

RELIGIOUS OBEDIENCE IN THE CONSECRATED LIFE: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE LITURGICAL LIFE OF THE CHURCH

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the Message for the Year of the Consecrated Life by Pope Francis against the backdrop of religious obedience in the era of rampant liturgical disobedience. Religious obedience is a dominant concern of the modern society which has great liturgical implications. The article is not just scratching at the surface of filial obedience expected of all worshippers. It takes one right into the deepest recesses of one's person as a consecrated man or woman. It adopts exploratory cum narrative approach as a method of achieving this objective. The work gives a working definition of terms used and the theological basis of religious obedience. It is established in the work that the implication for the liturgical life of the Church is anchored on the filial obedience to the liturgical norms and laws. It is discovered that the Church and modern society really need the consecrated men and women in order to follow Christ closely especially with regard to obedience. If the consecrated persons in the Christian families of worshippers take seriously their vow of obedience, their lifestyle and example will facilitate their obedience to the liturgical norms thereby setting examples for others to follow. It further argues for the enrichment of African cultural values of obedience in the light of respect for elders and authority. The consecrated person should integrate these cultural values to their religious vow and live them out in the liturgical life of the Church.

1. INTRODUCTION

On the vigil for the first Sunday of Advent, celebrated on November 29, 2014, Pope Francis, among other things, stated in the Message for the Year of Consecrated Life that: "After consultation with the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and for Societies of Apostolic Life, I have chosen as the aims of this Year the same ones which Saint John Paul II proposed to the whole Church at the beginning of the third millennium, reiterating, in a certain sense, what he had earlier written in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*: "You have not only a glorious history to remember and to recount, but also a great history still to be accomplished! Look to the future, where the Spirit is sending you in order to do even greater

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things" (No.110).² There are some obvious landmarks in the life of the Consecrated persons. It is inspiring to realize that the life of consecrated men and women which was so prevalent in the early Church is still an integral part of our religion today. Nowadays, however, it is the subject of scrutinies, controversies and debates. As such, the life of consecrated men and women (Religious Brothers and Sisters) from different institutes of religious life and societies of apostolic life has been subjected to a lot of questioning in the contemporary society.³ Close scrutiny follows all practices of religious style of family life that hitherto have been shielded from public gaze and introspection. Traditional religious practices such as: the evangelical counsels, the three vows, the common life, the prayer patterns and exercise of piety and penance, the apostolate and ministries, the formation and training given to members, the media and recreational facilities etc., have been questioned and criticized. For instance, does religious obedience not constitute obstacle to human development, personal fulfilment and liturgical life of the Church? Why must one obey at the first instance? Why are there rampant tendencies today towards liturgical disobedience? Why are some consecrated persons flag bearers of liturgical disobedience? Is there any theological value for religious obedience? Has African custom any cultural heritage to be harnessed?

It is against this backdrop that the article examines religious obedience of the consecrated persons in the observance of the liturgical norms and laws of the Church. Historically, obedience characterized the new dawn of consecrated life in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. That time was coincident with the rise of individualism in its various manifestations. Evidently, religious obedience is a dominant concern of the modern society which has great liturgical implications. This article is not just scratching at the surface of filial obedience expected of all worshippers. It takes one right into the deepest recesses of one's person as a consecrated man or woman which contradicts the worldly value of selfish individualism. It explores into one's consecration to the Lord, the witness of life one bears in the manifestation of faith in the person of Jesus Christ through the evangelical counsel of obedience and its liturgical implication for the liturgical life of the Church. Our searchlight on religious obedience is a journey on the road to Emmaus by a new generation of consecrated persons, a journey into the authentic spirituality for the consecrated persons, a study with rich spiritual dimension to be of a greater service in building the Christian families of worshippers. Pope Francis

² Pope Francis, *Message for the Year of Consecrated Life* (Vatican City, November 29, 2014). The Year of Consecrated Life started on 30th November, 2014, the first Sunday of Advent, and would conclude with the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple on 2nd February, 2016.

³ Anthony A. Akinwale, "The Challenge of Religious Life Today" in *The Catholic Voyage*, Vol. 9 (January 2012) 10.

avers, "The joys of the Gospel fills the heart and lives of all who encounter Jesus. With Jesus Christ joy is constantly born anew."⁴

2. THE NATURE OF RELIGIOUS OBEDIENCE AND CONSECRATED LIFE

It is important to delineate the basic terms involved in this study for the purpose of clarity and better understanding. The terms will be explained not necessarily from their dictionary or encyclopaedic meanings, rather more from their contextual study. The terms to be considered are *religious obedience* and *consecrated life*. We begin with the nature of religious obedience. We need to understand who a religious is. A religious binds himself or herself to the congregation by the act of professing a vow. The 1983 Code of Canon Law defines a vow as a deliberate and free promise made to God, concerning some good which is possible and better. The virtue of a religious requires that it be fulfilled.⁵ The three vows professed by the religious are the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience.⁶ This work is primarily concerned with the vow of obedience.

The word obedience comes from the word "*ob-audire*", which means "to hear." It designates the willingness to hear others and to do their will. Obedience refers to hearing God and obeying the divine will which manifests itself in the will of other persons in authority.⁷ And so, religious obedience is that general submission which the religious vow to God, and voluntarily promises to their superiors, in order to be directed by them in the ways of perfection according to the purpose and constitutions of their order. Accordingly, the canonical legislation states that 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.⁸

⁴ Pope Francis, *Evangelium Gaudium, Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World* (Vaticana: Libreria Editrice, 2015) nr. 1.

⁵ *The Code of Canon Law* (London: Collins Liturgical Publications, 1983) Canon 1191 § 1.

⁶ Canon 573 § 2.

⁷ John W. Crossin, "Obedience" in *The New Dictionary of Theology* Joseph A. Komonchak et al (eds) (Bangalore: Theological Publications, 1996) 720.

⁸ Canon 601.

Let us consider consecrated life (rendered in Latin as *vita consecrata*) which is a vocation like marriage and diocesan priesthood. Both men and women can choose to dedicate their lives to Christ as a way to seek an intimate relationship with him. These men and women give witness that they are called to be ultimately united with Christ. They live the truth that only Christ can satisfy the deepest longings in a person's heart, and witness that this union provides a deeper joy than the secular world can give. They are members of a community who work together as a team in response to a common call from God to serve the people to whom he sends them.⁹

Essentially, consecrated life is the act by which lay persons or clerics wholly dedicate themselves to God, to his service and to the Church. As earlier stated, in Pope Francis' Message of the Year of the Consecrated life which he addressed to all Christians, not only the religious, since all are radically consecrated to God by the virtue of Baptism and are sanctified and set apart for Him to be witnesses of His love and mercy to one another and to the people around them.¹⁰ However, strictly, consecrated life in the Church is made by and effected by means of evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. Accordingly, Canon Law states, "consecrated life through profession of evangelical counsel is a faithful form of living through which the faithful follow Christ more closely."¹¹ It is a stable form of living by those faithful who feel called to follow Jesus Christ in a more exacting way recognized by the Church. Consecrated life is a response to the divine call by God, to that special call to a union of life with him, which eventually is concretized in a special mission. Consecrated life is a charism (charisma) and charism means a free gift, a spiritual capacity resulting from God's grace.¹² Charism of the consecrated life focuses on how consecrated life fosters an intimate and joyful communion of life with Christ, in the school of his generous service of God and neighbour. Charism

⁹ Anthony Ikechukwu Kanu, "Quitte Non Pays: On Consecrated Persons and the Challenge of Family Obligations in Contemporary Africa" in *Building and Sustaining the Christian Family in Nigeria (Jos Studies)* Vol. 23 (June 2015) 46.

¹⁰ Pope Francis, *Message for the Year of Consecrated Life* 1.

¹¹ Canon 573.

¹² Emmanuel C. Anagwo, "Charisms According to St. Paul (1 Cor 12:4-11): Implications for the Nigerian Church" *CATHAN A Searchlight on Saint Paul Proceeding of 24th Conference of the Catholic Theological Association of Nigeria (CATHAN)* Cyril Obanure & Sylvia Nwachukwu (Makurdi: Aboki Publishers, 2010) 426.

instils an attitude in consecrated persons as they are gradually conformed to Christ, learn detachment from externals, from the tumult of the senses and from all that keeps them from freedom and being grasped by the spirit.

Consecrated life in the Church is effected by means of the evangelical counsels. The religious are consecrated by the fact of their assumptions of the evangelical counsels. Therefore the counsels constitute the exact manner of living consecration to God. The charism of a consecrated life connotes that special gift which the Holy Spirit makes to the Church. Accordingly, the canonical legislation stipulates that the consecrated life constitutes the divine gift, which the Church has received from the Lord and which by his grace she always safeguards. The institutes of consecrated life are like Jewels that adorn the Church equipping her for every good work. They are variety of gifts from the Lord to the Church. Although, all the baptized with their different gifts are consecrated and called in different vocations of life but the consecrated life is the fullness of baptismal consecration. It is a free gift from God to individuals and to the Church. It also requires a docile heart towards receiving these free gifts of God. In this article therefore *consecrated life* (also used interchangeably with words like *religious life*) is used to denote a stable form of living whereby the candidate follows Christ more closely by the public profession of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience.

3. THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS OF RELIGIOUS OBEDIENCE

The theology of religious obedience brings out the close connection between religious obedience and the Paschal Mystery of Christ.¹³ In that framework, the obedience of Jesus is the core and theological foundation of religious obedience. In Christ, the self-willed world learns the beauty of obedience. "My food is to do the will of he who sent me and to accomplish his work" (John 4:34). His whole life is the source and summit of religious obedience. The whole life of Christ on earth was spent in searching and doing the will of His Father. His obedience is intimately linked to his acceptance to be the Son of God made-man for the remission of humankind's sins. Everything that happened in the life of Jesus Christ was linked to the gradual unfolding of the will of the Father throughout the salvation history. The mission of Jesus consisted in no other thing but the fulfilment and realization of the will of God. Therefore the central goal of all followers of Christ consists in continuing the search for, and fulfilling the will of the Father in the world.

With crystal clarity, the Second Vatican Council's document, *Perfectae Caritatis* describes how religious obedience points out its object: the total dedication of one's will, its motive, sacrifice of self offered to God, its strength and value; greater stability and security in union with God's salvific will; its example: Jesus Christ, its

¹³ John Paul II, *The Consecrated Life Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Vita Consecrata* (Vaticana: Libreria Editrice, 1996) nr.24.

expression: submission to superiors as representative of God, its social dimension: the service of others; its ecclesial dimension: stricter obligation to serve the Church and lastly its end to attain to the stature of fullness in Christ (cf. Eph 4:13).¹⁴ Religious obedience makes the consecrated persons to enter decisively into God's divine plan of salvation in communion with Christ. It is normal that it should lead to Christ.

Unfortunately, religious obedience has come to be associated with the slavish submission to the will of others that constitute obstacle to human development, personal fulfilment and liturgical life of the Church. For Albert Nolan, "It has often come to mean acting like a robot or a dog that has been trained to just obey. The vow of obedience has too often kept some religious childish and immature."¹⁵ But one must remark that it should not be understood in this manner. Instead it should be a powerful means of witness against selfish individualism and in favour of the common good. In this way, the vow of religious obedience can become another sign of the future world whereby we believe in and hope for, a world that fights for the interest of the common good of the whole human race and the people of God.

Thus Vincent Pelletier avers: "In the spirituality of obedience, the issue is not whether I must say "yes" to whatever I am asked to do, but to see how this request and saying "yes" is an opportunity for me to die to self and give off myself for the other in love and service by saying "yes" and see that I am deepening my personal relationship with the Lord through self-giving."¹⁶ For instance, a sister or brother may be asked by his/her superior to do something that he/she finds very difficult or challenging. He/she might be asked to start a new local community and apostolate. As a "good brother/sister" who keeps the Rule, he/she can take up the challenge and use his/her gifts and talents and do his/her best, as a prove that he/she is "obedient." Conversely, he/she might take this request of his/her superior to his/her personal prayer to God.

Accordingly, St. John Paul II states that by the practice of the evangelical counsels, the consecrated person lives with intensity the Christological and Trinitarian dimensions of the whole of Christian life. For him, "Obedience, practised in imitation of Christ, whose food was to do the Father's will (cf. John 4:34) 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

¹⁴ Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae Caritatis*, (Decree on the Up-to-date Renewal of Religious Life) [henceforth PC] in Flannery, A. ed. *Vatican Council II*. Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1987) nr. 14.

¹⁵ Albert Nolan, "Religious Life as a Prophetic Witness" in *Grace & Truth: A Journal of Catholic Reflection for Southern Africa*, Vol 31, No.2 (August 2014) 12.

¹⁶ Vincent Pelletier, "Reflection on Religious Obedience" in *Specific Challenges to Evangelization in Africa-4 (AFER: African Ecclesial Review*, Vol. 49, Numbers 3 & 4, September-December 2007, 29.

history of the loving harmony between the three Divine Persons."¹⁷ This means that the vow of obedience of the consecrated person is rooted and practised in imitation of Christ. It is a vow practised freely, not in servitude but in service, not slavishly but animated by love of Christ and his Church. The vow of obedience of the consecrated person reflects the obedience of the Blessed Virgin Mary who in freedom obeyed the word of God that she should be the mother of Jesus Christ. The vow of obedience is evangelical because it is rooted in the gospel and life of Christ.

In her celebrated book, *Consecrated Life in the Church: Discipline and Praxis*, 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)."¹⁸ According to her, "obedience always involves interior suffering and spiritual martyrdom and tearing apart, exactly because it is a sacrifice of the will, the dearest to a person. It is a spiritual martyrdom; an annihilation of oneself; a tearing apart of that self that often leads to pride, arrogance."¹⁹ She listed the characteristics of the evangelical vow of obedience as obedience that is sustained by faith and love, obedience in imitation of Christ, and obedience done with regard to the submission of one's will to lawful superior. Consecrated life is a stable life under obedience to a superior.²⁰ Earlier she remarked that the aim of obedience to the religious men and women is to ginger themselves to their observance, with their whole energy, conviction, goodwill, creativity, and initiatives. It has its foundation in Christ, makes one's faith strong in God, sustained by love, and it is a submission of will to God through those in authority.²¹

To learn therefore from the obedient Christ, obedience really means the readiness and humble submission based on faith in the acceptance of what has been ordered as an expression of love and will of God.²² It is the disposition to do the will

¹⁷ John Paul II, *The Consecrated Life Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Vita Consecrata* 21.

¹⁸ Gerard Nwagwu, *Consecrated Life in the Church: Discipline and Praxis*, (Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt, 2013) 167.

¹⁹ Nwagwu, *Consecrated Life in the Church: Discipline and Praxis* 167.

²⁰ Nwagwu, *Consecrated Life in the Church: Discipline and Praxis* 167-169.

²¹ Nwagwu, *Consecrated Life in the Church: Discipline and Praxis* 155-157.

²² Canon 601.

of God within the context of a specific religious community. This does not exclude the possibility of discussion, of stating one's opinion but it does mean, first of all, the readiness to serve, to set aside one's personal wishes, if need be, for the good and needs of the strive to the kingdom of God. It is a lifestyle that should be lived in season and out of season, whether favourable or unfavourable which sometimes may be painful and characterized by "difficult commands."²³ Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life states accordingly, "The task presented to consecrated life by the historical landscape at the end of the twentieth century has required boldness and courageous inventiveness."²⁴ But it comes with blessings if accepted by the consecrated persons in line with the example of the obedience of Christ. So, in faith and love, the consecrated persons submit their will to that of their legitimate superiors in accordance with the rules and regulations of the Institute. By so doing, they will be of greater service in building the Christian family as the Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* articulates and underscores the tripartite benefits accruing therefrom, namely, the edification of the Church, the benefit of humankind and the needs of the Church.²⁵

4. INSTANCES OF LITURGICAL DISOBEDIENCE

Granted that filial obedience to the liturgical norms is expected, what beholds the worshipping community today is what Mauro Gagliardi calls the phenomenon of "liturgical disobedience."²⁶ A recent development, or lack thereof, has brought confusion in the liturgical celebrations of the Church. A startling observation shows that some consecrated persons felt that they can disregard liturgical norms and laws. This liturgical disobedience is easily observed in some parishes in Port Harcourt Diocese, Nigeria when readings are introduced as "A proclamation from the..." instead of the conventional way, "A reading from the..." Again, some champion liturgical aberrations whereby extraneous gestures like waving of hands after

²³ Dominic Hoffman with Basil Cole, *Consecrated Life Contribution of Vatican II* (Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2005) 173.

²⁴ Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Keep Watch To Consecrated Men and Women Journeying in the Footsteps of God* (Vaticana: Libreria Editrice, 2015) nr. 5.

²⁵ Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* (The Constitution on the Church) [Henceforth LG] in Flannery, A. ed. *Vatican Council II*. Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1987) nr.42.

²⁶ Mauro Gagliardi, "Observance of Liturgical Norms and "Ars Celebrandi" in <http://www.zenit.org/article-29850?1=english> accessed on 4th June, 2015.

dismissal mandate, the usurpation of the role of ordinary ministers of Holy Communion instead of the faithful observance of the norms guiding the exercise for extraordinary ministers, late-coming and rowdy exchange of kiss of peace are introduced and done by both the consecrated and non consecrated persons. According to Kevin Orlin, dictating the manner of reception of the Eucharist and ignoring rules for reception of the Eucharist are listed among the ten most common liturgical disobedience and controversies among all Christ's faithful, consecrated persons not excluded. Others are disregarding the prescribed text of the Order of Mass, interrupting the Mass, omitting the penitential rite, replacing or omitting the homily. Still others are dictating posture, holding hands during the Our Father, performing aliturgical dance and closing the holy water fonts at some seasons.²⁷

Be that as it may, one may rightly state that these abuses have deteriorated because mentality has been formed in many by which the liturgy with the exception of the words of the Eucharistic consecration can be subject to all modifications "pastorally" considered suitable by the priest or the community. This situation induced John Paul II himself to request the Congregation for Divine Worship to prepare a disciplinary Instruction on the Celebration of the Eucharist, published with the title "*Redemptionis Sacramentum*" on March 25, 2004. "*Ecclesia De Eucharistia*" published earlier indicated that the reaction to formalism is one of the causes of the "liturgical disobedience" of our time.²⁸ "*Redemptionis Sacramentum*" points out other causes, among them, a false concept of liberty and ignorance.²⁹ The latter in particular refers not only to knowledge of the norms, but also to a deficient understanding of the historical and theological value of many eucharological texts and rites: "Finally, abuses very often find their foundation in ignorance, given that in general that is rejected whose profound meaning is not understood, nor is its antiquity known."³⁰

Elsewhere, we argued that a cursory glance into the observance of liturgical norms in Africa, and Nigeria in particular, shows the tendency towards liturgical disobedience by some of the celebrants and participants. Indeed, elements of liturgical abuses continue to trail liturgical and para-liturgical ceremonies in recent years. And they are deadly threat to the pursuit of liturgical renewal advocated by the reformed liturgy of the Second Vatican Council. In spite of the fact that Christian

²⁷ See Kevin Orlin Johnson. "The Ten Most Common Liturgical Abuses And Why They are Wrong" in <http://www.catholic.com/thisrock/1999/9901feal.asp> accessed on 10th June, 2015.

²⁸ John Paul II, *Ecclesia De Eucharistia (The Church of the Eucharist)* (Awka: Fides Communications, 2003).

²⁹ Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Redemptionis Sacramentum (On Certain Matters to be Observed or to be Avoided Regarding the Most Holy Eucharist)*, (Okpuno: Fides Communications, 2004) 7.

³⁰ Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Redemptionis Sacramentum* 8.

worship is guided by a set of laws and legislations in the quest to arrive at the *ars celebrandi*; they are wantonly bypassed by some of the clerics and the lay faithful in the bid to make the celebrations 'more interesting' to the detriment of liturgical norms. A known adage holds, "order is the first law in heaven." And our earthly liturgy is a miniature of the heavenly liturgy.³¹

Religious obedience is strongly canvassed for towards the liturgical norms in a theological and historical understanding, in addition to the text of the ecclesiology of communion. The instruction rightly states that the mystery of the Eucharist is too great for someone to allow himself to treat it with his own personal choice, which would not respect either its sacred character or its universal dimension.³² When gestures, postures, texts, rites, etc are arbitrarily introduced, they do not bring about renewal, instead they harm the true right of the faithful to liturgical action which is the expression of the life of the Church according to her tradition and discipline. To complicate the situation, they introduce in the very celebration of the Eucharist elements of discord and deform it. For instance, some consecrated persons who decorate the altar and liturgical environment make use of excessive aliturgical colours like orange, yellow, etc. that have no liturgical or sacred meanings.³³ More often than not, the sanctuary areas are filled with flowers, without aesthetic value, as if one is in a traditional shrine, thereby dismantling a ritual that is already lacklustre.

Again, waving of hands, done by both the consecrated and non consecrated persons, is common in Pentecostal worship, in order to acknowledge divine presence, cheer up, to mention but a few purposes. But the gesture of waving hands is not a Catholic tradition; as such, it has no liturgical symbolism when used at the end of the Eucharistic liturgy or blessing of the faithful with the monstrance at the Eucharistic Benediction. Elsewhere we argued that the practice of waving hands in worship to mark the end of the celebration is liturgically inappropriate.³⁴ Fabian C. Okafor corroborates our position that some people wave their two hands facing the altar. One does not know whether they are waving bye-bye to the priest or to

³¹ Emmanuel C. Anagwo, "Liturgical Norms and Good Governance: The Imperative of the Rule of Law" in *Areopagus: Journal of Church & State Relations*, Vol 3, Number 1, (October 2013) 25-26.

³² Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Redemptionis Sacramentum* 11.

³³The liturgical colours are white, red, rose, green, purple and black (See *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2003) nr. 346).

³⁴Anagwo, *Hundred Questions and Answers on the Mass Vol II*, 72.

whom.³⁵ He rhetorically and pungently puts it: "This is one of those Pentecostal led-by-the spirit innovations which probably should not be stopped for fear of quenching the spirit. This action is an abuse. It is spreading and has to be discouraged by the Authority."³⁶ In fact, Bishop Hilary O. Okeke admonishes that, "Priests should discourage the people from waving their hands or performing other gestures not approved as they reply "Thanks be to God" at the end of the Mass."³⁷ This sort of thing puts the liturgy into a climate of theatrical representation and is in stark opposition to the notion of a ritual that has been handed down through the ages.

5. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE LITURGICAL LIFE OF THE CHURCH

As the Church celebrates the Year of the Consecrated Life, the evangelical counsel of religious obedience has significant implications for the theory and praxis of the liturgy and invariably would address some pertinent questions, leading to the promotion of liturgical obedience. For instance, how would we understand the religious obedience of the consecrated persons for the liturgical life of the Church? Would their understanding go against the expectations of the Church in the quest to worship God? How would the religious obedience of the consecrated person be a model of liturgical obedience? Applying religious obedience to liturgical life of the Church makes the consecrated persons to possess the characteristic feature of Christ's mission, vision and passion: "I came not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me" (John 6:38). Anthony A. Akinwale collaborates and opines that, "The religious has no identity and no mission without Christ the Head and his body the Church."³⁸ Doctrinally, both the priest and the lay faithful owe obedience to Christ and his Church in matters of faith, morals and liturgical discipline. Since our concern is with the liturgical life of the Church, we must categorically state that neither the priest nor the lay faithful are lords and masters of the liturgy. Both must receive it as a gift through which by actively, fully and consciously participating, they enter into communion with Christ and the Church, and benefit from an increase of grace. This fundamental obedience of the liturgical assembly to Christ and the

³⁵Fabian C. Okafor, "Some Innovations in the Eucharistic Liturgy: Effect of Pentecostalism" in *New Trends in Faith and Practice From Crisis to Confusion* (Nsukka: Afro-Orbis Publications, 2006) 86-87.

³⁶Fabian C. Okafor, "Some Innovations in the Eucharistic Liturgy: Effect of Pentecostalism" 86-87.

³⁷Hilary O. Okeke, "Notes for Liturgical Celebrations" in *The Christian Outlook*, 8.10 (June 13, 2009) 6.

³⁸ Akinwale, "The Challenge of Religious Life Today" 11.

Church is the basis for other forms of filial obedience with the assembly. In a way, the priest owes obedience to the faithful since he has a solemn mission to lead them in prayer and worship according to the mind of the Church. Similarly, the faithful have a corresponding right and duty to pray and worship in communion with the universal Church. Thus the priest is called to direct the faithful in the Church's liturgical worship. The lay faithful, in turn, have an obligation to obey him insofar as his direction corresponds to Church's mind as expressed in the liturgical books or in the dispositions of legitimate Church authority. Meanwhile, when it concerns acts of private devotion, the priest, as teacher, is called to guide and guard the faithful to a solid spiritual life. In this way, he may sometimes be required to warn them against certain devotional practices that deviate from sound doctrine or that are prone to confuse this flock regarding the priority of the sacramental life.

It has always been the cherished tradition and custom of the Mother Church that the liturgical norms regulate how the public worship of the Church is to be carried out. In the words of Austin Echema, "The norms are based on the teaching and guidance of sacred Scripture, of the Apostles, of sacred Tradition, of definitions of solemn Councils of the Church and of the entire prayer history of the Church."³⁹ Liturgical worship is not a private function, but celebration belonging to the Church. "No other person, even if he be a priest, may add, remove or change anything in the liturgy of his own authority."⁴⁰ The evangelical counsel of obedience cuts across all spheres of life, most especially as it motivates obedience to the Church in all ramifications. Caroline Mbonu rightly argues that "Obedience is not necessarily action counsel, that is, what I do? How should I do it? Rather, obedience seeks to ask the question, what is the community saying? How can we achieve it?"⁴¹ The evangelical vow of religious obedience is primarily to promote the value of the community. Mbonu further states that, "The basic assumption is that a person taking the vow of obedience in a particular community is already committed to its goal."⁴² The Church is a community of all communities and liturgy is its ultimate goal. The

³⁹ Austin Echema, "The Importance of Liturgical Norms in the Eucharistic Celebration: The Nigerian Experience" in *The Nigerian Journal of Theology*, Bisong Kekong & Ukwuegbu Bernard (eds), Vol 29 (June 2015) 63.

⁴⁰ Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, (The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy) [Henceforth SC] in Flannery, A. ed. *Vatican Council II*. Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1987) nr. 22.

⁴¹ Caroline N. Mbonu, "Celebrating the Year of Consecrated Persons: A Reflection on the Vowed Life Foreground on Matthew 5:48" in *The Nigerian Journal of Theology*, Bisong Kekong & Ukwuegbu Bernard (eds), Vol. 29 (June 2015) 7.

⁴² Mbonu, "Celebrating the Year of Consecrated Persons..." 11.

reformed liturgy of the Second Vatican Council stresses that the liturgy is the summit to which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the fount from which all her power flows.⁴³ The evangelical vow of religious obedience requires the faithful to be committed to this lofty goal of the Church and to obey liturgical norms in order to achieve this goal.

An outstanding implication of religious obedience of all Christian faithful, especially the consecrated persons, therefore is the right to enjoy the celebration of a true liturgy and especially the celebration of the Holy Mass which should be exactly as the Church has desired and established it, as written in the liturgical books and in the other laws and norms. The consecrated persons have the right to have the holy sacrifice of the Mass celebrated for them in keeping with all the teaching of the Magisterium of the Church. The liturgical community has the right to have the celebration of the Most Holy Eucharist carried out in such a way that it seems truly as a sacrament of unity, excluding absolutely all the defects and gestures that can manifest divisions and factions in the Church. There is no exaggeration therefore if we affirm that liturgy is everything for the Church. It is the soul and life-wire of the Church. Thus proper celebration of the liturgy which is in keeping to its norms and laws are very dear to the Church. The evangelical vow of religious obedience which the consecrated person professes gives him/her the proper disposition to keep liturgical norms which invariably leads contemporary human beings into personal contact with the Father in the quest to actualize the *glorificationis Dei, sanctificationis populi* (glorification of God and the sanctification of the people).

6. ENRICHMENT WITH AFRICAN CULTURAL VALUES OF OBEDIENCE

Christian worship can also integrate African positive (cultural) values as a way of incarnating the vow of religious obedience. Basically, African cultural values that easily rub off on religious obedience are the respect for elders and authority. Africans in general and the cultures in Nigeria in particular take the value of respect seriously. There is the handing over of tradition and wisdom from the old to the young through oral tradition by Africans. In fact, young people are expected to ask questions and listen to the elders who explain to them the history, customs, traditions, culture and values of their people. It is common practice that a typical African family gather in the evening. In some cases when there is moon light, the father would be telling the children stories about their culture. The oldest member of the family has a higher status than the youngest within that hierarchy. Children from the tender age are taught how to respect and obey their parents and elders. In the words of William Conton quoted by Oliver Onwubiko, "Africans generally have deep and ingrained respect for old age, and even when we can find nothing to admire in an old man, we will not easily forget that their grey hairs have earned

⁴³ SC 10.

them right to courtesy and politeness."⁴⁴ There are duties, obligations, rights and privileges. Parents have the duty to discipline, protect and educate their children and bring them up to be well behaved. For instance, a young boy is not expected to look at a young girl while an elder is around. If he does that, it smacks of disrespect to the elder. On the other hand, children have to obey their parents and respect those who are older.

Meanwhile, when the community has gathered for social occasions, elders are first given seats before the young ones. This is because authority resides in the elder, the king or chief of the village and his cabinet. This scenario takes place even if the elder, king or chief comes late. A younger person immediately gets up for him to sit. It is also the elders that pray at gatherings and in most cases, the eldest man is employed to lead such prayers. Their blessings and courses are taken very seriously. According to Jude A. Asanbe, "The Yoruba believe that old age co-terminates with wisdom. In fact, it is generally regarded as an exception for anyone to attain old age without being wise. So, the family head has to be a man of great wisdom, a wisdom derived from experience and deep knowledge."⁴⁵ Consequently, elders are respected for many reasons. Firstly, they are believed to be the teachers, directors of the young and custodians of the tradition. The Igbo would say: "He who listens to an elder is like one who consults an oracle." The oracles are believed to give the infallible truths. Thus elders are also believed to say the truth and their words and instructions are heeded to and for the promotion of good behaviour among the young.

In the African culture, obedience and respect are seen as values and fundamental moral duties which help people to live with one another. The sense of obedience calls for the responsible submission and dependence to the will of Supreme Being mediated through the community in dialogue, mutual respect and matured vision of reality. In this culture, life is shared and responsibilities are never a personal affair but communitarian concern. No one lives for oneself alone and the misconduct of an individual affects all, so also is applicable to the religious who vowed obedience. Failure in this vow affects the community at large. Thus, the consecrated persons are under oath to observe the rules governing their promises as any default may result to instant death or other punishments as may be melted out by the gods or deities in question. Some of these vows are taken for life or for a specific period of time, depending on the purpose for which the vow is taken. All in all, the African consecrated persons should not find it difficult in living out the vow of religious obedience because obedience is a fundamental value in the African traditional society.

⁴⁴ See Oliver A. Onwubiko, *African Thought, Religion & Culture* (Enugu: SNAAP Press, 1991) 28.

⁴⁵ Jude A. Asanbe, "Canonical Perspective on Seniority Among the Yoruba and Its Implications for Priestly Life" in *Bodija Journal: A Philosophico-Theological Journal*, (June 200/2006) 117.

7. CONCLUSION

In the light of the discussion above, we have attempted to establish that the consecrated life is a gift which the Father has given to the Church and the modern society. In this way, the most characteristic traits of the life of his Son Jesus, the chaste, poor and obedient one (see Matt 8:20; Phil 2:8), and the unfathomable riches of his mystery (see Eph 3:8) might be present in the world and might draw everyone toward the kingdom of God. That accounts why we have no hesitation to assert that for religious obedience to be translated into the liturgical life of the Church, the consecrated persons must listen attentively to God through the demands of the liturgical norms and laws. No living human community survives without some rules. Christ, before returning to the Father formed a community of disciples; later to become the Church. However, unlike the civic community regulated by legal codes, Christ's liturgical community is led by the filial law of love. The agape that Jesus calls us to transcends the world of mere expression and explosion of passion or emotion. It is a higher form of filial obedience which shows our appreciation of God's goodness towards all. In this regard, Pope Francis states, "So I invite every Christian community to experience this Year above all as a moment of thanksgiving to the Lord and grateful remembrance for all the gifts we continue to receive."⁴⁶

The Church and the modern society really need the consecrated men and women in order to learn and follow Christ closely especially with regard to obedience. If the consecrated persons are serious with their vow of obedience, their lifestyle and example will seriously facilitate their obedience to the liturgical norms thereby setting examples for others to follow. One of the cardinal difficulties we have in obedience to the liturgical norms emanates from the fact that there are few role models we can look up to for direction. The lacuna can be filled by the consecrated men and women as flag bearers of liturgical obedience. This is clearly in line with the teaching of Pope Francis, "I am counting on you "to wake up the world", since the distinctive sign of the consecrated life is prophesy."⁴⁷ By their exemplary life to the liturgical norms, it will make the liturgy an occasion for an encounter with Christ whose priestly office we exercise in the liturgy. It then follows that obedience to the liturgical norms as kept by the Church, which is the body of Christ, is obedience to Christ himself since the Church exercises that priestly office in His name.

Finally, it is the opinion of this paper that there is a very close similarity between religious obedience and obedience to the liturgical norms. For the

⁴⁶ Pope Francis, *Message for the Year of Consecrated Life* 1.

⁴⁷ Pope Francis, *Message for the Year of Consecrated Life* 2.

consecrated men and women there should be no conflict between the two: obedience in the consecrated life should overflow into the liturgical life of the Church. Moreover, from the African perspective, the African consecrated persons should not find it difficult in living out the vows of obedience because obedience is one of the fundamental moral values in the African traditional society which helps people to live with one another. The African traditional culture has a priceless cultural heritage related to the vow of religious obedience. The consecrated persons should integrate these cultural values to their religious vow and live them out in the liturgical life of the Church. Thus the split between faith and culture would be reduced if faith could be made to seek understanding and expression more in the philosophy and wisdom of the African people than in Greek and Western categories.