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CHAPTER 9

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**Contemporary Sexual Crises in the  
Church and the Challenge for Priestly  
Formation<sup>1</sup>**

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**Introduction**

Priestly anniversaries are times for great celebrations and deep reflections on the part of the entire Church. Silver Jubilees ought to be celebrated with great pride and hope. I rejoice with Rev. Anselm Kole Jimoh as he commemorates this special moment in his priestly ministry. Many like him continue to be the hope of the Church even at times when ugly narratives of priestly sexual abuse have come to distort all that the Church stands for in our times. I have been asked to reflect on a topic that demands an honest engagement. On that note, let me transition to the purpose of this work.

In this work, I intend to do the following; shed light on some of the trends of the emerging sexual abuse cases; present a critical analysis of the formation styles within Nigerian seminaries with the intent to articulate a new vision of priestly formation that will help the Nigerian Church in particular and other national churches both in Africa and other parts of the world to prevent future scandals, while properly training the men who present themselves to be trained for the ordained state.

### **Trends of Current Abuses**

A critical question must be asked, one that demands an honest response. Does the Church have a sexual ethics problem, one that may be inadvertently contributing to the issues it is faced with today? I am convinced by the multiple evidence available that the response is in the affirmative. The ongoing ideological struggles between experts in the social sciences and pure sciences tasked with investigating the human mind, gender and sexuality on one hand, and church experts and theologians who argue for various theological positions on human sexuality demonstrate the point being made here. The dust seems not to have settled but many in the Church's hierarchy are impatient with the perceived 'slow' analysis of the sciences and would rather prefer a particular reading of religious texts along with their own cultural and personal sensibilities. It might be important to offer a quick note of caution; science can be a gatekeeper of truth for the Church. When healthy relations are built with the scientific community, the Church's doctrinal positions will be greatly advanced and best address the demands of the signs of the times. Science is today teaching us that gender binarism is a limited and sometimes a confusing way to speak of the breadth of our human condition. As noted by Judith Lorber, any discourse on gender ought to be predicated on cultural knowledge, which sometimes varies from one culture to another. In western societies, "until the eighteenth century, philosophers and scientists taught thought that there was one sex and that women's internal genitalia were the inverse of men's external genitalia: the womb and vagina were the penis and scrotum turned inside out."<sup>2</sup> Lorber further explicates, while looking closely to how gender identities are given in western societies, that the nuances found in the human person, ranging from chromosomal markers, anomalous genitalia, and other physiological differences tended to be rigidly categorized by the duality of male-female; man – woman; and heterosexual – homosexual.<sup>3</sup> How is the Church's theological anthropology responding to this new discovery? Is the Church's preference to appeal to biblical texts to buttress a particular type of anthropology or is it to have an open mind to what is being discovered by scientists without making any moral judgement? These are options that lead to quite different and sometimes opposing conclusions.

Again, gender binarism is being challenged by new scientific discoveries in the area of intersex realities.<sup>4</sup> Based on scientific

discoveries, it is common knowledge that there are “over 70 sex chromosomal” expressions within the human population.<sup>5</sup> Thus, even language needs to be adjusted to account for such breadth of sex expressions in the human population. Male and female are at best labels of erasure and truncate the pendulum reality science is exposing us to.<sup>6</sup> One conclusion can be made from these unfolding knowledge of the human organism; our knowledge of ourselves as humans is the knowledge that is not fixed. It is always progressive knowledge. Ignoring all these discoveries and simply upholding what is termed traditional views on gender binarism as was recently done by the Vatican dicastery, Congregation for Catholic Education in its recently released document on gender theory is problematic.<sup>7</sup> An important question worth asking, when one hears arguments on human sexuality that is based on traditional views, is this: what cultural knowledge heritage is one alluding to and defining as the norm?

The document from the Vatican dicastery fails to address the fact that Christian anthropology is not constructed outside of a cultural locus with all the biases that play out in such a locus. What the document calls “right season” as the defining marker of the Church’s position on what it means to be human must be engaged critically for what it is.<sup>8</sup> Reason is always culturally determined. The argument proposed in the document is to reject any “separation of sex from gender.”<sup>9</sup> The Jewish and Greco-Roman cultural influences on how the Church reasons and its vision of what it means to be human ought to be acknowledged as such. The Church’s position does not exhaust the issue at hand. While the Church upholds a Greco-Roman metaphysical grounding of human sexuality, there are also legitimate arguments to be made based on other ways gender expressions are more fluid that are not grounded in metaphysics. Examples of non-metaphysical views of human sexuality can be found among the “Berdache in North America and the Fa’afafine in the Pacific, and the Kathoey in Thailand.”<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, if culture is the place where the divine-human drama is fully experienced, then cultural differences that define gender fluidity as found in different human communities should not be dismissed easily simply because they differ from those that have shaped the Church’s views. Rather than a rigid vision of what it means to be human, these differences can become the

possibility for embracing a richer vision of what it means to be human in a culturally diverse world.

The cautionary note from the American Jesuit theologian, James Martin that “the document is mainly a dialogue with philosophers and theologians, and with other Church documents; but not with scientists and biologists, not with psychologists, and certainly not with LGBT people, whose experiences are given little if any weight” is something that should make everyone to be very concerned.<sup>11</sup> To have an informed opinion on an issue demands a deliberate and holistic engagement with all factors shaping that issue. To simply dismiss an aspect of the process and uphold views that are at best one-sided and/or incomplete should not be the approach to the teaching office of the Church should be following. Conclusions like these hurt people who are already at the margins of society and the Church. Perhaps, the following cautionary insight is helpful in shedding light on what is at stake here; “it is important to emphasize that although heterosexuality operates in part through the stabilization of gender norms, gender designates a dense site of significations that contain and exceed the heterosexual matrix. Although forms of sexuality do not unilaterally determine gender, a non-causal and non-reductive connection between sexuality and gender is nevertheless crucial to maintain.”<sup>12</sup>

Thanks to the social sciences we are more knowledgeable about how human conditioning plays out even in the most private aspects of our lives, our sexual preferences.<sup>13</sup> Even though no current study has been done in the context of Africa, the churches of Africa can also learn from the insights and experiences of those in the western world. It is on that note that I intend to call attention to some insights found in the recent study done on the sex abuse crisis in the United States of America.

There are some observable trends found in the John Jay Report of 2004 by John Jay College of Criminal Justice that was commissioned by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). The report focused its studies of sexual abuse in the Church between 1950 and 2002. It found out that there were over 10,000 sexual abuse allegations brought against priests and deacons working in dioceses in the United States. It also showed that the percentage of priests and deacons working in the country (109, 694), 4% (4392) were accused of sexual abuse of minors and adults. I

should be clear here by stating the obvious; the report was not extensive enough. It did not study the members of the hierarchy and members of lay religious orders. Recent revelations have shown that the scandal is not just limited to priests or deacons or even to male members of the Church with leadership roles. Female religious communities have had their own share of the scandal as well. The sex abuse scandal is one that affects every aspect of the Church, ordained and lay.

The John Jay Report offers some interesting profile of the abuses and the abusers that may be of use to those interested in revamping priestly formation in the twenty-first century. Grooming tactics were prominent ways the abusers used in carrying out their illicit sexual contacts with their victims. The abusers took time to build a trusting relationship with their victims and then threatening them should they betray their confidence and reveal what abuses were occurring. The age profile of the abusers is also telling. Half of those accused of abuse were below the age of 35 when they first carried out their first sex crimes. Less than 7% of the abusers were themselves victims of sexual abuse as minors. 19% of them were also dealing with alcoholism. 70% of the abusers were formed in seminaries under pre-Vatican II seminary formation programs.<sup>14</sup> What do all these tell us? They point to the fact that there is a very strong case to be made for using insights from the social sciences to address this crisis. These are not just accidental cases that played themselves out without any organic pattern in them. Rather, a closer study of these patterns reveals some innate deficiencies in the formative programmes operative during the years these abusers were in seminary and/or in ministry.

### **Formation Styles and Lessons to be Learned**

My work as an educator has taught me the relevance of viewing formation as something that must be holistic; one that ought to engage the different aspects of human life if it is to have any transformative impact on the ones being formed. In 1992, Pope John Paul II gave to the Roman Catholic Church a post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (I will give you shepherds after my own heart – Jer. 3:15). Here, John Paul II articulates the need for formators of future priests to take seriously the need to tailor their education to

meet the needs of our times. He called for a clear understanding of holistic formation that accounted for the human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral. It is worth pointing out the bold claim made by John Paul II, who argued for human formation as the core of all holistic formation on which the other three aspects of formation hinge. His vision of the human is also very interesting; it is conditioned on what he calls “affective maturity.”<sup>15</sup> In his words, “Affective maturity presupposes an awareness that love has a central role in human life... We are speaking of a love that involves the entire person, in all his or her aspects - physical, psychic and spiritual – and which is expressed in the ‘nuptial meaning’ of the human body...”<sup>16</sup> Following the release of this document, many houses of formation in the western world and in Africa began the much-needed conversation to figure out how to revamp their formation process to allow for a clear understanding and expressions of these four aspects of formation. I recall vividly, efforts made by some religious communities in Nigeria who began to explore ways of revamping their formation programme to account for this new guidance on priestly and religious formation.

Furthermore, to show how much work still needs to be done even by the religious communities that want to make a difference, it is proper to share an incident that occurred some years ago during my undergraduate studies. During my senior year as a philosophy student in the seminary, a course on human sexuality was introduced as an elective. It was going to be taught as two sessions. One was to be taught by a nun and the other by a member of my religious community. I happened to have registered for the latter. During our first week of class meetings, it dawned on me that what was needed was not just a course but a total re-education of all priests and seminarians for our lack of training in the area of human sexuality. The instructor kept referring to Origen, the great theologian of the Early Church, as someone who had cut off his ‘third leg,’ a euphemism for castrating himself. When I pushed further by asking the instructor to explain how humans mutated from having three legs to now having two, I was made to know that such types of questions were not going to be entertained by him. That was it for me. I realized that the issues at stake were deeper than just taking a class on human sexuality. The anthropological vision that has defined how we perceive ourselves as sexual beings, our comfort level with our own sexual conditioning, our linguistic comfort in carrying out such

discourses all needed to be critiqued deeply and if necessary, transformed radically if the vision of Pope John Paul II was to be realized for the Church, particularly in the Nigerian context. I am not alone in making this observation. Another “reason why renewal and transformation are constantly needed is the fact that our knowledge of reality is constantly increasing and changing and this inevitably affects the way we live our lives. For instance, it makes an enormous difference if our understanding of homosexuality changes from regarding those who engage in same-sex behaviour as either deviant or sick ‘heterosexual’ persons to seeing them as persons whose fundamental orientation attracts them to persons of the same sex.”<sup>17</sup>

No one denies the fact that the establishment of structured priestly formation has yielded some positive results. The intellectual formation has been a great success for priests over the centuries. Lovely spiritual practices have been developed through the quasi monastic settings of seminaries. A good sense of community among the future members of the clergy is developed during these formative years. However, with regard to sexual formation, the outcome has been very poor, if we are to be honest with ourselves. Since the Church is made up of men and women, one wonders what dictates the rationale behind having junior seminaries that house young boys who are excluded from substantive interactions with young girls their age? As part of their priestly formation, ought not these young boys be provided with healthy sex education and ways of appreciating personal boundaries in their interactions with each other and with women and girls? As reputable psychologists would opine, dating is part of holistic human formation. Through the dating experience, a young man or a young woman begins to learn how to negotiate appropriate boundaries for themselves and for those they may have feelings for. They learn to appreciate the fact that consent must be clearly given and sustained always, otherwise it is not consent. As these young men and women attain adulthood, their affective maturity aligns itself also with those of the spiritual and intellectual. When one listens carefully to all the traumatic stories of the sex abuse cases involving ordained men in the Roman Catholic Church, one thing is central, these accused have no sense of what healthy affective boundaries entail. Even with the level of intellectual education, they have attained in life, their poor social skills, manipulative

personalities, puerile tricks at luring their victims to enter into a relationship of trust speak to a disconnect between the different levels of their formation. It is as though one of the four integral pillars of formation (affects) is not properly aligned with others. This is not an accidental reality. This distorted alignment is traceable back to the very origins of the founding of seminaries. The establishment of formal structures for priestly formation came from the Council of Trent's attempt at curbing ideas it had deemed injurious to orthodoxy.<sup>18</sup> Men who were to serve the Church were to be trained clearly in ways that the radical ideas of the times could be curtailed.<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, the psychological background for this approach and attitude is intricately linked to a somewhat problematic attitude toward all things that do not fit perfectly well with the stated goals of *raison d'être* for seminaries.<sup>20</sup> Issues dealing with human sexuality would necessarily be seen as suspect, especially in a church with a strong Manichaean heritage; one that frowns at the sensual, and considers the sexual as the pathway for tempting and corrupting the purity of the soul. Rather than explore the broad nature of human sexuality as an essential condition for priestly formation for men whose ministerial duties will entail relating with other humans through the breadth of their human affects, a form of spiritualizing of the affects has come to replace that which needs to be addressed in a more pragmatic and concrete manner. Celibacy and chastity are spoken of using the spiritual motifs of the heavenly bride. Theological and spiritual works have flourished over the years in addressing the sexual urges and realities of these candidates for priestly and religious life. A huge mistake on the part of the Church is not to take seriously new fields of knowledge, especially in the social sciences, that deal with the human person as a sexualized being. It is on that note that I want to offer some concrete interventions to help articulate a more robust priestly formation programme for the Nigerian Church and other local and national churches that may be facing similar problems.

### **Envisioning A New Formation Paradigm**

Priestly formation is not for its own sake. It is for the good of the Church. Those who chose to respond to the call to serve in the ministerial priesthood are chosen from the community of the baptized in churches located in particular cultures and societies. Understanding these facts is fundamental in helping to build up a formation



programme that is relevant for the times. Thus, any seminary formation today in the Church, be it in Nigeria or anywhere in the global north, must take seriously the reading of the signs of the times. The Church of the twenty-first century is not going to be similar to that of the twentieth century. We currently live in the age of technology. Different types of community are springing up globally that go beyond previous understandings of that term. New notions of ecclesial structures are being formed. A broader understanding of ecclesial leadership is fast becoming the norm. The laity is becoming very educated theologically and sometimes more informed theologically than the ordained as seems to be the case in the western world. Nigeria is not immune from these changes occurring. The existential and ultimate questions being asked by the young are conditioned by the totality of their experiences in more globalized and pluralistic contexts. With the above in mind, I offer the first of four interventions to help articulate new formative programmes for the future members of the clergy in Nigeria; priestly formation in Nigeria today should begin with a serious reflection on the signs of the times in the country. What does it mean to be a Church in today's Nigeria, where religious and cultural pluralism are key components of the lived experiences of the people? What and how does it mean to be a Church in an era when Nigeria is positioned to become the largest economy in Africa and may become a prominent player in the global economy? How and in what ways can the Church be relevant to a society where women are rightly reclaiming their roles in society? Simply reciting old arguments to address new discourses is at best an insult to people's intelligence.

To read the signs of the times is to position the Church for its role as an agent of the new evangelization. This new evangelization ought not to be focused solely on making Christians out of people. Rather, it ought to go beyond that. It must help people appreciate who they are as sexualized beings. Today, we live in an era of full self-expression. This is the era of the #METOO Movement. This is the era of #BlackLivesMatter Movement. The Church in Nigeria cannot function as though it is isolated from these global social movements and concerns. It should also resist the temptation to want to appeal to catechesis that offers shallow answers to complex issues. Human sexuality is a complex matter, one that must not be seen anymore

from the locus of the problematic. The Church in Nigeria ought to come up with a holistic human formation that addresses the spectrum of human sexuality as embodied in the lives of candidates for the priesthood. To think and operate formation programmes with the mindset that all persons in the programmes are themselves heterosexual persons may not be doing justice to the needs of persons who do not identify with heterosexuality.

A recent poll conducted by The Initiative for Equal Rights (TIERS) found out that “39% of Nigerians approve of members of the LGBTQ+ community having equal access to public healthcare, education, and housing.”<sup>21</sup> The Church ought to be leading this conversation and promoting inclusive social teachings that address the needs of these persons. The best way to account for this is to have a robust formation programme that speaks to these social issues. Making the hermeneutical shift that moves from the problematic to the locus of giftedness can help the Church to see possibilities of hope and new knowledge it may not have been capable of seeing previously. Stated differently, “a Christian theology of creation means that we accept the whole of reality, ourselves included, as given and gift. The task of human freedom is to become who we are and we cannot do that without continually trying to understand better who we are. This is a never-ending process.”<sup>22</sup> Thus, reading the signs of the times is itself a form of prophetic response to the call of discipleship that is relevant to our era. The Church must be seen and must also see itself as an instrument of God’s mercy. Pope Francis has made his pontificate a reflector of this theological and ministerial stance. There is beauty in such a strategy. For too long, the Church has embraced a rigid normative approach to human sexuality that is defined radically by western notions of natural law, which, of it itself, is culturally conditioned. A legitimate question the Nigerian Church must respond to is this: are there no cultural insights from Nigeria that can help the Church to embrace a more humanistic, personalistic, and holistic understanding of human sexuality that is not radically limited by the dualism of good and evil or right and wrong that seems to have defined western understandings of sexual identities and expressions? This question calls for Nigerian theologians and the members of the Church to take seriously their responsibilities as educated members of the Church to articulate an Afro-Nigerian theology on human sexuality that speaks to what it means to be human in the Nigerian

context. Without denying the usefulness of the natural law tradition in western societies' construction of knowledge, be it in their philosophical or theological traditions, I am of the view that an African pragmatic ethics needs to be the *modus operandi* for the Nigerian Church. What does this entail? Perhaps, the insight of Kwame Gyekye will help explicate the point I am making here. In his words:

On what grounds are some acts (etc.) considered good? The answer is simply that each of them is supposed ... to bring about or lead to social well-being. Within the framework of Akan social and humanistic ethics, what is morally good is generally that which promotes social welfare, solidarity, and harmony in human relationships. Moral value in the Akan system is determined in terms of its consequences for mankind and society. "good" is thus used of actions that promote human interest. The good is identical with the welfare of the society, which is expected to include the welfare of the individual... It is clear that this definition does not at all refer to the will or commands of God. That which is good is decreed not by a supernatural being as such, but by human beings within the framework of their experiences in living in society.<sup>23</sup>

In a very abbreviated form, natural law tradition makes a metaphysical assumption that imputes moral normativity on persons, objects, and actions irrespective of the nuances brought about by context or social locations of the acting subject. On the other hand, African pragmatic ethics situates the moral content of a being, object, or action within their complex relational interactions operating in a concrete community.<sup>24</sup>

Let me offer a second intervention. Christianity's Achilles heel has always been a bias for a dualistic vision of the human person. Question three of *The Penny Catechism* begins by asking: In whose image and likeness are humans made? The corresponding answer is that it is in God's image that humans are made. Then the next question asks categorically if the likeness of God is "in your [one's] body or in your [one's] soul." The response is telling. "This likeness

to God is chiefly in my [one's] soul."<sup>25</sup> For centuries, many Christians have recited these lines and have never stopped to question the theological rationale behind such glaring dualistic anthropology. If the soul is what "chiefly" represents the divine likeness in us, one is thus compelled to ask the question, what then does the body represent? Christian theology has a rich and yet very sad history in depicting the body and all that it represents as a pathway for temptations and the corruption of the soul. What does this mean in light of sexual ethics today? I would say, everything. The sexual crisis the Church faces today can be traced to this disjointed and paradoxical dualism inherent in the Church's theological anthropology. Not being able to see the human body with all its embodied affectivity as epiphanic gifts of God's encounter with creation reduces the Church's capacity to mediate a rich narrative of how God works in and with us in the concreteness of our embodiment. God did not become human "chiefly" in our soul. Rather, the incarnation speaks of a God who chose to become fully one with us in all that we are except sin. In the incarnation, all dualistic arguments are rendered invalid. God became not just a human being but a sexualized being. It is important that theologians take this seriously. If I may be as vivid as possible, the sexualized God-human experienced all the emotions attached to sexual self-discoveries and these entail all the hormonal realities involved. I recall a conversation I had with a fellow theologian some years ago when I made the comment that the adolescent Jesus must have had wet dreams and thought constantly of the persons he had 'crushes' on as do typical adolescents who are going through puberty. I could see my colleague almost having a nervous breakdown. He just could not conceive of his Jesus as being described in such 'dirty' terms. For him, sexuality is a dirty thing and at best sinful. The keyword here is an experience. "Though experience is always open to fallible interpretation, the bottom line is that experience is, and always has been, the most reliable source for discerning God's will."<sup>26</sup> It is not the abstract postulations of reason as though the reason has its own embodiment different from its unity with the body.

The Church is in urgent need of a holistic approach to human sexuality, one that must move away from beginning the conversation from fallenness, sinfulness, and evil to a starting point that stresses the beauty, sacredness, and fulfilling nature of being a sexualized

being. There is too much shame in the current theological discourse on human sexuality. The Church should move to a locus of pride in addressing what it means to be fully human. This responsibility must begin with the actual formation of future ministers of the Church. One wonders how those who are called to mediate the fullness of God's life to the Church and world and who are trained to see a fundamental aspect of that divine-human life as innately sinful can themselves be effective in their callings. Are they not being set up to fail even before they begin their ministry? The challenge for seminary formators today is to address the following questions: how comfortable and healthy are the discussions around human sexuality in the curriculum? How matured are the candidates for the priesthood to express who they are as sexual beings, and what concrete ways do they embrace to ensure that their affects are nurtured while also embarking on the formation of the other aspects of their lives? I do not think the Church is capable of bringing about this transformative move on its own. This leads me to offer a third intervention that may be helpful to the Church as it addresses the lacunae present in its vision of the human person.

Human collective wisdom has given us many angles from viewing and understanding our world. Groundbreaking research continues to be carried out in different fields. Disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, psychology, and many more continue to enrich our collective understanding of what it means to be human in the totality of our embodiment. Even the pure sciences have helped us to understand how our affects and decision-making processes continue to be shaped by the chemical makeup of our bodies. All these discoveries are a wealth of knowledge that can help the Church continue to grow in its theological articulation of what it means to be human. May I offer a very direct critique of a strand in the theological tradition of our church and maybe it might help us to make the much-needed shift to help address the current sex abuse crisis. There is a strong natural law tradition in the Church. Many of the Church's positions on issues dealing with human sexuality, reproductive health, and even the recent document from the Congregation for Catholic Education on gender theory demonstrate a clear bias for a particular way of reading the natural law tradition – one that is rooted in the Greco-Roman philosophical, theological, and cultural heritage. But one has to ask the critical questions, is this particular reading of

natural law done in honest dialogue with these other disciplines and their findings or is this reading of natural law based on an insular approach that preferences a specific narrative even when that narrative has no evidential credence? Why can't the Church appropriate more than one approach to understanding humans as ethical beings that include both the western natural law tradition and the African pragmatic ethical approach? How can one cultural knowledge exhaust the richness of human knowledge of how God interacts with creation?

It is important to note here that at the core of one's being one experiences one's own identity as genderized and sexual being. To simply deny the legitimacy of that self-awareness and existential experience may be a dangerous path to follow for the Church if it is to fully be a medium of hope and life for many who seek its counsel at moments in their lives when they need the nurturing and supporting guidance of its counsel. I opine strongly that the starting point for the Church's position on human sexuality ought always to be an open dialogue with other disciplines. The marriage of reason and faith is not a marriage of convenience. It ought to be one of authentic dialogue, however difficult that dialogue may be. I am not a psychologist. But I have had the honour of knowing persons who struggle with their sexual orientations and gender identities. These are not experiences that come from a place of abuse of freedom as the recent document on gender theory from the Vatican curia seems to suggest. These are existential struggles that sometimes lead to unimaginable trauma that words cannot describe. How ought the Church's vision of human sexuality speak to these realities in ways that holistic embrace of oneself becomes the focus? This is the current challenge that a robust sexual ethics must address. Again, seminaries cannot exempt themselves from this process. Seminary curricula should have a robust number of courses in the social sciences and the natural sciences that shed light on what it means to be fully human. What is a course in theological anthropology that does not speak to the realities of cultural, social, philosophical, scientific, linguistic anthropologies? What does it mean to be made in God's image when the embodied human's social location is not the starting point of any God-human talk? Who is Jesus Christ without his social location as a Jewish man living in an occupied land under strict patriarchal system? Of what value is Jesus Christ to an adolescent who is going through

puberty and struggling with all the hormonal changes in their body if the said Jesus is not presented to him/her as one who went through the same experience and came out of it unscathed? Our theological discourses in the seminaries must now be as pragmatic and concrete as they can be if we are to have a handle on the sex abuse crisis. Our current crisis lies in the strong urge to flee to the utopic state of abstract discourses on what it means to be human. We are not words. We are embodied beings living in the concreteness of the here and now.

I want to begin my fourth intervention for a new paradigm for priestly formation that speaks to our realities today with a question. Why seminary formation? This question is the key to understanding how and why the Church is faced today with the crises of inauthenticity among those ordained and tasked with the responsibility to be the media of God's mercy to God's own people. This question comes also from my own experiences as one who had the pleasure of receiving priestly formation from two very different models, one that is aligned to a more traditional model and another more progressive that seems to be taking seriously insights from discoveries from the social sciences. Before I proceed, let me state it clearly, in no way am I ranking these two models. Rather, I am attempting to see how one can help the other grow even though I am convinced that priestly formation must be contextually shaped to help address the unique needs of the local church. Uniqueness does not mean isolationism.

A critical observation of priestly formation both in Nigeria and in the United States of America validates the following comments: in Nigerian priestly formation programmes that I am conversant with, one can conclude that there is a strong focus on weeding-out candidates for the priesthood who are judged to be lacking in virtue or character needed for priestly ministry. One could argue that the very fact that there are so many candidates for priestly formation along with fewer resources to carryout holistic formation may be contributing to this model. But there are grave implications arising from this model. Rather than helping candidates open up to the formative process with all candidness and knowing they would not be judged but rather helped to become better persons who through an elaborate discernment process may discover later their other callings

away from the priesthood or even to the priesthood, a state of paranoia is created in their lives and they end up being inauthentic and secretive about who they are. Paying attention to the study cited earlier in this work on the state of sex crisis in the Church in the United States of America, one notices that the height of the crisis came during the time when the Church was also experiencing some vocation boom and operating a weed-out model of formation. On the other hand, a different model that is currently being practised by a growing number of dioceses in the United States is what I have labelled the full-authenticity model. It entails a formative process where candidates for the priesthood are invited to self-disclose who they are, and that includes their sexual orientation. Whatever level one finds oneself in the sexual orientation spectrum is received as gifts that can be used to help the candidate to fully live out their calling to voluntary celibacy that the priesthood calls for. For this goal to be realized, concrete steps are taken to help the candidates in formation to embrace their inner truths as sexual persons. There are series of evaluations throughout the formative process and these include expert opinions from the social sciences. Candidates for the priesthood are considered human beings who are on a life journey and that means they need all the professional, formal, and informal support at the different stages in that journey. Knowing that one is in formation not to be judged or weeded out but to be helped to discern correctly and acquire the needed skills, talents, and virtues for the ministry ahead allows for these candidates to open themselves up at their core to the process even if that opening up means embracing their own vulnerabilities. There is beauty in such a process when it is done right.

Lest my readers think that the American model is free from error, let me offer a few comments based on my time in the seminary in the United States and my interactions with seminary formators here in the country as well; American seminary formation today needs to create a culture and climate that appreciates the beauty of intellectual formation. Due to the lack of vocations, there is the temptation to want to water-down the intellectual formation of future priests. There isn't much, if any, philosophical foundation for seminarians before they embark on their theological formation. Even when engaged in theological formation, it has become the trend to see seminarians embracing a cafeteria approach to theological formation. They tend to



reject theologians and their works they have judged for themselves to be unorthodox. Also, American seminary programmes need to take seriously the discoveries in the social sciences on social issues like racism, and systems of oppression. Throughout my time in the seminary, not a single course was offered on such topics dealing with systemic racism and xenophobia. If at all there is an original sin of American society, it is racism. To educate men for the ordained priesthood who are supposed to be sources of life and hope for God's people, and not prepare them on how to address the social sins of the society and the Church in this part of the world, is to diminish their ability to be agents of positive change.

### **Conclusion**

In this work, I have intentionally moved away from the simplistic conclusions that tend to define the current clergy sex abuse crisis as being perpetuated by a homosexual mafia in the Roman Catholic priesthood. There is no evidence justifying such a sensational conclusion. I do not want to give a myth the legitimacy it does not deserve. However, there is clear evidence that the Church has a sexual abuse crisis amongst its clergy. The crisis seems to be growing as we begin to see that it goes beyond just priests and deacons. The entire clergy has a sex abuse crisis on its hands and it needs to figure out how to address this issue. The recent decision of Pope Francis instructing how the crisis ought to be addressed by leaving it in the hands of the bishops and Roman curia is a good place to start the much-needed reform.<sup>27</sup> To now require a metropolitan to take the lead in the investigation of a suffragan bishop under his jurisdiction, as directed by Francis in his *Motu Proprio, Vos Estis Lux Mundi*, calls for some honest discernment process.<sup>28</sup> It might be wise for the Church to move completely the investigative process of episcopal sexual abuse and priestly sexual abuse to a more neutral body that is comprised of laypeople. This approach will allow for complete transparency that may not always be the case when a bishop is tasked with the responsibility of leading an investigation into the moral/immoral actions of a fellow bishop.

It is worth noting that no institution can reform itself internally. It has never happened even in the history of the Church. One wonders why and how Pope Francis thinks this time around it is

going to be different. Yes, I know that the pontiff is canonically bound to act within the juridical tradition of the Church where the local church has its own autonomy. However, a greater good is now at stake, the integrity of the Church. This greater good calls for a new approach to Canon Law and its inherent tradition. Without reducing other bishops to mere secretaries of the Bishop of Rome, it might be useful for the Church to articulate new canonical regulations that offer to the laity deliberative powers in helping the clergy to be faithful to its commitment to the people of God, especially in matters dealing with monitoring the unfolding sexual abuse crisis among the ranks of the ordained. Each diocese ought to have its own deliberative process with each member having equal deliberative powers to arrive at decisions that should include the reduction of the ordained to the lay state. The fact that the baptism of the laity is what decides their rights and duties in the Church, the members of such a commission should be able to apply disciplines to those found guilty that are currently reserved to the Holy See. This is not going to slip into the ancient struggles between the ordained and the laity. Such fears come from a place of power.

It is time for the Church to abandon narratives and the psychology of power and embrace the psychology of service and humility. The current sex abuse scandal has injured the Church at its very core. How it heals from this self-imposed injury will be determined by its ability to embrace its own vulnerabilities. A church that speaks of vulnerability as the gateway of experiencing the divine must now demonstrate to the world and to itself that it does not only speak the words, it also knows how to live them out.

## **Endnotes**

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<sup>1</sup> A longer version of this work will be published under the title “Priestly Formation and Sexual Abuse in The Roman Catholic Church: In Dialogue with The Nigerian Church,” *Journal of Black Catholic Theological Symposium* (2019).

<sup>2</sup> Judith Lorber, “BELIEVING IS SEEING: Biology as ideology,” *Gender and Society* 7, no. 4 (1993), 568

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 569 – 570.

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<sup>4</sup> See I. A. Hughes, “Intersex,” *BJU International* 90, no. 8 (November 2002): 769 – 776. See also, U. S. National Library of Medicine, “Intersex,” *Medical Encyclopedia*, accessed June 17, 2019, <https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001669.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Christine E. Gudorf, *Body, Sex, and Pleasure. Reconstructing Christian Sexual Ethics* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1994), 4.

<sup>6</sup> Lorber, “BELIEVING IS SEEING: Biology as ideology,” 571.

<sup>7</sup> See Congregation for Education, “*Male and Female He Created Them*” *Towards A Path of Dialogue on The Question of Gender Theory in Education*, June 10, 2019, [https://www.lifesitenews.com/images/local/CONGREGATION\\_FOR\\_CATHOLIC\\_EDUCATION\\_EN.pdf](https://www.lifesitenews.com/images/local/CONGREGATION_FOR_CATHOLIC_EDUCATION_EN.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>10</sup> World Health Organization, “Gender and Genetics,” *Genomic Resource Centre*, accessed August 27, 2019, <https://www.who.int/genomics/gender/en/index1.html>

<sup>11</sup> As cited by Philip Pullella, “Vatican Condemns Gender Theory as Bid to Destroy Nature,” *Reuters*, June 10, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-vatican-gender-idUSKCN1TB20E>

<sup>12</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter* (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2011), 182.

<sup>13</sup> Gudorf, *Body, Sex, and Pleasure*, 5.

<sup>14</sup> For a detailed review of the report, see, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, The City University of New York, *The Nature and Scope of Sexual Abuse of Minor by Catholic Priests and Deacons in the United States 1950 – 2002* (Washington D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2004).

<sup>15</sup> John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: Pastores Dabo Vobis*, March 25, 1992, 44, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_25031992\\_pastores-dabo-vobis.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_25031992_pastores-dabo-vobis.html).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Kevin T. Kelly, *New Directions in Sexual Ethics. Moral Theology and the Challenge of Aids* (London and Washington: Geoffrey Chapman, 1998), 25.

<sup>18</sup> H. J. Schroeder, *Canons and Decree of the Council of Trent. Original Text with English Translation* (St. Loui, MO/London, 1941), 175 – 179.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Happiness Nleweoha, “Watch: A Recent Statistics On LGBT Community in Nigeria,” *The Guardian*, August 11, 2018, <https://guardian.ng/life/watch-a-recent-statistics-on-lgbt-community-in-nigeria/>

<sup>22</sup> Kelly, *New Directions in Sexual Ethics*, 28.

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<sup>23</sup> Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought. The Akan Conceptual Scheme. Revised Edition* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 132.

<sup>24</sup> For a detailed treatment of this topic, see SimonMary A. Ahiokhai, “Embracing the Pragmatic In African Indigenous Religions: New Perspective for Interfaith Dialogue,” *Christianity and Culture Collision: Particularities and Trends from a Global South*. Eds. Cyril Orji and Joseph Ogbonnaya (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016): 151 – 163.

<sup>25</sup> *The Penny Catechism: A Catechism of Christian Doctrine* (Charlotte, North Carolina: TAN Books, 2012), 1.

<sup>26</sup> Gudorf, *Body, Sex, and Pleasure*, 12.

<sup>27</sup> See Francis, *Apostolic Letter. On The Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Persons*, March 26, 2019,

[http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu\\_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20190326\\_latutela-deiminori.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20190326_latutela-deiminori.html). See also, *Law No. CCXCVII. On The Protection of Minor and Vulnerable Persons*, March 26, 2019,

[http://www.vatican.va/resources/resources\\_protezioneminori-legge297\\_20190326\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/resources/resources_protezioneminori-legge297_20190326_en.html). See also, *Guidelines for The Protection of Children and Vulnerable Persons*, March 26, 2019,

[http://www.vatican.va/resources/resources\\_protezioneminori-lineeguida\\_20190326\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/resources/resources_protezioneminori-lineeguida_20190326_en.html).

<sup>28</sup> See Francis, *Apostolic Letter: Motu Proprio – Vos Estis, Lux Mundi*, May 7, 2019,

[https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu\\_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20190507\\_vos-estis-lux-mundi.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20190507_vos-estis-lux-mundi.html)