

**WITNESSING THE IDENTITY AND MISSION OF AN INSTITUTE OF
CONSECRATED LIFE IN THE FACE OF CRISIS AND VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT

People in the consecrated life live out their vocation and unique charisms in the human society, and thus, are equally challenged by the violent situations around them. On a face value, one is short of words over what consecrated persons can do in the context of violence. Can a consecrated individual or group offer any help in ameliorating violence? The paper is a modest discussion of some ways people in the consecrated life can witness in the situation of violence. It is subdivided into three sections: section one will describe the notion of violence and some of its forms and causes as it exists in the Nigerian context. Section two will throw light on the identity, vocation and life of people in the consecrated life. Furthermore, the section will highlight some of the impacts of violence on the consecrated life in the Nigerian context. Finally, in section three, we shall examine some patterns of witnessing in the context of violence for a consecrated person. Our argument is that, while crisis and violence challenge their total submission and faith in God, at the same time, the violence around people in the consecrated life challenges them to a more prophetic witnessing in the world.

INTRODUCTION

Violence is one of the thorny issues in the Nigerian society. The constant occurrence of violent clashes with religious, economic, political and social undertones speak eloquently of a nation that is constantly menaced by all shades of violence. In the Nigerian case, religious difference, political manoeuvres, socio-economic destabilization and jungle justice characterise the reasons for justifying violence in most of its shades – religious and social. More so, the situation of violence is worsened by the often irrational attempts of those in power to control and repress critical voices and defenders of human rights.

People in the consecrated life live out their vocation and charism in the human society, and thus, are equally challenged by the violent situations around them. On a face value, one is short of words over what consecrated persons can do in the context of violence. Can a consecrated individual or group offer any help in ameliorating violence? In the face of violence, some consecrated people will quickly resign to pacifism and say: How far can she or he go apart from committing such situations to prayer? Some others are inclined to suggest, as a possible solution, the turning of the right cheek to the molester as Jesus commands. A more objective approach would focus on the question: Can a consecrated person offer a significant help in a context of crisis and violence? How significant can such a contribution be? These and many other questions arise in the context of discussing the consecrated

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life and the response to violence. Moreover, a reflection on the character of the religious life in relation to violence presents us with a paradox. A paradox of surrender of power vis-à-vis the manifestation of unrestrained use of power at the detriment of the helpless. Such a reality presents us with the necessity and urgency for considering the witness of the consecrated life in the context of crisis and violence.

The paper is a modest discussion of some ways people in the consecrated life can witness in the situation of violence. It is subdivided into three sections: section one will describe the notion of violence and some of its forms and causes as it exists in the Nigerian context. Section two will throw light on the identity, vocation and life of people in the consecrated life. Furthermore, the section will highlight some impact of violence on the consecrated life in the Nigerian context. Finally, in section three, we shall examine some patterns of witnessing in the context of violence for a consecrated person.

1. FORMS OF VIOLENCE

In recent times, the scope of violence threatens to widen beyond the reach of definition. One feels the sense of violence through the spectres of genocide, racism, injustice, victimization, oppression, terrorism, poverty, rape, sexual trafficking, forced labour and war. These spectres of violence range between global injustices, domestic violence and more sophisticated forms of violence. Hence, the commonplace assumption that sees physical harm to be the most obvious form of violence may be questioned. Along the view that restricts violence to physical harm, anthropologist David Riches defines violence as “an act of physical hurt deemed legitimate by the performer and illegitimate by (some) witnesses”² The presence of the term “physical” in Riches’ definition is problematic because it excludes all nonphysical kinds of hurt. It ignores the notion of violation, demeaned selfhood, and undermines the assertion of power as aspects of violence. Thus, Michael Levi, Fiona Brookman and Mike Maguire are right in their statement that violence is “a slippery term which covers a huge and frequently changing range of heterogeneous physical and emotional behaviours, situations and victim-offender relationships”³ Hence, against a restricted view of violence, it is now popularly accepted that violence is certainly not limited to acts of physical harm, nor is physical violence limited to the physicality of the violent act itself. Since we cannot discuss every kind of violence, we shall streamline our discussion into three major forms of violence that characterise the Nigerian context, namely, everyday violence, victimization and religiously aligned violence. Our decision to discuss the three, among others, issues from the fact that they are more rampant and very close in the experience of people in the consecrated life.

1.1. THE VIOLENCES OF EVERYDAY LIFE

² David Riches, ed. *Anthropology of Violence* (Oxford: Basil-Blackwell, 1986), 8.

³ Michael Levi et al, "Violent Crime," in *The Oxford Handbook of Criminology*, ed. Mike Maguire et al (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 796.

Social violence, namely, the violence that oppressive structures and unjust social orders bring to bear on human experience is the commonest and most neglected aspect of violence. This includes the devastating conditions provoked by suffering such as unemployment, homelessness, lack of education, powerlessness, misery hunger, pain, disease and death.⁴ The violences of everyday life have aggressive effects on the body and the moral order. These effects consequently impact on how people understand themselves and their ability to engage in everyday life. Thus, in the description of her book, *Death Without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil*, Nancy Scheper-Hughes, asks: "When lives are dominated by hunger, what becomes of love? When assaulted by daily acts of violence and untimely death, what happens to trust?"⁵ Scheper-Hughes' dramatic description of the meaning imposed on people by oppressive structures offers a vivid illustration of what we mean by the violence of everyday life. We experience the violence of everyday life when a human person suffers great deprivation of sources for meaningful existence. Such condition exist when one does not enjoy authentic human dignity and wellbeing as a result of poverty, denial of freedom or basic human rights. These experiences can shape people's perception of the self, others, and the world as a lived sense of violence.

Among the many causes of everyday violence, poverty exists as a major source of violence militating against full human flourishing in the Nigerian context. We witness outrageous instances of starvation and demeaned human situation because people do not have the wherewithal to meet the most basic human needs such as food, clothing and shelter. We understand poverty as part of the whole system of violence based on the fact that it arises often out of neglect and the injustice of one onto another. It is a result of the collective failure of human person, government, groups, and even the Church who violate the right of the other to the common good. Hunger which is an offshoot of poverty is a deprivation of a basic human need. In the context of deprivation of food and drink, the human dignity is violated and the body experiences an intense pain and violence. Poverty is not only a form of violence but it also mediates other forms of violence, such as armed robbery and kidnap as prevalent in the Nigerian context today.

In the face of the violence of everyday life the moral order experiences daunting challenges. People's capacity to respond to life challenges are greatly threatened by the demeaned human condition. Thus, they are victims of many incidences of sexual abuse, child labour, human trafficking, poor health, high mortality and so on. In many cases, the youth becomes susceptible to moral lethargy. Furthermore, when the moral order is grossly shaken, the society breeds other forms of vice such as intolerance, lack of respect, shallow personality development, greed, spiritual and physical sloth etc. Thus, the violence of everyday life remains the most

⁴ Arthur Kleinman, "The Violences of Everyday Life: The Multiple Forms and Dynamics of Social Violence," in *Violence and Subjectivity*, ed. Veena Das et al (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 227.

⁵ Excerpt from the online University of California press website book description <http://www.ucpress.edu/book.php?isbn=9780520075375>

challenging for people in the consecrated life due to its peculiarity and intrinsic connections with personal, spiritual, moral and social evils.

1.2. RELIGIOUSLY ALIGNED VIOLENCE

Among the many forms of violence witnessed in Nigeria, religious conflicts and religious terrorism ranks the top. According to Statista's *Global Terrorism Index*, Nigeria ranks the third country with 9.31 points among the top 50 countries ranked by the global terrorism index for 2016.⁶ The key underlying factor to the frequent violent conflicts in Nigeria has been the issue of religious dominance. As Toyin Falola puts forward, "proponents of Christianity or Islam seek to unseat the rival religion, to impose their own values, and to control the state. This has become a major problem, and the struggle for political power has come to entail the manipulation of the symbols and beliefs of Islam and Christianity."⁷ Falola is right in his view that intolerance and appeal to domination and power struggle especially between religiously aligned ethnic groups fund what is understood as religious conflicts in Nigeria. In this Nigerian context, ignorant masses are bought by religious sentiments, used by the power-hungry politicians and religious leaders as a stepping-stone to power.

The three dominant religions in Nigeria, namely Christianity, Islam and African Indigenous Religions (AIR), exist all over the country either as the majority or the minority religion in any given part of the country. For instance, in the Southern part of Nigeria, Christianity is the dominant religion while Islam and AIR are minority. Conversely, in the Northern Nigeria, Islam is dominant while Christianity is the minority. AIR is spread all over Nigeria but is always in the minority. The dominant Christian culture of the South has strong influence on the people from the region, while the dominant Muslim tradition of the North (with the practice of *sharia* law in some cases) also significantly influences people from that region. Since Christians and Muslims are allowed by Nigerian constitution to live together, people with differing cultural and religious backgrounds often meet in the same state, and in most cases sharing things in common. The violent outcome of this diversity in Nigeria is highlighted by the unhealthy rivalry between the various religions in Nigeria. The escalating unhealthy rivalry between Christianity and Islam in Nigeria makes it even more challenging for them to live together in one country. Often, one camp rejects the religious others and implants or advocates one particular religious belief or ideology.

It is clear that religious conflicts diminish the development of human potential in Nigeria. For instance, the situation of near perpetual conflict in the country induces anxiety which cripples individual initiative and ultimately leads to apathy and a 'laissez-faire' attitude. This chaotic situation reduces production and increases corruption and idleness among the youths in Nigeria. Thus, Christian

⁶Statista, "Global Terrorism Index 2016 , Top 50 Countries," accessed February 16, 2017. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/271514/global-terrorism-index/>.

⁷ Toyin Falola, *Violence in Nigeria: The Crisis of Religious Politics and Secular Ideologies* (New York: University of Rochester, 1998), 2.

Ezeibe observes that religious conflict “claims the lives of able-bodied men and women who would have engaged in productive ventures and contributed to the economic development of Nigeria.”⁸ It is perhaps correct to assume that such destabilized state of affairs and inter-religious antagonism could have possible impact on the life and witness of consecrated persons in Nigeria.

1.3. THE VIOLENCE OF VICTIMIZATION

Victimization points to the fact that the evils threatening the human person – poverty, violence, ecological crisis – are the result of human decisions and that these evils need not be if human beings lived in consideration of the other. Victimization has a connection with social suffering which we discussed in point 1.1. above. Victimization is the violence of human wickedness to another and the suffering that arises from the knowledge that one is suffering as a result of the unjust decisions of people who have power over them, while social suffering is the result of victimization. Human and Ecological suffering occur because some who have the power to influence human well-being, rather use their power toward personal and self-serving projects. In such projects, human beings are co-opted as part of the mechanism for realizing personal interest or gain. As Paul Knitter points out, “human poverty and ecological destruction result, if not intentionally, then necessarily, from gain or profit motivated decisions, especially as such decisions are enacted and translated into economic policies, legal systems, and international arrangements.”⁹ Knitter’s view is on point that victimization means that most of the evils – poverty, ecological crisis, violence, are not natural events and must not be. The truth is that, most evils of human existence can be fought, prevented and corrected if people are willing to let go of their personal gain and interest for the common good of all.

The decision of the few who pride themselves above the common good of all to inflict suffering on others and the earth is the vilest kind of suffering. It is a terrible situation when people see that their suffering is as a result of the selfish decision of the few who have the power and authority to influence people’s life for either good or bad. As Knitter says, “such decisions, made by the few but affecting the life and life-giving capacity of peoples and planet, embody the *victimization* of some people by others.”¹⁰ Furthermore, Knitter analyses the gravity of such kind of suffering putting forward that,

To be a victim is to be an instrument, nothing but an instrument used by another. To be a victim is not to count, to be there purely to be used and then discarded. To be a victim is the horrible, strangling feeling

⁸ Christian Ezeibe, "Inter-Religious Conflicts and Crisis of Development in Nigeria: Who Benefits?," accessed December 10 2012. http://www.academicexcellencesociety.com/inter_religious_conflicts.htmlInter-Religious.

⁹ Paul Knitter, *One Earth Many Religions. Multifaith Dialogue & Global Responsibility* (MaryKnoll: Orbis, 1995), 63.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 63.

that one cannot dispose of one's own life; the victim is powerless in the face of greater, consuming power.¹¹

The foregoing analysis of victimization evinces that victimization connects with a particular kind of evil, namely, injustice.

As Knitter points out, we think of injustice when "our minds and hearts respond to a situation of suffering which we know immediately and certainly, need not be and should not be."¹² Injustice occurs with the unjust distribution of the goods of the earth. The criteria that places some at the top and others at the lower rung in accessing and enjoying the earth's riches is not justified. There is something unjust when within a country like Nigeria, a handful few possess and control over 80 percent of the nation's wealth. It is equally unjust when the increase in total salaries of the common people remains at the barest minimum while the salaries of the few at the helm of affairs continue to increase. The poor get poorer each day not because they are not hardworking, but because the decision of the few has failed to give just reward for their hard work. Conversely, the rich get richer and richer, not because of their hard work, but because they, at a point in their life, were able to connect with those few who decide the fate of others or because they keep usurping the share of the poor out of self-interest and personal gains.

The different forms of violence we have mentioned are not far away from the homes of the consecrated people. At one time or the other, consecrated people have been victims of violence, or its accomplice through their lack of engagement for the eradication of violence, or by making decisions that victimize others including those working among them. In what follows, we shall discuss how violence affects the life of people in the consecrated life in the Nigerian context. But we shall first describe the people in the consecrated life.

2. THE CONSECRATED LIFE IN THE FACE OF VIOLENCE

People in the consecrated life are grouped under three categories, namely, the religious institutes, the secular institutes and the societies of apostolic life. The new Code of Canon Law groups the religious institutes and the secular institutes under institutes of consecrated life since "both are committed to the practice of the evangelical counsels."¹³ The difference with the two lies in a common life of the people in the religious institutes.¹⁴ The Code treats the societies of apostolic life in the third part of Book II, considering them to be similar to the institutes of consecrated life. People in the society of apostolic life may or may not make explicit commitment to the evangelical counsels. Moreover, they pursue, "each in its own

¹¹ Ibid., 63.

¹² Ibid., 63.

¹³ See the 1983 Code of Canon Law, § 731. See Manuel Ruiz Jurado, "Consecrated Life and the Charisms of the Founders," in *Vatican II Assessment and Perspectives: Twenty-Five Years after (1962-1987)*, ed. René Latourelle (New York: Paulist, 1989), 4.

¹⁴ John Paull II, *The Consecrated Life (Vita Consecrata): Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1996), 9&10.

particular way, a specific apostolic or missionary end” while living a common life.¹⁵ The consecrated life, each in accordance with its specific nature, strive to live a life dedicated to the perfection of charity through the practice of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience, lived within a community and remains integral to Christian witness in the world. Therefore, people in the consecrated life are members of the Church and share in the mission of the Church. I will apply the expression “consecrated life” to designate all three forms of life: the religious institutes, the secular institutes and the societies of apostolic life. Moreover, I will discuss their witnessing in the context of crisis and violence in line with the broad understanding of the life and vocation of people in the consecrated life.

2.1. THE UNIQUE VOCATION OF THE CONSECRATED LIFE

According to the teachings found in Church documents, we can distinguish the character of the consecrated people with two broad categories, namely, its internal and its external character. The former applies to formal content of the life—its intrinsic character and essence as a practice of the evangelical counsels in the example of Jesus Christ. The external content of the consecrated life applies to its visible contribution in the life of the Church. We must note, however, that due to its nature, the consecrated life is most outstanding in its internal character - the practice of chastity, poverty and obedience, is its significant contribution in the life of the Church. Most people in the consecrated life, live in a community – sharing what they have in common, in solidarity with one another.

Sylvia Nwachukwu argues that with Vatican II’s teaching on the universal call to holiness of the people of God, we must pay attention to the opinions that the idea of consecration is not the special reserve of any particular group since all members of the Church are called to holiness of life.¹⁶ Nevertheless, she asserts that, regardless of the hesitancy to apply the term consecrated exclusively to any particular group, the scripture and Vatican II point to the uniqueness of the consecrated life particularly, as “a heightened and intensified form of Christian discipleship.”¹⁷ As such, the consecrated life follows more closely and shows forth the life of Christ who’s life in the world was to do the will of the father and which he proposed to the disciples who followed him (the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* §44).¹⁸

In a more general sense, the consecrated life is a life dedicated to the service of God through the Church. The people in the consecrated life do not live for themselves alone, but rather, their life is in union with the life of the universal Church. They share in the life of the many brethren who strive to accomplish the will of God. Thus, *Lumen Gentium* points out that the consecrated life belongs to the life

¹⁵ Ibid., 11.

¹⁶ Mary-Sylvia Nwachukwu, *Consecrated: A Vision of Religious Life from the Viepoint of ‘the Sacred’* (Lagos: CHANGE Publications, 2010), 40-41.

¹⁷ Ibid., 36.

¹⁸ All reference to the Documents of the Second Vatican Council is from: Norman Tanner and Giuseppe Alberigo, eds., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils: Trent to Vatican II*, vol. 2 (London: Sheed & Ward, 1990).

and holiness of the church (44). Consecrated persons contribute to the mission of the Church by bearing witness with their lives. The Decree on the Sensitive Renewal of Religious Life, *Perfectae Caritatis*, refers to the merging of the consecrated life with the life of the Church when it declares that people in the consecrated life “must recognise their God-given vocation as primarily a call to practise the gospel counsels,” and adds that since it is the Church that accepts their offering, they are to see themselves as bound to the service of the Church, the service of God (5).

In line with their unique vocation, people in the consecrated life strive to root out violence in their everyday-life through total submission to the will of God and good exercise of freedom and authority. The vow of obedience and a life of community as they stand, are powerful solvent for the ego, forcing one to place the needs of others before one’s own. Thus, by pro-active engagement with the violence in their own life they transform the violence around them through respect and recognition of the other, tolerance, patience, understanding and love.

In view of their unique vocation, it is understandable that crisis and violence challenge the quality of their witness in the world. Therefore, before thinking of how consecrated persons witness to the gospel in the face of crisis and violence, we have to consider how the consecrated life is implicated in the face of violence. In what follows, we shall highlight how violence and crisis could affect the values of the consecrated life.

2.2. THE EXPERIENCE OF CONSECRATED LIFE IN THE FACE OF CRISIS AND VIOLENCE

The environment is one of the essential determinants of a person’s behaviour. It is normal that, as social human beings, what is happening around us impacts our vision, attitude, perception, choices and responses to life. Thus, it is arguable that the violence that occurs in and around Nigeria impacts on the identity, choices and general life of people in the consecrated life in Nigeria. Some of them may have been at one point or another victims of violence such as victimization and kidnap. Directly or indirectly they experience violence when their relations and friends become victims of violence.

Conflict and violence as it is aligned with brazen display of power, intolerance, victimization, neglect of the poor and unforgiveness impinge on the core meaning of the self-donation of people in the consecrated life.¹⁹ Violence is about the use of power as well as a conscious decision not to act in solidarity. We resort to violence when we are not in solidarity, when we discriminate and see the other as an outsider rather than a part of us, and not worthy of our care and love. As such, violence, especially, those that are religiously aligned, puts the perspectives of the consecrated life under suspicion and doubt. It questions the very essence of the values of the consecrated life. Indeed, violence in all its shades mocks the essence and relevance of the life of virtue. Such that, the memory of violence touches the

¹⁹ See the profound description of self-donation in Ukwuije Bede, *The Memory of Self-Donation: Meeting the Challenges of Mission* (Lagos: CHANGE Publications, 2009), 78-79.

basic aspects of the gospel counsels of obedience, chastity and poverty to the extent that some begin to see the Christian option to right use of power as a certain form of weakness.

Consecrated persons are directly touched either as victims or oppressors in the case of violence. Strains of legitimization of violent conflicts and victimization can be discerned even in the religious communities in the day-to-day life of the “weak and helpless” members in the community. Often, even among consecrated persons, violence is incited and justified out of a situation of injustice or victimization in which one side uses or abuses another. Thus, even religious actors and faith based communities legitimize violence by intolerance, unforgiveness and with a ‘test’ of powers. One of the enigmatic issues about these violent acts ‘with religious undertone’ is the practice of legitimising of violence by religion or in God’s name. To critique violence, one must remove it from the cycle of justification. Particularly, the use of authority must go together with service, faith, hope and love so that we do not lay a burden on others by selfish legitimization of violence.

Their unique vocation is such that counteracts the display of violence. In their daily interactions, rather than getting swallowed up by the shades violence around them, people in the consecrated life transform conflicts in and around them through humility, wise use of authority and denunciation of power. Furthermore, they can confront the evils within and around them through their vocation to prayer, taking up the burdens of the helpless, being in solidarity with the poor and victimized of the society. Pope Paul VI makes it clear on that prayer is basic for both internal and external renewal for peace could take place. Thus, he declares: “Venerable Brothers and beloved sons [and daughters], we can possess a singular weapon for Peace, that is, prayer, with all its marvellous energies to raise moral tone and to invoke transcendent divine forces of spiritual and political renewal, and also the opportunity offered to each and every one to question himself interiorly and sincerely concerning the roots of rancour and violence which may lurk deep in his heart.”²⁰ In this 1968 New Year Address the Pope vividly mentions the evil and violence that resides in human heart and the power of prayer for spiritual and political renewal. We cannot speak enough on the fact that spiritual renewal is the first pattern of witness by people in the consecrated life in the face of crisis and violence.

As participants in the mission of the universal Church, their active witnessing in the face of violence bear fruit in two major ways. First is to be a partners in the mission of the Church through dialogue and second is taking up the option for the poor and the victimized in the society.

3. WITNESSING TO CONSECRATED LIFE IN THE CONTEXT OF VIOLENCE

The question of the actual response of a Christian in the midst of violence is often a complicated one. The complication arises on the one hand, from the question of the

²⁰ Message of His Holiness Pope Paul VI for the Observance of a Day of Peace 1 January 1968.

core Christian tenets of love, peace and forgiveness and on the other hand, the gospel imperative to challenge evil. In the scriptures, we witness three different approaches to evil. The first is the one we find in the Law of Moses, namely, an eye for an eye (Exodus 21:23). The second is the question of pacifism "if they strike you on the right cheek turn the left for them" (Matthew 5:38-39). Under pacifism, reference can be made to Jesus' command to put no resistance to the evil one. On this note, John Paul II gives us a good expression "do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good." These fundamental Christian expressions point to the fact that we cannot resolve evil with evil and this is evident in the common expression that "two wrongs cannot make a right." However, in this Christianity's option for non-violence, we are to guard against mere surrender to evil. Therefore, we present the third gospel attitude to violence, "why do you strike me?" (John 18, 22-23). How does Jesus's question "why do you strike me" serve as a more productive way of witnessing in the face of crisis and violence, especially those arising from victimization and social violence?

The pacifism which Jesus preached was an active one. Jesus was wise in his approach to evil because we cannot use the same method of the evil-one because if we do so, evil will be multiplied. To this effect, John Paul II declares that "war is a defeat to humanity. Wars are the cause of further wars. They do not resolve the problems for which they are fought."²¹ Jesus gave a proactive response to evil by working against the same categories with which evil triumphs. Take for instance, while Jesus did not strike back when he was slapped, he asked a question 'why did you slap me?'. Uzochukwu Njoku analyzes Jesus' response as a more proactive way of responding to violence. For him, "'why do you strike me' is a challenge to Christians never to be passive in the face of evil, injustice and oppression."²² The fact is, by this response, Jesus appealed to the conscience of the evil one through the cry of a suffering human body.

Jesus' unique response to evil also manifested in securing liberation for the oppressed human person. He fought for the liberation of captives, he fed the hungry, he spoke out on behalf of the marginalised, he spoke out for peace and against the use of power, he says "blessed are the meek," he spoke against exclusion and discrimination, and he always preached the values of hospitality and solidarity. Jesus rebuked injustice, spoke against retaliation and preached forgiveness, etc. Thus, while not marching evil with evil, Jesus was not passive in the face of violence. Jesus' teaching was neither a mere pacifism nor was it an approval of violent retaliation. Rather, he devised an active engagement in witnessing in the face of crisis and violence. Jesus' approach is unique for reminding the violent that their activities will cause more harm than good both to their victims and themselves.

Jesus' own active and dialogic engagement represents the response of a person in the consecrated life in the context of evil. In their witnessing, the people in the consecrated life take into consideration their call to witness the love of God even in the face of evil. In what follows, we shall look at how they bear witness through

²¹ John Paul II, Message for the World day of Peace, January 1, 1998, nr.1.

²² See Uzochukwu Njoku, "Clouds of Evil and the Challenges of Contemporary Religious Vocation," *Oche Amamihe Wisdom Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 2 (2011): 47.

their practice of the gospel counsels, and active engagement in the mission of the Church.

3.1. PARTICIPATION IN THE CHURCH'S MISSION OF RECONCILIATION AND DIALOGUE

People in the consecrated life are called to support the Church's initiatives of dialogue. Against the two extremes of passivity and confrontation, authentic witness to the gospel message of love even in the midst of persecution is a form of active witness in form of dialogue. The recognition and respect, dialogue and solidarity of their life is an example of how the Church's mission of dialogue takes place.

Dialogue is an active engagement with a condition of total difference, unpleasant, differing and sometimes, discomfoting. Dialogue takes different forms. Interreligious dialogue, as it appears is the most significant way the church intervenes in the religiously aligned crisis and violence in our country. To be successful, such dialogue must assume some qualities, especially in line with the socio-economic and political contexts of human existence as well as cultural and religious diversity in Nigeria. It must be a dialogue life whereby they witness to people through practical life issues and human existential contexts. Dialogue with people in their existential situations and in consideration of cultural and religious diversity follows some patterns such as: "Learning to understand what others actually believe and value, and letting them express this in their own terms; Working to prevent disagreement from leading to conflict. Together, listening and responding with openness and respect, [in which] we can move forward to work in ways that acknowledge genuine differences but [sic] build on shared hopes and values."²³ In line with the foregoing pattern of active and praxis-oriented dialogue, people in the consecrated life can collaborate with and support the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) in reaching out to dialogue with people and groups divided along religious lines and in mediating exclusive dominating ideologies that play out in governance and policy making in Nigeria.

Furthermore, dialogue extends to conversation with people and power (socio-economic) and those who make decision for the masses. In this case, calling for recognition of the poor and victimized in the forms of social violence is an imperative of the Church. Indeed, that was the mission of Christ and the reason he went to the cross. Such approach offers a more praxis-oriented interreligious dialogue that is capable of addressing the influence of exclusivist religious ideology on the well-being of human beings and global development. Following the pattern of dialogue along socio-economic lines, we underscore that the social violence we discussed under the forms of violence above requires a more proactive witness. We turn to this in what follows.

²³ The Inter Faith Network for the UK, "Building Good Relations with People of Different Faiths and Beliefs," accessed April 20 2016. <http://www.interfaith.org.uk/pcode.htm>. See Paul Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions* (London: SCM, 2010), 62.

3.2. PARTICIPATION IN THE CHURCH'S MISSION OF LIBERATION AND EMPOWERMENT

The internal life of the religious exemplified in the evangelical counsels and a life of virtue belongs to the more global mission of the Church, and the mission of God. Hence, the religious life is not merely a passive life, rather, tied to the mission of the Church, it is a participation in the mission of Christ. Thus, *Lumen Gentium*, declares that people in the consecrated life are called, "each in their own way, to help the church in its mission of salvation" (§43). The mission of the Church as Vatican II presents it is to be the sacrament of salvation. The Church exists to continue Christ's work of salvation through religious freedom, option for the poor, liberation, and social justice. Thus, people in the consecrated life are part of Jesus' campaign and mission which the church carries on.

The witness of people in the consecrated life is equally aligned with the Church's option for the poor. The fathers of Vatican II observe that one of the causes of poverty is the result of imbalance between the prosperity of a few and the misery of many. To them, poverty is the result of a "more basic imbalance rooted in the heart of human being" (*Gaudium et Spes* 10). Fernando Sahayadas argues that for the Council fathers, "the fundamental source of the present social problems is to be found in the creaturely limitations in realising boundless desires and the vocation of human beings."²⁴ Furthermore, *Gaudium et Spes* reiterates that "although the disturbances in the social order result partly from the "natural tensions of economic, political, and social forms," the deeper causes are found in human persons' pride and selfishness, which contaminate even the social sphere" (25).²⁵ From the conciliar statements, we can deduce that the disparity between the rich and the poor are rooted in the moral depravity of the human heart. In other words, the defects of the socio-economic order have their primary origin as well as its solution in the choices made by human beings.

The witness of people in the consecrated life, therefore, targets to counteract the evils of human pride and selfishness through option for the poor and victimized. Concretely, they bear witness in ministering to the victims of violence, to provide for refugees and the victims of war. They strengthen those that are persecuted for their faith and uphold the imperative of endurance as an aspect of the Christian life. They are also witnessing when they educate people against violent acts and give instructions on the importance of respect for religious freedom and human dignity. They witness when they inculcate human values to the youth in their various apostolates. The option for the poor is the basic imperative of the Church's mission.

In a more systematized sense, people in the consecrated life witness through speaking out for the marginalised of the society, and in promoting peace and reconciliation. In this regard, they can cooperate with or establish NGOs geared towards mediating peace and reconciliation and offering assistance to the victims of violence, the poor and victimized. As a matter of fact, concern for the marginalized

²⁴ Fernando Sahayadas, *The Church in the World: The Reception of Gaudium et Spes in the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Bengaluru: Theological Publications, 2015), 325.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 326.

members of the society proves to be a prophetic element. This is especially the case because many who marginalize others are those in positions of power or who, at least, have to exercise some form of dominance over others; and it would take a prophetic voice to confront the injustice. Their prophetic witnessing in seeing, namely, being alert to the violences around them, acting and speaking on behalf of victims and dialogue with offenders could be a contribution from people in the consecrated life and one which deepens their charisms and vocation.

CONCLUSION

In this paper we have discussed patterns in which people in the consecrated life witness authentically in the face of crisis and violence. We have pointed out that violence touches core aspects of their life and mission. Furthermore, we realised how consecrated persons, partaking in the one mission of the universal Church are charged with Jesus' own establishment of the rule of God through a life of virtue and active engagement against social violence. In discussing the imperative of a middle position between passivism and violent confrontation, we argued that people in the consecrated life must not be agents of victimization, so too must they be upfront in criticising agents of victimization. In their collaboration in the mission of the Church through dialogue, and option for the poor and the victimized, they bear witness to Christ's own death for the liberation of those under the violence of social suffering and victimhood.