THE INCULTURATION OF CONSECRATED LIFE TODAY IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA[1]

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ABSTRACT

The debate on the process of the inculturation of the consecrated life in Africa is and remains of great relevance for the religious Institutes because of the relevance of its theme and also for the solidity of the life of faith in the African cultural realities. In the milieu of Roman Catholicity, we all agree that inculturation theologically "*means an intimate transformation of authentic cultural values by their integration into Christianity, into various human cultures*"[1]. Whatever the case may be, we cannot be spared, in order to be credible and less intellectualistic or academic, to face the problem of interculturality because, as we know, "*the Christian faith really opens up a mode of intercultural life, in that it connects people of different cultures in a "we" that is the fruit of the conversion of each to a reality different from its original culture?[1]* ". Interculturality, in fact, clears the way for an explicit conversion that makes it possible to deal with the inculturation process with keenness for fear of being inconsistent and thus succumb to a sort of folklorism, ethnocentric fundamentalism and a return to the past without expected results. In this Africa thirsting for fecundity, Consecrated Life, deeply rooted in the example and teaching of Christ the Lord, is a gift of God the Father to His Church by the Spirit, has much to contribute to this great continent. Thanks to the profession of the evangelical counsels, *the characteristic traits of Jesus -* chaste, poor and obedient - *become "visible" in the middle of the world in an exemplary and permanent way* and the eyes of the African faithful are called to return to the mystery of the Kingdom of God who is already acting in history, but who is waiting to take his full dimension in the heavens (*VC*, 1).

INTRODUCTION

This is the topic of the article that I was requested to write on for this journal. The main objective is to make a contribution to the current debate on the process of inculturation of the consecrated life today in sub-Saharan Africa, and to open up alternative paths for further reflections. This article will articulate three points: in a first approach I will give my point of view on the current situation of consecrated life in Africa. Secondly, I will situate the problem of the process of inculturation (an urgency, a challenge and an imperative) in the present context in relation to the interculturality as a formative interplay. Finally, I will discuss the real difficulties and the opportunities of inculturation of Consecrated life today in Africa. And I will end with a conclusion.

I. THE CURRENT SITUATION OF CONSECRATED LIFE IN AFRICA

First of all, I observe, like everyone else, that consecrated life in Africa is in a situation of *crisis* but also of *vitality***.** One of the most evident symptoms of this crisis is undoubtedly the significant hemorrhage many of the religious communities or institutes witnessed and continue to experience. At the beginning of this exodus, we easily reassured ourselves with reflections like: It was easily said and is still said, "it's a purification process going on in our place… all those who were not really called to this vocation are going away; life and things will be much better after that". If some quit because of lack of ideal or engagement, others do so because they believe that consecrated life as it exists in its present state is not capable of responding to their ideals and their need for engagement. It is therefore a crisis that is not peculiar to Consecrated life but affects the whole Church[1].

On the other hand, besides these departures, we observe a certain vitality which is manifested in the increasing number of young people that come from all over who embrace consecrated life. Besides, here and there is the erection of feminine indigenous congregations of diocesan rite, even though they do not always have a clear identity or charism.

That said, the current crisis of consecrated life in Africa is essentially a crisis of identity.[1] And the immediate causes are: on one hand, there is the weakness and imprecision of the charisms, the spirituality, the apostolate, I would say of the identity of the patrimony of the institute[1]. On the other hand, it is due to the profound changes that African society has known in the course of the last few years, changes have brought about profound mutations in the way religious men and women are inserted into the society and into the apostolate of the Church.

Without a doubt, many factors have contributed to consolidate a peaceful diffusion of these mutations, including: the transfer of

responsibilities from missionary religious men and women from the West to indigenous religious who are of a good number in these religious families; followed by the big problem of multiculturality and interculturality [1] which is always galloping in the lives of many indigenous as well as missionary religious communities. Finally, the problem of double belonging: how does one live as a consecrated Christian in the actual context of mundialization and globalization without "alienating oneself" or disowning oneself, and be able to find his or her true place, so that he/she is not a "counter witness" for others? In short, how do we inculturate this consecrated life in our religious Institutes?

As I said earlier, religious life was welcomed, certainly, with a certain reticence, but often with enthusiasm, thanks to certain traditional African values of references[1]:

- *The sense of the sacred*: respect to what is related to God and to transcendence or all that brings us closer to him.
- *The communitarian sense*, the extended family and the enlarged fraternity, we would say, with all its consequences in terms of solidarity and sharing. This renders real religious fraternity easy in the eyes of Africans, when fraternity is based on relations of parity.
- *The sense of precarity of earthly things.* True happiness, even in the enjoyment of material things, comes from above, from the harmony with the One who brought these things into being.
- *Virginity* in view of marriage or a consecration, *and the meaning of life, of fecundity, of* a superior life to be transmitted to others. To be a "mother", a "father" is not a banality. That is why religious people are regarded with great reverence.
- The *sense of authority* of leaders who are responsible for the community; one has to know how to obey and listen, which are indispensable conditions for a wise person. God has given us two ears and one mouth.
- The value of human being is found equally in the "given word" and in the signs and *symbols* which translate the fundamental alliances and decisive choices.

The acceptance of consecrated life in the African culture has helped to bring about a certain transformation provoked by the newness of Christ's message, on mundialization and globalization.[1] In Africa, certain dimensions have been rightly challenged, as testified in the documents *Ecclesia in Africa* (1994) and *Africae munus* (2009):

- The image of God and sacredness, the newness of a God who is closer to us, an incarnated God, who becomes our brother and friend, without becoming banal or a sinner.
- The family extends to the dimensions of the Church, no longer in the name of tribal blood but in virtue of the blood shed by the Son of God; and so the

Holy Spirit blows on the whole of humanity, breathing and expressing Himself in every woman and man, so as to transform us from the inside. In this way, the tribe expands.

• A new richness, a new treasure, that of the kingdom of God and of grace, which surpasses and permits us to surpass earthly goods.

• A new fecundity offered to married people as well as to virgins who, following the example of Christ can become fruitful, just like the seed that dies in order to bear fruits.

• Authority is now exercised as a disinterested service, and the one who is the first becomes last. Obedience does not consist anymore in having fears, nor of being interested or flattering to the leader, but it consists of entering freely into a dialogue in which we open ourselves up in discerning the will of God, with the mediation of the person in position of responsibility and of the entire family.

The discovery of a truly efficacious Word, that of God to man through his Son, his Word, and that of man who is capable of saying yes when he wants to say yes, and no when he wants to say no. For instance, there is the Word given through solemn vows, and which nourishes itself through the Word made flesh.

On the other hand, it will be right to say that, in the context of globalization of culture linked to liberalism which presents itself as specie of "new Catholicism" where good and services more and more are geared towards economic profit (returns), religious men and women in Africa are not exempted from this search of a hedonistic way of life, a culture which is generally characterized by a certain narcissistic individualism; the deficiency, sometimes very serious, with which they live their ecclesial experience[1]. This situation only further undermines the *raison d'être* of religious life which is already losing its specific identity and can no longer play its specific role in the Church and in the world.

In this context that is evolving rapidly, it would seem that consecrated life in Africa will have to reflect and bring solutions to these urgent challenges mentioned below in order to reinvigorate its apostolic presence in this changing Continent that is made of many cultures, different cultural forms and of ethnic diversities:

1 - The challenge of formation: facing this world in effervescence of ideas, changing, modernism, what kind of formation is being given to future Consecrated men and women so that they do not lose their identity?

2 - The challenge of the evangelical counsels: How does one live the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience in a world that is more and more disarticulated and secularized?

3 –The religious community is a cell of the Church-as-family of God in dialogue: individualism, the means of social communication; are these not snares for these Consecrated persons?

4 - The challenge of inter-ethnic community life.

5- The challenge of inculturation: how can the international institutes inculturate their charism in a given country and live in the present, the ideal of life advocated in the past by their founder?

6 - The challenge of witness: how to be the voice of the voiceless?

II.   THE PROBLEM OF INCULTURATION: AN EMERGENCY, A CHALLENGE, A DUTY

How can one be fully a religious and fully African? For me, at the beginning of the third millennium, where almost everywhere religious congregations are celebrating the centenary of their arrival to Africa, I can't but feel a certain worry about the future. The only serious problem evident is that of inculturation and interculturality: these congregations although international will either be African or will never become.

It is the future of these communities that is at stake especially as their members are more and more Africans and even Asians. We must help these members to live a life that is fully consecrated to the Lord and fully African, because if we do not succeed in doing this we risk having members whom part of their being and their lives remain on the margins of consecration, hence a duplicity in the way of living the gift to the Lord. "The religious life," affirmed St. John Paul II, "moreover, continues the mission of Christ with another feature specifically its own: fraternal life in community for the sake of the mission. Thus, men and women religious will be all the more committed to the apostolate the more personal their dedication to the Lord Jesus is, the more fraternal their community life"[1].

But how to live this fraternal life in community when our paths, our projects of life cannot meet? How do we move from a juxtaposed multiculturality to a fruitful and fraternal interculturality? But how do we manage the conflict accentuated by cultural and social differences? How do we live with each other, in a fraternal relationship without masking the social inequalities existing between us? Not to question these relationships, these diffused and complex feelings, is to take the risk of idealizing interculturality and of not falling in a process of inculturation that would only produce ethnocentrism, withdrawal into oneself, exoticism, and the negation of other and his/her milieu.

Before facing this process of inculturation of consecrated life, I believe that we must first face the challenge of interculturality. This is because it invites us to rethink the way we live together in communities and the way we constitute community both at the local and international levels. Will we choose identity withdrawal and resistance in the face of the difference of the other person, or will we allow ourselves to be engendered by each other?   It happens that we sometimes see religious who do certain things that disrupt the life of the community (e.g., very ambiguous relationship with the family ...) and all this, of course, in secret. This creates inner conflicts for the person concerned and problems for the community. How can we in this case begin

the process of inculturation if the challenge of interculturality has not yet found a solution?

However, the task of expressing the consecrated life in the culture and through the culture in which we live today is not the only one of the great challenges or the future of the consecrated life, in the face of the diversity of environments. This challenge is not optional, but it is a requirement of our faith itself. Without inculturation, faith will remain superficial with neither depth nor personal commitment and even risks becoming a counter-testimony. And without interculturality, our communities would run the risk of transforming the difference (*l'étrangeté*) of other into a threat and not into a promise of new fraternity[1]. With this, and we will lose a chance of revisiting the meaning and missionary vocation of religious life in the world of today. Paul VI declared in this sense to the Bishops of Africa: "It is up to you to make alive and effective the meeting of Christianity with the ancient African tradition. [...] It is a question of creating or of deepening a new civilization, which is both African and Christian, and we affirm with you that this project is achievable, with the grace of God ..."

Frequently inculturation is poorly understood. According to some, inculturation is to bring culture to the fore; it is to overload Christian liturgies with local rites, it is the affirmation of one's own culture, it is the justification of let's say a certain "moral" to the Asian, the American, the European, the Oceanian or the African, depending on the environment in which one finds himself. It is not a simple exterior adaptation, because inculturation "means an intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration into Christianity, into the diverse human cultures"[1]. This fertilization or fecundity will, of course, necessitate an effort of purification so that these cultural values conform to the requirements of the Gospel.

The permanent interactions between the local and the international, migrations and exchanges put cultures and identities in a position of withdrawal or openness. The question of living together rests today even more strongly than yesterday. The question of interculturality is eminently a social issue. I am convinced that it is difficult to have interculturality without social justice. Or it is difficult to talk about intercultural politics in a religious community where wealth and poverty coexist, where abundance and misery confront each other.

In this prospective, I am convinced that it is important to stay on the process of inculturation in order to confront with sharpness the question of interculturality before everything else in order not to succumb to a kind of folklorism, ethnocentric fundamentalism and a return to the past.[1]

For this, the fact that many religious congregations today have become international and multicultural by their members, this reality offers them practical advantages. Its real value is the testimony it gives of universality and openness in terms of the diversity of the Kingdom of God.

This testimony is particularly urgent in the context of globalization which has the tendency, on the one hand, to exclude and, on the other hand, to eliminate all differences. This being so, there is a particular need today to testify to the fact that the Kingdom of God is a Kingdom of love that absolutely includes everyone and is at the same time open to the particularity of every person and of every people.

Evidently, the ideal is not only "internationality" (mere presence in the congregation or community of members of different nationalities or cultures). And it is also not simply "multicultural" (that is to say, the capacity for members of different nationalities and cultures to exist simply side by side or co-exist). The ideal is, rather, true "interculturality", that is, a congregation or community that allows the different cultures of the members to interact between themselves and thereby enrich the members individually and the community as a whole. An authentic intercultural community is characterized by three things:

1) the recognition of other cultures (that is, giving minority cultures visibility in the community);

2) respect for cultural difference (by avoiding all attempts to level cultural differences by subsuming minority cultures into the dominant culture); and

3) The promotion of a healthy interaction between cultures (in other words, seeking to create a climate where every culture allows itself to be transformed or enriched by the other).

Thus, an authentically intercultural community is a community where members of different cultures truly have a sense of belonging. Such a community, however, does not arise by chance, or simply by putting together people of different culture and nation under the same roof. A veritable intercultural community needs rather to be consciously created, promoted intentionally, cared for and carefully educated. Such a community requires some basic personal attitudes, community structures and a spirituality of communion. Consequently, members need a specific program of formation, both initial and permanent, in order to prepare them to live in an effective way and in a way that makes sense in an intercultural community. It is very essential that members be convinced that interculturality is an ideal to be sought and a value to promote. It is after all that this community is ready to embark on a process of fruitful inculturation because all the members are persevering in the teaching of the Apostles, in the fraternal communion, in the breaking of the bread, and in the prayers (cf. Ac, 2, 42).

III. THE REAL DIFFICULTIES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF INCULTURATION OF CONSECRATED LIFE TODAY IN AFRICA

Before speaking about the real difficulties and opportunities of the inculturation of consecrated life in Africa experienced by our religious communities, I would like to emphasize that it is not a question of claiming our cultural rights, nor is it a battle for the recognition of our identities, nor a struggle for reclaiming already outdated mental attitudes, but rather it is question of the roles that these communities must continue to play in the face of the various historical contingencies in order to permit a constant and balanced relationship between God and the African in search of salvation[1]. Let me ask myself these questions: Is the present theology of consecrated life adapted and pertinent to African religious? How must we understand the evangelical counsels in the context of both a secular globalized society and the emergence of non-Western cultures, particularly Africa? What are their new interpretations that emerge from today's crises - ecological, financial, political, crisis of sexual abuse, etc.[1]? As Latin saying goes: "Here is the difficulty. Here we must engage".

In wanting to confront the process of inculturation, it must be said that it is never an absorption but an achievement. Jesus, in fact, did not come to abolish but to accomplish, to perfect. In this fulfilment, "it is what is of God that is to be preserved" (Mk. 7). But who is the legislator or guarantor, if not the same local religious community, which is the actor in this process of inculturation?[1] If our religious communities were effectively engaged in the process of inculturation, they would be continuously growing. We would no longer be Africans who are consecrated but consecrated Africans. A profound evangelization of our religious communities would become an urgent duty for everyone.

If the point of departure is effectively evangelical values[1], then the encounter with cultural ones is achieved through judicious discernment and with a great deal of success. Let's see them:

The first opportunity is that where African religious life is expressed in and through the resources of these transformed cultures. This involves aspects such as prayer, with the parameters of the language used, for example. It is not the same thing to pray in French, English or Spanish, as to pray in the language of the people where we are incarnated, whether you are born there or are from elsewhere. We know well that the excuses like "all books are in French" or "I learnt all prayers in Spanish only" are absolutely invalid. Ask any missionary if he or she has not noticed the sense of communion and the pride which he brought to life by just trying to say a *Good morning* or a *Thank you*, or in trying a local dance step with people of the village or neighbourhood. Who still preoccupies himself about mistakes when one feels the efforts to identify with them as "one"?

Second aspect, is that of traditional symbols, vestments, music and rites that can and should be valorized. This is an important and delicate dimension. This is important because faith is expressed in a necessarily cultural way. Delicate because inculturation begins with the conversion of

customs and is celebrated through rites. Putting too much emphasis on rites, language and dances translates a certain superficiality that comes either from a nostalgia for ancestral times - which is no longer part of African culture - or a search for an aestheticism close to a certain superficial religiosity but very far from the true faith that transfigures life and celebrates it in the liturgy.

The other opportunity is that of community life. Interpersonal relations in Africa have a flare which is not the same in the West. Greetings, looks, the way of communication, of working together, of supporting each other, to express one's positive and negative feelings, the notion of punctuality, or more broadly that of time and seasons, of history, of destiny, etc. It is true that everyone thinks according to the criteria of his/her culture and - if we are honest - we tend to attribute more positive values to the criteria of one's own culture. This is normal, as many researches in social psychology reveal, especially in relation to attributions of causes, prejudices and attitudes. But the experiences of the religious communities shows that it is precisely in this domain that interculturality is more spontaneous, probably thanks to the dialogue in the communities to better understand each other and attitudes undermine dialogue and growth, whether in consecrated life help each other in a spirit of exchange and enrichment. Experience equally proves that prejudices or close-minded attitudes compromise dialogue and growth, be it in religious life or in the process of evangelization.

A third and last opportunity that emerges from this encounter is that of material poverty. Some missionaries once thought that in a context of poverty, it was difficult for religious life to be perceived as a value. In the minds of certain people, religious life could be perceived as way of advancing socio-economically, since religious houses are rarely poor. On the contrary, experience has shown that coming from a rich context made it difficult, if not impossible, for some missionaries to understand from within what the poverty they had professed really meant. This permits us to go on the bases where all religious, regardless of their origins, are called to give a testimony of inner freedom and simplicity, without competing with the poor, because they would not understand that intelligent people try to lead a life that they (the poor) would like instead to be helped out of. Our mission and our witnessing therefore enable us to put our fingers on what true poverty is all about and to combat it through education and solidarity, through our initiatives and our fundamental option for the poor, while testifying to the evangelical freedom lived by Christ who enriches us through his poverty.

Other interesting aspects are available to us to live the religious life in Africa today. Some speak about dress, suggesting that it be inspired by local customs and materials; others talk about hospitality and welcome, taking into account the African sensibility in this regard. African religious attach great importance to it, but it is also necessary to reflect about it in order to

understand the content that certain situations may have for community life. Until then, the debate revolves around acculturation and still interculturality. Now, let us try to speak specifically of the vows, such as might be considered from the perspective of inculturation of consecrated life in the African context today.

Poverty and sharing

The difficulty and the beauty of the vow of poverty in Africa comes from the fact that, on the one hand, if we want to know what the word poverty means in material terms, many situations of our young people and our parishioners are quite eloquent and explicit about it. This makes it partially easy to understand the implications of our religious poverty. Partly because this vow signifies that we must configure ourselves to Christ (incarnated in every young person, in every family, in every need and every sharing too), a Christ whose cross is so easy enough to discern. But no biblical verse, no article of our constitutions, asks us to embrace a way of life devoid of what is necessary. It would be a comedy, and moreover, it is not religious poverty, evangelical testimony. Such an attitude can also reveal hypocrisy or a discomfort that often comes from a superiority complex based on a materialistic reading of the reality in which we live.

Voluntary poverty can never be like an endured, unjust, contextual poverty. It can simply render itself solidary, take care of love and, if such poverty is truly a gift of all our person, do everything to enrich the young, first evangelical values, human and professional, because the ideal of the consecrated life is not to make people rich but to make honest citizens and good Christians. In this sense, the vow of poverty is expressed in positive terms: contentment and thanksgiving, detachment from the heart, works well done, trust in providence, respect and solidarity with the poor.

In Africa, religious poverty must be conceived in connection with, on the one hand, the imitation of Jesus, hardworking and confident in providence, and on the other hand, the sensitivity to family solidarity. Moreover, a serious difficulty for consecrated Africans comes from the fact that their intellectual and professional formation, and their lifestyle are the fruit of an almost Western preparation, even though he/she does not always enjoy the autonomous use of the goods of his religious family, which his brothers, cousins and uncles do not always understand. "You make money, so you're rich. What are you doing because you are not married? For those studying abroad, the issue becomes more complicated. "Just bring us a car so we put it on the road as a taxi!", "find us benefactors there"...are common expressions one often hears.

History has made people to believe that living in the West means being rich, especially by hiding the many miseries we see every day. But the person who comes in as a missionary faces the same problem. For him or her, too, like the indigenous missionary, it is a miracle to live poverty in a

credible way. Because we can have a little material goods or have power and continue to look from above and from outside, the people and the situation that we find in our new family. The African religious, according to his/her motivations can be also really poor evangelically even if his/her community seems rich, or - if his/her motives were going in this direction - despise his/her brothers/sisters even when objectively, they lead a life which is easier than his. The worst of riches is that which prevents us from entering heaven, according to Jesus, and this is pride and the spirit of superiority.

On the other hand, we must encourage ourselves to continue to convert. As someone said, "We did not become consecrated persons in order to take care of our parents. But we did not become consecrated persons in order to get rid of them". Many times, the community being sensitive to the problems of the families of the brothers / sisters, (it is not the brother or the sister who makes the gesture but the community or the province), there was a very great solicitude when important needs emerged in the families (prompt help, death, marriage), and it is essential that someone from the community be given the responsibility of keeping contact with the families, the first benefactors of the congregation.

Furthermore, let us say that some excesses in management, because of incompetence or non-transparency, could be avoided if we educated young people to the good administration skills, namely to know how to manage the goods, and to cultivate the sense of the common good, to feel really close to our people. We cannot lock up novices or young people consecrated in religious palaces, far from the temptations which we see everywhere, and reproach them after 6 to 9 years of overprotection, and of being indifferent to their culture of origin. By demonizing money, sex and freedom, we prepare young people for an angelic life that has nothing to do with very concrete situations that will require of them a great maturity to the brother or the sister. Some of the consecrated persons say that their vocation is in danger, simply because they have found a young and beautiful student or a handsome gentleman.

The danger is not really the girl or the boy (otherwise we need to close all our schools or educational institutes) but they themselves. On the other hand, if we start with our prejudices, on phrases like "Africans", "Whites", we can be certain that we will be disrespectful to people, that we will not build anything, except a congregation divided into categories in the image of the capitalist world. Numerous strategies are developed in every community concerning help to beggars in order not to be manipulated, the reception of visitors, the travels and investments (construction and furnishing) of our houses, which preaches a message that is more eloquent than our many discourses on poverty.

Obedience and participation

Obedience appears to be a difficult practice in all cultures and religions. The aspirations for autonomy, the fact that religious commitment is mostly situated at an age whereby the person is full of legitimate ambitions and enjoys an exaggerated concept of his/her abilities - we can even speak of the illusion of omnipotence - added to some familial and cultural conditionings, really complicate the disposition to this evangelical vow. Some persons have been used to obeying, unfortunately sometimes for fear of punishments or the harmful consequences of a rebellious attitude. Others obey because they want to flatter or to obtain favors, or because they want to present a good image of themselves. Other people grow up with a great thirst for autonomy and independence and, scarcely feel themselves "liberated" from the yoke of the formators through the "whew or "relief" brought with the solemn profession of vow or ordination, refusing any superior and external authority to themselves, considered as an obstacle to their development and to the modern version of religious life.

But when one opposes "freedom" to "obedience", he/she ends up choosing one of the two, while in consecrated life, one obeys because one is adult and free, and the freedom in turn is a fruit of listening and inner availability. Most of the difficulties associated with this vow go back to poor education, human pride, or lack of delicacy in the management of human resources. It is almost impossible to find a religious man or woman who is deep in prayers and humble of heart, which is causing you problems in this domain. Susceptibility is a clear symptom of immaturity and disobedience, the non-acceptance of fraternal correction or of contradiction, the incapacity to see our demands and unmet needs.

Does anyone still believe that African cultures facilitate the vow of obedience? No culture is an evangelical emblem. Not even the Jewish culture. It is true that here children, young people and women are educated towards respect for parents and elders. But the difficulties are as great as elsewhere. In the consecrated life, the superior is not always an elder, an older person (by age of birth), or more intelligent, or one with more diplomas (qualifications). The criteria are elsewhere, and the poor superior is just trying to do his/her job well, in general. In addition, to continue to obey in order to please others, to flatter or to gain points is an infantile or immature habit, to which neither a superior nor the fellow brother or sister have the right to indulge. Every Christian knows that he/she is free from the slavery of threatening prohibitions.

Education promotes freedom, the will, in a context of the family, and of the Church. Through charity, we make the task and fidelity easy for us and for one another by our capacity to obey, to dialogue and to discern in a manner which is prompt, joyful, complete and adult.

Chastity and Fecundity

In certain cultures, like ours, African, there exist celibacy and virginity, but only for reasons of consecration to the deity, to the king, to the pharaoh, and to the spirits[1]. But for ordinary people, since life was understood and transmitted as a gift of God and a guarantee of the clan's perpetuityy, the person who deliberately refused to transmit it or who was incapable of transmitting life was considered as a useless link in the evolutionary chain. Many reflections today continue to show that this poses a problem for the chastity of African consecrated persons. In my opinion, it is a generalization that would be tantamount to saying that for a Westerner, given all the sexual and homosexual deviations that are legalized in Europe, therefore the Europeans are not capable of living chastity. It is absurd and astonishing as reasoning and conclusion.

Every culture gives people to a certain approach to fecundity or fruitfulness and we must recognize that there are still ethnic groups in which the commitment of a son or a daughter to the priesthood or the consecrated life poses enormous problems. It has been said in the economic sense, since children take care of their old parents in Africa, unlike the societies where pensions and old people's homes exist. Generalized statements of this kind sometimes seek to overshadow the sad reality that these African morals and values have been fatally attacked in the process of encounter between the West and Africa. Then, the few specific cases observed of religious who have been unfaithful to their commitments are generalized in a way to say that all consecrated African persons are like that (infidelity), which is intellectually dishonest and not charitable Christian wise.

To speak such a language to a young religious today, is to ignore his responsibility—which is almost total—in the religious response. This reasoning can also encourage infidelity because he says to the young African religious: "You can override your promise, because in your culture it is not a value. And yet we know that infidelity is such a horrible thing in the African traditions, because of the weight of the given word. In the olden days, a man tempted to be unfaithful had to take the "temptation" as a second wife, instead of having a wife and a mistress, as is permissible and common in cultures that dare not call it polygamy. Are the greatest dangers or the "best" temptations to chastity today found - as they would want us to believe - in the village or in our televisions, our internet sites, our complicities with the modern hedonistic mentality, our divisions in community, our spiritual superficiality, in our lack of affective maturity, especially towards our collaborators, and what about our search for benefactors / benefactresses? Let us strive to read the signs of the times, the treasures that the sower has planted in the reality where we work, a reality that is from now on with universal colors, so we need to have the courage to reformulate our charisms and our consecration.

Conclusion

Here, as in all my remarks since the beginning, I did not want to impose a model to follow in the process of inculturation, notwithstanding solutions towards responding to the eternal question: How can one be Christian religious and at the same time African? This is because I am convinced that the question or debate around the inculturation of consecrated life in sub-Saharan Africa is primarily a complex challenge that involves different levels of reflection and action: biblical, Christological, theological, ecclesiological, anthropological, economic, and social. Beyond what I have just said, in many cases our reflections on this theme remain too academic, too idealistic and less practical.

That is the reason why I opted for a reflection that could bring about some clarifications on the subtle relationship between inculturation and interculturality, always in order to better understand the difficulties inherent in this relationship. In any case, it is evident that there is need to define and distinguish what is correlated to the anthropo-theological and the biblical dimensions, and intercultural communication in this relationship. This requires becoming conscious at the same time of the interplay of both our religious communities and the complexity of implementing this process. This practical-strategic approach is by no means easy: it involves self-reflection and requires the construction of new, particular paths within the actions of animation, accompaniment and formation.

Interculturality, in itself, involves the encounter with someone unknown, obliges us to creativity and demands equality[1] which does not exist without social justice. Together with the process of inculturation, interculturality makes the African religious a man or woman identified by his/her roots and his/her past having mental attitudes to be developed. I will cite three: 1) to be convinced that one can understand the other in his/her difference, 2) to open one's ears and awaken one's mind, 3) learn to strip oneself and open oneself to the other and then to imagine being together.

Some religious communities consider the debate on the relationship between interculturalism and inculturation as a thing of the past, a new museum, they are wrong. The answers may no longer be given, but they have to be constructed, even today and together. Our conviviality seems possible only if there is a strong and constant struggle against voluntary discrimination, against prejudice, hatred and irrationality. The future of consecrated life in Africa will be intercultural if we do not want to perish together, we do not want what has allowed the emergence of the human to be the tomb of humanity.