the world and of the Church passes through the family,” says St. John Paul II. According to Pope John Paul, both for the Church and for civil society the family is the foundation: “Not only is the Christian family the first cell of the living ecclesial community, it is also the fundamental cell of society. In Africa in particular, the family is the foundation on which the social edifice is built.”<sup>16</sup> The individual person exists only as a part of the family community. “I am because we are,” says Mbiti.

The word “family” in Africa must be understood with a much wider meaning than in the thought of the societies who consider themselves to develop according to a nuclear family structure. The nuclear family is more enclosed in itself, whereas that of Africans is more all-encompassing. That is what the extended family is all about.<sup>17</sup> Africans recognize each other as family members and

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<sup>16</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation “Ecclesia in Africa”* (14 Sep 1995) 80, [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va). (Referred in the article as *EA*).

<sup>17</sup> By nuclear family, I mean a family that consists of one father, one mother and their children: in some cultures this is considered to be the social unit. There is not much room for outsiders out of the above mentioned to step

consequently have family relations to a degree which seems puzzling to the mindset of cultures that are exclusively based on the nuclear family. This finely knit network of relationships connotes the family as the unique place for community communion among its members. The family becomes an oasis of rest, security and identity. Such an understanding confirms the anthropological golden rule that a human being is a social being. Benedict XVI highlights it this way: “One of the deepest forms of poverty a person can experience is isolation. If we look closely at other kinds of poverty, including material forms, we see that they are born from isolation, from not being loved or from difficulties in being able to love. Poverty is often produced by a rejection of God’s love, by man’s basic and tragic tendency to close in”.<sup>18</sup> How can a young African leave such a bedrock of security? A bad dream for an African is to be isolated by the rest of the community. No life without the community or the family.

We can conjecture that the majority of present-day European cultural mindsets do not easily understand that Africans have neither cousins, nor paternal uncles, nor maternal aunts, nor nephews, nor nieces. Instead, all male cousins are brothers and all female cousins are sisters. Moreover, all brothers of our father are not uncles but rather they are our fathers and all sisters of our mother are our mothers. Our brother’s children are our children, too. We have the same authority over them as our brother. That seems very strange for many European mindsets.

In Africa, it would be a great insult for a child to call the brother of his father “uncle”. This could eventuate a kind of curse upon the child. It is regarded as a blatant lack of respect. The parents have the responsibility to teach their children not to consider everybody

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in. Whereas the extended family is a family group with a close relationship among the members that includes not only parents and children but also uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces, cousins, and grandparents. All belong to the same family. The ideal African family is based on the extended family system where members are united in a common ancestor who gives each person his or her identity. Further reading: J. MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications 1994, 106-107.

<sup>18</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Encyclical Letter “Caritas in Veritate”* (28 Jun 2009), 53, [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va). (Referred in the article as *CV*).



as cousins, uncles or aunts but rather as sisters, brothers, mothers and fathers. The lesson behind this is to educate the children with a sense of belonging together, of growing in togetherness as one strong and big family. From early childhood, parents reinforce the notion that there is no life outside of the communion of the family. The family becomes the centre of the possible human ties among the members. On this matter in his book *The Family of the Church*, Bishop Murphy states that “the strength of any human family lies in the internal unity, trust and love of its members which gives it in turn the strength and confidence to share in the wider community of the world and play a creative part within it.”<sup>19</sup>

## 7. The African Family Is Present Everywhere

We should look at African life as a “being with”. By their very nature, Africans are a “being with”. That means they are taught from their very youth through sayings and proverbs that any human being is powerless without the family, that is to say, without the communion that ought to characterize and typify the family. There exist popular African proverbs such as *Mtu ni Watu*, which can literally be translated as “The human being is people” and *Kidole kimoja hakivunji chawa*, which means “One finger does not pick out a louse.” These sayings emphasize the togetherness dimension and underscore the fact that the family is the first place of education and human formation. The family, so to say, is the first school where every person experiences and tastes the life of communion. There is no individual life: life outside the community means nothingness. Anyone living outside the community and the communion that the community offers is considered as a living dead. The young people who get married, for example, are entrusted with a child to nurture and care for, whether that child may be a nephew or a niece. In one sense, they have left the family; but in another sense the family is still their home. African marriage is more than a covenant between two people. There is something more: it is a covenant between two families; between two clans.

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<sup>19</sup> C. MURPHY – O’CONNOR, *The Family of the Church*, London: Darnton Longman and Todd 1984, 1.

This can be even applied to consecrated life. By the fact that the family has a child who is consecrated, all the members of the family automatically see themselves as a vibrant participation in their beloved's consecration by way of witnessing, i.e., by identifying themselves with their consecrated brother, sister, son or daughter. The family becomes the light of the parish and a reference for other families. The young woman who joins a congregation brings the family with her. Considering her own past, many hands contributed to her education until she reached this stage. It is not easy for her to disconnect herself from the family.

I do not know any African consecrated who in one way or another does not care for his or her family. I know young consecrated people who deprive themselves in order to meet the needs of their family. They do whatever they can in order to care for their elderly parents and to pay school fees for one of their young brothers and sisters.

There is no greater curse than being cut off from the community. "To be with" is to be in harmony with one's family, to be in communion with them. How can you convince an African to leave his family when his family does not leave him? Once the sense of 'being with' evaporates, the integrity of this particular consecrated religious diminishes. Energy and vital force wane. In order to avoid such disastrous situations, parents repeat unceasingly to their children this principle of life: "I am because you are; and without you, I am not; you and I are the community."<sup>20</sup> The moral imperative that lies behind all this is that one ought to strive as much as possible to incorporate the individual into a vibrant communion of brothers and sisters.

The Fathers of the First African Synod wonderfully elucidated the fact that without the family, society does not exist:

By its nature, the family extends beyond the individual household; it is oriented towards society. The family has vital and

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<sup>20</sup> For more information, Cf. J. MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 108; A.E. OROBATOR, *The Church as Family. African Ecclesiology in Its Social Context*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1999, 154-155; S. BOCKIE, *Death and the invisible Powers: The World of Congo Belief*, Indiana, 1993, 10. He is quoted by Orobator: "No one speaks of 'my life' separated from 'our life'".

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organic links with society, since it is its foundation and nourishes it continually through its role of service to life: it is from the family that citizens are born and it is within the family that they find the first school of the social virtues that are the animating principle of the existence and development of society itself.<sup>21</sup>

At the risk of repeating myself, Africans are very conscious of their being for one another and with one another. In *Bantu Customs in Mainland Tanzania*, Van Pelt reinforces this same idea: "Africans feel responsible for one another and are held responsible for one another by the other groups of related people. They keep in contact with one another and frequently stay with one another. They rely on each other in all circumstances and are very much interested in the family's offspring."

This is how the extended family in Africa operates. It creates the 'being with' ready to relate to others, to help them, to live with them and die for them. Van Pelt goes on to stress that, "since the nuclear family is only a cell in the extended family, it is natural that the children belong to the extended family."<sup>22</sup> In Africa, we consider the nuclear family as an island. And no one can live as an island; he will soon die. Africans are called to be open to others, to 'be with'. This is why an African is evaluated more by the persons with whom he or she associates rather than what he or she has. "To be with" or "not to be with" is the radical question for Africans. To have or not to have comes afterwards. In fact, an African might get rich, but the wealth is not his/her alone. It is for the whole family, because his/her being is always 'being with'. Otherwise the more he/she has, the less he/she is.

No African can let his family die because of the way of life he has chosen to follow. How can a young consecrated African who has three full meals a day live peacefully his religious vow of poverty while knowing that his family is in a very alarming situation of misery? He knows that his relatives do not study for lack of tuition fees; he knows that his aging parents do not have proper shelter; he knows that the family eats hardly one full meal

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<sup>21</sup> EA 85.

<sup>22</sup> P. VAN PELT, *Bantu Customs in Mainland Tanzania*, Tabora: TMP 1977, 13-15.

a day. When we seek to concretize the vow of poverty for our respective communities, we should not neglect consideration of those families among us that suffer abject poverty. If you do not seek to resolve these problems, you can be sure that you are creating only hypocrites. Let us find the ways and the means for coming to the aid of the one whose family is suffering acute economic distress. It is integral to our mission to help them. If you do not do it publicly, be sure that the member will find a way to care for his/her family in a manner that preserves confidentiality, respect and trust among all the members of the community, particularly with superiors.

The African family, therefore, is a home where one finds security, identity, solidarity, frank and open dialogue, listening to one another, mutual participation and understanding, a sense of belonging – in one succinct phrase, a communion of life. In other words, the family in Africa, distinguished for its capacity to make life flourish, engenders communion: this can enrich very much the nature and the mission of the Consecrated Life and even of the Universal Church.

## **8. Weaknesses of the African Family**

The concept of family in Africa, however, presents some negative connotations and weak elements to which we should pay more attention in case we would like to apply it to the consecrated life. We do not intend here to go into details of the defects in the understanding of family. Nonetheless, we find it necessary to elucidate this point by bringing up some examples.

African families seem to be sometimes very exclusive. That is, families are defined on the basis of blood relationships. Blood ties are stronger than any other kind of bond. In this sense, we can understand that blood is life. Life in Africa is strength. It can either wax or wane. This operation of nurturing life is possible only within the limits of the blood relationship. Whenever an African gets into trouble or unfortunate events happen in his or her life, he/she takes a first step by consulting his/her own relatives to whom he/she is related through blood.

Africans believe that no curse could come from outside the blood relationship. It is often said as in the case of my tribe, ‘the

insect which destroys a grain of bean is within the grain and not outside it'. Life is inside the blood ties. Life can degenerate within those same blood ties. It is indisputable that in the family way of relating to one another the blood ties dominate. This is why some African conflicts are aroused simply because people would like to defend their own identity or their blood ties. The "genocidal" killing in Rwanda can be a clear illustration of such a strong and wrong conception of blood relationship. The consequences of such a conception are horrible and go even against the inner values of African culture. What are these consequences? Tribalism, racism, intolerance, segregation, hatred and injustice.

There is a saying in many of the world's languages, "Blood is thicker than water". In Swahili: *Damu ni nzito kuliko maji*. The saying expresses the fact that blood ties, that is to say, blood lineage exercises the prevailing influence on social bonds. An outsider can hardly share the intimacy of a family. It is almost impossible to get into the heart of a family which is not one's own. Who then is our brother? Our sister? Is it not the one from my clan? Who descends from the same ancestors as we ourselves? The ideal African family is based on the extended family system. The extension of the family reaches back through history to a common ancestry. Common ancestry unites the members of a family because it is a common blood lineage which gives each one his or her identity. Within this particular mindset about the nature of the extended family, the family's members may actively promote their blood relatives for economic, social, educational or political positions to the exclusion of everyone outside their family.

Nowadays even provincial chapters seem no longer to be a place where everyone can share their experiences as consecrated persons united to each other in a religious bond of sisterhood or brotherhood. Rather the chapters seem at times to be a boxing ring for power. People just come to vote for their clan or tribal candidate. It is unfortunate that even "the Church as well as the consecrated life suffers the same sickness as human society." The French Theologian Bernard Sesboüé does not seem to be

exaggerating when he says: “*The Church is always from the time and the culture in which she lives.*”<sup>23</sup>

## 9. Interpretation of What the Respondents Reported

As the tables in sections 4.1 and 4.2 indicate, the percentages of persons who cite the various motivators for religious life vary from 1 to 17: if 17 percent responded that a certain factor is motivating consecrated life, that factor would seem to be the most important to note. We recall what we have said previously about the centrality of Christ in consecrated life. By looking at this schema, we must acknowledge that there is a serious shift from Jesus as the principal motivator to other factors that may be quite secularist. In other words, there is a shift from the supremely fertile Root to roots that are indeed arid. Christ is no longer the Centre. That which has usurped the centre is a constellation of factors that unfortunately challenge in one way or another our way of living Consecrated Life. We can regroup these motivators into four categories:

Money:	Money-Egocentrism-Infidelity-Dishonesty
Power:	Power-Tribalism-Jealousy & Hatred-Witchcraft-Desire to Study-Rumours
Globalization:	Inter-cultural Globalisation & communication
Jesus:	Jesus-Mystery of Salvation-Eucharist-Prayer-Community Life-Vows.

We dare to say that there is a challenging shift from Christ as the heart of consecrated life to other values such as Money, Power, and Globalization. Let us make just a short comment on each of them from an African perspective:

### 9.1 Money

Consecrated persons in Africa are aware that they can no longer depend upon the aids and subsidies from Europe where faith is

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<sup>23</sup> B. SESBOUE, *N'ayez pas peur! Regards sur l'Eglise et les ministères aujourd'hui*, Paris: Desclée 1996, 14. Personal translation: “The Church is always from the time and the culture in which she lives.” *Ecclesia in Africa* 85.

dormant. We have to work hard on our own for self-reliance in order to be financially independent. The time has come to wake up, to find means for self-sustenance, to show that we are no longer mission countries (in the old sense of the word) though we are still under the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. Many of our entities have not yet reached the level of provinces because of lack of financial independence.

In order to be a province, if it were only the matter of the number of members, our Salvatorian circumscription could have become a full province many years ago. Now we are merely content with the appellation of Salvatorian Missionary Pro-province of Tanzania. We are lacking just one thing. That would be money in order to stand on our own. We will not be considered as grown up people unless we obtain the financial independence. While you major ministers are striving to find ways and means to liberate us from the chains of dependence, some of the members of your entities are operating in a way that is diametrically opposed to your endeavours.

Africa does not move forward because of bad management, the lack of the spirit of responsibility, the lack of the spirit of striving for the common ideal. Everyone is looking for his/her own interest. Consecrated persons are no longer trustworthy when they are running a sector of production. When a religious at the end of the day, of the week, of the month deposits 100.000 into the common account, be sure that he/she has kept another 100.000 for himself or herself. We have lost the sense of apostolate, the sense of gratuitousness, the sense of togetherness, the sense of the common good, the sense of belongingness and the sense of Christian solidarity. Instead, a strong sense of individualism has taken over.

We are all looking at our own pleasure, our own personal interest; nobody is ready to run a sector pro Deo which has no income. Work has replaced the apostolate. We are looking only for profit and interest. We have lost the sense of gratuitousness which was the copyright of consecrated life for centuries. Pope Benedict XVI reminds us: "The human being is made for gift, which expresses and makes present his transcendent dimension."<sup>24</sup> He

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<sup>24</sup> CV 34.

continues: “Economic, social and political development, if it is to be authentically human, needs to make room for the *principle of gratuitousness* as an expression of fraternity.”<sup>25</sup> Time has come to put the boundaries between work and apostolate<sup>26</sup> and to regain the old pride of consecrated life: gift and gratuitousness. “While in the past it was possible to argue that justice had to come first and gratuitousness could follow afterwards, as a complement, today it is clear that without gratuitousness, there can be no justice in the first place.”<sup>27</sup>

In the name of self-reliance, consecrated persons are destroying their own identity, the essence of their consecration. How many schools and hospitals are we building nowadays with the thought in mind not of the human being but of the profit, the financial interest that neglects the values of gift and gratuitousness? We sometimes have the most beautiful schools and the most expensive ones, but unfortunately, the poor cannot afford the school fees. Pope Benedict XVI reminds us: “Also in *commercial relationships* the *principle of gratuitousness* and the logic of gift as an expression of fraternity can and must *find their place within normal economic activity*. This is a human demand at the present time, but it is also demanded by economic logic. It is a demand both of charity and of truth.”<sup>28</sup>

Why is an African religious or a consecrated person accused of not being ready to exercise financial management? Many missionaries have accused Africans of lack of formation in the financial sphere; some others have accused consecrated Africans of joining Religious orders in order to escape family misery. They say that consecrated life is not for Africans because they have made it a kind of business in order to gain more money for their families. Why is a consecrated African striving for money?

To talk about money is to touch also the vow of poverty. How can I as an African live my vow of poverty in the context of the general poverty of the society in which I live? Is my poverty understood by my own family living in extreme misery? How can

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<sup>25</sup> CV 36.

<sup>26</sup> CV 36.

<sup>27</sup> CV 38.

<sup>28</sup> CV 36.



a consecrated man defend himself before his family who rent a small house in spite of the fact that the family is sizable while in the same neighbourhood another consecrated person has built a big and beautiful house for his family? These are questions to be scrutinized in order to understand the African consecrated soul. It is only by drawing from African anthropology that we can get some enlightenment.

## 9.2 Power

If one is a major superior, one has power. However, the power in the church is the power to serve and not to dominate. What is African power? We have to look to the African traditional way of exercising power. We know the various sorts of power: Theocratic – Monarchic – Dictatorial - Democratic. The kind of power that prevailed in Traditional Africa was that of the monarchy; in modern times, it was dictatorship. Democracy has been very slow to show its face.

In general, the priest has a royal power, and so he is a king.<sup>29</sup> No one can give what he/she does not have. We are children of our milieu, and the milieu shapes us even without our knowing it. A king is served and has around him servants who serve him. He does not work, but there are people who work for him. When he is absent, he leaves his glasses as a sign of his presence. Nobody can sit on his chair. He is the lord, the one to be greeted respectfully. Everyone has to walk in his footsteps. You cannot oppose him. He can build houses and run his own businesses, can have many wives without anybody questioning him.

The co-workers of the king are his close relatives from his clan, from his tribe. Power is to be protected, and this will happen only with the help of the clan and the tribe. Nobody from outside of the tribe can reach the hard core of his power without endangering his/her own life. The king is ready to kill and to use every means possible to preserve his power. He is supposed to favour his own

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<sup>29</sup> *LG* 10: "The ministerial priesthood, by the sacred power he enjoys, molds and rules the priestly people. Acting in the person of Christ, he brings about the Eucharistic Sacrifice, and offers it to God in the name of all the people. For their part, the faithful join in the offering of the Eucharist by virtue of their royal priesthood."

people; otherwise he will be considered as treacherous. You do not become a king alone: everyone in your clan and tribe remain inseparable from you. So, you as king have the power to do whatever you like; to use money as you wish, for example, without fearing any one.

The African King equals the Kingdom and the Kingdom equals the King. We are the icon of our society both traditional and modern. When you have power, you have also money. When you have money, you also have power. That is why consecrated Africans are ready to resort to sorcery and witchcraft in order to get power or to protect it against those who want it. In a word, there is nowadays the struggle of the fittest; the struggle for power. The person thirsty for power is the one hungry for respect.

Having this in mind, you can understand why even African consecrated persons are striving for power. Power is always for the family, for the clan and not for anyone else outside the clan circle. Understanding power as the will to dominate and not to serve provokes hatred and fighting. Nowadays, consecrated persons are ready to use any means to destroy others in order to protect power or in order to get it. We are all aware of the misuse of means of communication when a person has in mind only one purpose: to destroy others. You are not foreigners to anonymous messages disseminated in order to destroy someone's life.

Consecrated life has become like any other business. What matters is power! This enables us to understand why the vocation of brotherhood is dying in Africa. Many congregations face the challenge of seeing their religious brothers expressing their desire to change their vocational path in order to be priests. Brotherhood does not pay. Why are Africans acting like this? I would not like to point a finger. I will just say that there seems to be a lack of solid formation and a crisis of religious identity.

When I say formation, I also have in mind the lack of formation for the formators. How is it possible to appoint a young priest as a Novice Master soon after his ordination and then to rationalize this decision by a simple reference to lack of personnel? He might be a saint, but still such a noble apostolate cannot be entrusted to him. He needs to be anchored not only in his convictions but in his experience as a religious before he is appointed for such a noble

service. It is now recommended in the formation houses to have a team of formators, that is to say, at least three but never one. We can never talk of serious formation with only one formator having beside his work, the house to run and maybe also the parish. Let us avoid making business men instead of guides for souls. Why have African consecrated persons transformed consecrated life into a business enterprise or a business career? What must we do in order to face such intimidating challenges?

### 9.3 The African Family as a Challenge

The family remains united with the consecrated person; it does not leave him or her alone. Many will say we have to evangelize African families so that they may arrive at a true understanding of religious consecration: "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven. Then, come and follow me" (Matt 19:12). This verse has been the guiding star for our forefathers in consecrated life. It can be said that the meaning of this reference is quite clear: "Quit everything for Christ by serving the poor as Christ would serve the poor". Who are the poor?

For Africans, the family are the first ones to be considered as the poor: the widowed mother; the sick father; the old parents; brothers and sisters yearning to study but lacking school fees; orphans of dead brothers and sisters; uncles and aunts who paid our school fees and are waiting for a sign of acknowledgment. The Scriptures do not urge Christ's follower to "quit" the family in order to commit oneself totally to Christ. After all, during his earthly life, Jesus did not abandon his mother; instead he entrusted her to his Beloved Disciple before his death. Even Simon Peter thought about his mother-in-law and asked Jesus to grant him a favour on her behalf. Jesus responded by curing her: "Jesus entered the house of Peter, and saw his mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. He touched her hand, the fever left her, and she rose and waited on him" (Matt 8:14-15). We Africans should develop a spirituality based on the powerful words of Jesus to his beloved disciple: "Woman, behold, your son". Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother". And from that hour the disciple took her into his home" (John 19:26-27).

Any spirituality which tries to convince an African to cut himself or herself off from the family will fail. The work of the African theologians is to scrutinize the sort of care that the community of the disciples provided for Jesus' mother and the care she provided for them. Nevertheless, we are sure of one thing: she accompanied them everywhere. She became one of the active community and not just an idle woman. She knew her Son better than anyone else. When I read this text, I actually do not advert so much to the words of Jesus to his mother and his beloved disciple, but rather to his GAZE. Can we imagine the horrible sufferings he was enduring? Still he is able to see his mother among the multitude of people. "When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple he loved..." (John 19:26). Do you see or can you see your beloved Mother and through her your beloved family in your daily consecration?

Even after Jesus' resurrection, not only Mary but the entire family of Jesus remained united with the disciples: "All these devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with some women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers" (Acts 1:16). Let us use in a very positive sense a Swahili saying: *Damu ni nzito kuliko maji*. What do we do with the families of our deceased confreres? Do we still have contact with them? When did you last visit the families of our deceased?

Moreover, the disciples knew that the heart of a mother is a precious treasure. It is only a mother who can talk properly and in depth about her son. A mother knows her son. The disciples knew that Mary had many things to share with them about her Son because as the Scripture tells us "she kept everything in her heart" (Luke 2:15.51). As a sign of acknowledgement from her Son, she was now the Mother of the entire community. She was with the community of disciples the day of Pentecost, the day when the Church appeared publicly for the first time. The heart of Mary is a mystery we must contemplate in order to understand her son. She is a living tabernacle that contains the living Christ. Christ can reveal to us how there is no contradiction between being consecrated and remaining united with the family.

## 9.4 Globalization

The world has become a very small village. We are connected to each other. We are living in a world without boundaries. Communication technology offers plenty of opportunities. "When people exchange information, they are already sharing themselves, their view of the world, their hopes, and their ideals."<sup>30</sup> Today humanity appears much more interactive than in the past: this shared sense of being close to one another must be transformed into true communion. *The development of peoples depends, above all, on recognition that the human race is a single family* working together in true communion, not simply a group of subjects who happen to live side by side.<sup>31</sup>

However, our society has become too noisy. It is a matter of looking around us to see how people have become slaves of the new means of communication. People have no time for themselves. Everybody seems to be busy. A concrete example is the use of cell phones in our University College. It is seldom that one sees a student outside the class not manipulating a cell phone. Everybody is busy with his/her cell phone: talking, listening to music, chatting with a friend, watching a movie, consulting his mails, and so on. Sometimes, we may even see professors leaving the classrooms and going out to respond to a call. On the way, you may come across two people walking together and one is busy talking to his/her cell phone without paying attention to the other. How many times during a meeting or an assembly do we hear phones ringing and people running outside to answer them? How often during Mass, do we hear phones making noise?

This means of communication which is actually virtual becomes more important than any other form of relationship. We do not truly meet each other anymore. Everyone seems to be busy and not care for the other. People living in the same house or the same community do not have time to meet each other, to sit together, to see each other; instead they communicate through

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<sup>30</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Message for the 45<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day "Truth, Proclamation and Authenticity of Life in the Digital Age"* (5 Jun 2011), [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

<sup>31</sup> *CV* 53.

emails and SMS. Let us listen to this non-human story: “I remember a true story of a sick friend of mine, who once went for a check-up to a physician. Instead of dealing with the sick person, the physician was busy responding to different calls from his friends talking about their last weekend; there were other calls catching his attention from his patients who were asking about the medicines they should be taking. Whenever he came back to my sick friend lying on the consultation bed, it was just to say, “Sorry, sir, you know, nowadays we are so busy”. He completely forgot the sick person before him. At the end, my friend just decided to leave the place with these words: “Sorry, Doctor, I think with you it is better to make a check-up through the cell phone. Let me leave now... I will phone you once I am at home for my check-up.”

Other eye-catching examples concern consecrated persons. Once we went to visit a certain community of ours. During the community meal, we realized that eight out of ten were outside talking on the phone. Another living example is about a religious man who was travelling from Morogoro to Dar-es-salaam. When he reached Chalinze, he realized that he has forgotten his two cell phones. He decided to drive back home after ninety kilometres in order to find his phones. He said to us he could not live without the cell phone. On our way back, a confrere asked him: “Do you have your breviary?” He answered, “No”. He continued: “He could not drive back to Morogoro for a breviary. Unbelievable!”

Moreover, in our religious houses, it is sometimes horrible. There are some consecrated persons who are using their cell phones the whole night through without caring for the others. In the convents where it is forbidden to possess the cell phone, nights offer members opportunities for communication. In these houses, the superiors are the only ones to think – unfortunately – that members do not possess cell phones while everyone has one even two cell phones. You will unfortunately see some religious men and women leave the chapel in order to answer a call outside, sometimes with a loud voice disturbing those inside. The question is: Is it proper nowadays to forbid cell phones to religious persons be they in initial formation or in on-going formation? For us, such a question is meaningless and out-dated. We think it is inappropriate to build any kind of spirituality or formation on the

basis of “it is forbidden to have a cell phone”. Instead, let us find means to form a religious sense of responsibility. The question actually is no longer whether religious members have to possess a cell phone; rather the issue is to form them to maturity, truth, to honesty because only the truth will make them free (John 8:32).

At this point, let us listen to the voice of one of the brilliant theologians of our time, Benedict XVI, who is actually waking up people on the issue of the means of communication. He says:

The new technologies are not only changing the way we communicate, but communication itself, so much that it could be said that we are living through a period of vast cultural transformation. This means spreading information and knowledge is giving birth to a new way of learning and thinking, with unprecedented opportunities for establishing relationships and building fellowship. In the digital world, transmitting information increasingly means making it known within a social network where knowledge is shared in the context of personal exchanges. The new technologies allow people to meet each other beyond the confines of space and of their own culture, creating in this way an entire new world of potential friendships. This is a great opportunity.<sup>32</sup>

Meanwhile, we need to be careful, underlines Benedict XVI. He goes on to say: “It also requires greater attention to and awareness of possible risks. Who is my ‘neighbour’ in this new world? It is important always to remember that virtual contact cannot and must not take the place of direct human contact with people at every level of our lives.”

## 10 Parish Life Needs a Parish Spirituality

Community life is one of the main pillars of consecrated life. What is community life? Nowadays, the reality we call community life is challenging. Is community life living under the same roof? Is community life sharing the same meal and then afterwards each going his own way? Is community life living in the same parish

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<sup>32</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Message for the 46<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day “Silence and Word: Path of Evangelization”* (20 May 2012), [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

without any religious life commitment? Is religious life living as a parish priest and once a month joining his religious community for a common meal? Many who are considered to be experts of religious life and consecrated life do not hesitate to say that parish life is destroying our community life because pastoral spirituality is far different from the spirituality of religious life. Many of us would say, on the other hand, that it depends on one's personal organisation. It is true, but parish life possesses its own obligations which are quite distinct from the rule for religious.

Let us take a concrete example of parish life in Dar-es-Salaam: how demanding it seems to be. How does it integrate with the consecrated life with all its small rules such as praying together three or four times during the day, eating together three times, common recreation every evening, watching TV together, monthly community meeting, monthly recollection, yearly retreat...

Obedience is the soul of religious and consecrated life: is it a matter of serving two masters at the same time, the bishop and the local major Minister or Superior? Broadly speaking, there exists actually a kind of perpetual tension between parish pastoral life and religious pastoral life. It is a matter of looking back to the origin and evolution of religious and consecrated life in order to understand the dangerous shift that seems to have changed the compass of our life's direction. Everyone is struggling to get appointed in town. Many religious priests consider it to be a punishment to be appointed to a remote diocese or a remote parish. They dream of quitting Kahama, Tunduru, or Ifakara... for Dar-es-Salaam because of the apparently easy life in Dar.

I want to highlight one fact which many do not keep in mind. A parish is canonically a parish of the diocese, not of the religious congregation. We may be serving the parishes as parish priests, but at any time the bishops can choose to relieve us of the parishes. It is wrong to say that it is a Franciscan parish, or a Claretian parish, or a Spiritan parish... Consecrated persons do not have a parish.

Parishes may hinder us from creating new forms of apostolate. We might become complacent: because we are pleased to be parish priests, we do not recognize the fact that as religious, as consecrated persons, it is not our charism simply to serve in the



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parishes but rather to sustain the Church in other apostolic ventures, at the peripheries, at the outskirts of the cities.<sup>33</sup>

Many congregations have inadvertently become more clerical than religious; even those old orders which had religious brotherhood as their seal. One of the challenges that the old Orders is facing is that even the religious brothers aspire to priesthood. How many brothers have expressed enough disenchantment with the brotherhood that they have shifted their aspirations and now declare that they wish to be priests? To be a priest is to have power.

A "Bruder" is the helper of the priest. This image is highly emphasized when the "Bruder" lives in a parish. Religious Brotherhood has no market any more, especially in Africa. The time of the "Bruder" is behind us. To be a "Bruder" seems to mean to be a slave of the priest. Moreover, in most cases, those who join as Brothers don't have enough education. Those who become "Bruder" are those who initially joined with the intention of priesthood but on the way failed. In other words, they are a "Bruder" by accident and not by vocation. Nobody understands why a young man can join a congregation just for brotherhood. Our own faithful do not understand. Even worse our families! Is this not a sign that the religious life or the consecrated life in Africa may be flawed?

## **11. What Drives the African Family?**

As we have mentioned previously, consecrated life in Africa can only be discussed in the context of the African family. If we dissociate the two, we are in danger of dressing African consecration in false shades of meaning. Certain words of Saint John Paul II carry their own impact:

When marriage is not esteemed, neither can consecrated virginity or celibacy exist; when human sexuality is not regarded as a great value given by the Creator, the renunciation of it for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven loses its meaning. Rightly indeed does St. John Chrysostom say: "Whoever denigrates marriage also

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<sup>33</sup> Using again Pope Francis categories: "The Church has to go to the outskirts of cities to meet the needy."

diminishes the glory of virginity. Whoever praises it makes virginity more admirable and resplendent.”<sup>34</sup>

Whoever denigrates the African family also diminishes the possibility for happiness in the consecrated life. When the African family is underestimated, neither can consecrated life exist. Therefore, there is an urgent need for proper inculturation so that the African way of living consecrated life may find its proper anchoring point in African anthropology: “African, who are you?” This question is fundamental because as John Paul II says: “For the Church all ways lead to *man*.”<sup>35</sup> He explains more: <sup>36</sup>

The Church cannot abandon man, for his "destiny", that is to say his election, calling, birth and death, salvation or perdition, is so closely and unbreakably linked with Christ... Since this man is the way for the Church, the way for her daily life and experience, for her mission and toil, the Church of today must be aware in an always new manner of man's "situation". That means that she must be aware of his possibilities, which keep returning to their proper bearings and thus revealing themselves. She must likewise be aware of the threats to man and of all that seems to oppose the endeavor “to make human life ever more human” and make every element of this life correspond to man's true dignity—in a word, she must be aware of *all that is opposed* to that process.

There is an urgent need for evangelization of the processes of inculturation, the processes by which catechesis '*takes flesh*' in the various cultures because “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us”. That means God became man in a particular culture, in a particular race, in a particular civilization in order to purify all cultures.

That is what John Paul II declares in *Ecclesia in Africa*: “This is the sublime mystery of the Incarnation of the Word, a mystery which took place *in history*: in clearly defined circumstances of time and space, amidst a people with its own culture, a people that God had chosen and accompanied throughout the entire history of

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<sup>34</sup> FC 16.

<sup>35</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Encyclical Letter “Redemptor Hominis”* (4 Mar 1979), 14, [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va). (Referred in the article as *RH*).

<sup>36</sup> *RH* 14.

salvation, in order to show through what he did for them what he intended to do for the whole human race."<sup>37</sup>

For this reason, inculturation includes two dimensions: on the one hand, "the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity" and, on the other, "the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures".<sup>38</sup> "Considering the rapid changes in the cultural, social, economic and political domains, our local Churches must be involved in the process of inculturation in an on-going manner, respecting the two following criteria: compatibility with the Christian message and communion with the universal Church ... In all cases, care must be taken to avoid syncretism".<sup>39</sup>

## 12. A Call to Africanise Consecrated Life

Theologians have worked hard for decades on the insertion of Christian values in the African culture; the insertion of the original consecrated life of the anchorite Saint Anthony, the coenobites Saints Pacomius and Saint Basil, Saint Benedict the monk, and the mendicants Saint Francis of Assisi and Saint Dominic. We Africans have tried to live like them for many years but unfortunately without much success. Let us try to deepen the first dimension; perhaps this will bring us to true achievements. That is 'the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity'. Pope St. Paul VI noted that "the world is in trouble because of the lack of thinking". He was making an observation, but also expressing a wish: a new trajectory for cognitive process is needed in order to arrive at a better understanding of the implications of our being African consecrated persons.<sup>40</sup>

During his first African pastoral visit to Uganda in 1969 the same pope made an unforgettable appeal to African theologians: "*You may, and must, have an African Christianity*". In other words, "*By now on, you Africans are missionaries to yourselves,*" declared

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<sup>37</sup> EA 60.

<sup>38</sup> EA 59.

<sup>39</sup> EA 62.

<sup>40</sup> CV 54.

Pope St. Paul VI.<sup>41</sup> That means, “You may, and must have an African Theology, an African Liturgy, an African Christology, an African Consecrated Life and at the end an African Christianity”.<sup>42</sup> Pope Paul VI opened up wide the doors to Africans so that we might feel at home in the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. As Pope Francis has said, the Church is “the house for all and not a small chapel that can hold only a small group of elected people. We must not reduce the bosom of the Universal Church to a nest protecting our mediocrity”.<sup>43</sup> Paul VI’s call to have an African Christianity was actually a very revolutionary declaration from a Pope. And it had immediate effect on the entire Church in Africa. The unity of the Church does not demand uniformity, as we learn from the experience of Eastern Catholics. However, the principle of diversity is now intensified in its application to the faithful of the Roman rite.<sup>44</sup>

We may truly say that the Pope’s declaration blended beautifully with the African wish to make necessary liturgical adaptations to the lifestyle and culture of Africans.<sup>45</sup> It is after this declaration that the Church in the Congo, after the approval of her rite of the Mass (Rite Zaïrois), started to worship God using the vernacular languages in the liturgy: to clap hands, to dance during the celebration, and to use drums, guitars, and many other local

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<sup>41</sup> J. BAUR, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Nairobi: Pauline Publication Africa 2009, 452.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 444-452.

<sup>43</sup> Editor’s Note: This interview with Pope Francis took place over the course of three meetings during August 2013 in Rome. The interview was conducted in person by Antonio Spadaro, SJ, editor in chief of *La Civiltà Cattolica*, the Italian Jesuit journal. Father Spadaro conducted the interview on behalf of *La Civiltà Cattolica*, America and several other major Jesuit journals around the world. The editorial teams at each of the journals prepared questions and sent them to Father Spadaro, who then consolidated and organized them. The interview was conducted in Italian. After the Italian text was officially approved, America commissioned a team of five independent experts to translate it into English. America is solely responsible for the accuracy of this translation.

<sup>44</sup> VATICAN II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy “*Sacrosanctum Concilium*” (4 Dec 1963) 37, [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va). (Referred in the article as *SC*).

<sup>45</sup> *SC* 37.

African musical instruments.<sup>46</sup> It is worth emphasizing that whatever the African rite may happen to be, there are always songs adapted to particular circumstances be it a birth, a funeral, the birth of twins, the beginning and conclusion of initiation, or the circumcision which accompanies those rituals. This is the reason why people have said: "Africans sing in time and out of time". We are born with rhythm in our blood.<sup>47</sup> Music is in our blood.<sup>48</sup> Musical instruments such as drums never feel out of place.<sup>49</sup> In the words of Bernard Lonergan: "... The world mediated by meaning is not only a world known by the sense experience of an individual but the external experience and internal experience of a cultural community, and by the continuously checked and rechecked judgments of the community. Knowing, accordingly, is not just seeing; it is experiencing, understanding, judging and believing."<sup>50</sup> To borrow one of Lonergan's favourite expressions, our celebrations are polymorphic expressions of cultural consciousness. Eucharistic celebrations are moments of symphonic joy.<sup>51</sup> This applies to consecrated life and indeed touches the interior heart of our faith: Christ.

### 13. A Call to Africanise Christianity

Thankfully, Africans can worship their God according to their milieu, their language, their space, their body, and their mind. I recall a solemn exhortation of the late Joseph Cardinal Malula,

<sup>46</sup> JOHN BAUR, *2000 Years of Christianity*, 448.

<sup>47</sup> L. KABASELE, *Liturgies africaines, l'enjeu culturel, ecclesial et théologique*, Kinshasa: FCK 1996, 26-27.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 26-28. « En Afrique noire, le rythme est souverain. Il est partout et en tout. L'expérience commune est que le monde tourne dans un rythme : les saisons se succèdent, l'homme naît, grandit et meurt ». « Aussi danse-t-on de joie, comme on danse de peine. On danse l'amour comme on danse la colère et la haine. On danse le repos comme on danse le travail. Car partout, il s'agit du rythme et de l'harmonie à rétablir ou à maintenir par ce thème ». Dance goes together with singing.

<sup>49</sup> SC 116.119.

<sup>50</sup> B. LONERGAN, *Method in Theology*, New York: Seaburg 1979, 237-244.

<sup>51</sup> L. KABASELE, *Liturgies africaines*, 16. Célébrer l'eucharistie en Afrique: Celebrating Eucharist in Africa.

the first Congolese Cardinal: “*A few decades ago, he says, missionaries came to Christianize Africa; the time has come for Africans to Africanize Christianity*”.<sup>52</sup> If we expect encouraging results in our endeavours, we must take to heart the fact that the call to Africanise even the consecrated life has become an urgent appeal to action. In other words, it is the duty of African Christian theologians to articulate their own experience of Jesus as the Risen and Living One. This appeal remains vapid if we do not commit ourselves to a very intense intercultural dialogue between African tradition and Christianity. I rather prefer the concept of inter-culturality than in-culturation because the term inter-culturality stresses the bi-directional character of the optimal strategy. Instead of a one-way strategy that seems to be the nuance of the word “inculturation”, we should build a way with a double direction that both offers and receives.

Moreover, this is a typical African metaphor. In many of our countries, we do not have highways where everyone is going in one direction. Rather what distinguishes our landscape are roads with two traffic directions. Analogously, we must do the same with our interior and community life: only by integrating our Christianity with our African-ness and our African-ness with our Christianity, will we be able to build a strong consecrated life with African-Christian roots. As I mentioned previously, up to now Christianity was the one who was giving and Africa was there just to receive; but now the time has come to try it the other way around. What can African Tradition offer to Christianity for a strong and meaningful African consecrated life and for a strong and meaningful Christianity in its global dimensions?

## Conclusion

We are indeed grateful that by declaring the Year of the Family in 2014 and then the Year of the Consecrated Life in 2015, the Church has offered us wonderful opportunities to think about our consecrated life as Africans. This is the favorable time to organize seminars and workshops with experts to seriously think about our

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<sup>52</sup> F. LUYEYE LUBOLOKO, *Le Cardinal J.A. Malula un pasteur prophétique*, Kinshasa: Editions “Jean XXIII” 1999, 4.

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African way of living the consecrated life, especially our manner of living the pillars of the consecrated life, such as prayer, life in community, the life of the vows, and our commitments to God in the African milieu. Without the central Root, Jesus, other roots cannot hold fast. We must understand that God became man in Christ and dwelt amidst our culture so that we, African consecrated persons, with our own culture like his may become like him. That means that we are to be an "alter Christus". Hitherto, we have Christianised our African way of life without too much success; now the moment has come to Africanise the consecrated life. By God's grace we will succeed! Aggiornamento!

## Appendix

What nowadays attracts consecrated persons? Please give 15 examples listed in order of priority. Kitu gani kina vutia hasa watawa siku hizi? Toa mifano 15 kutokona na umuhimo wake.

N <sup>o</sup>	Motivators	Respondents	%
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2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
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8.			
9.			
10.			
11.			
12.			
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