

## FORMATION OF THE YOUNG CANDIDATES IN INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND IN THE SEMINARIES FOR THE SYNODAL WAY

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### **Abstract**

*God is the origin and end of the formation of candidates in institutes of consecrated life and seminaries. He sows the seed of vocation to total self-giving. Through formation, God provides a fertile ground where the seed germinates and sustains to bear sweet, beautiful, and attractive fruits to satisfy the hungry and thirsty souls in the world. Formation to consecrated and priestly life creatively moulds the candidates' minds, hearts, bodies, talents, and gifts to conform to the life of the Trinity. The formation process and structure provided for candidates require a synodal way which stems from the Trinitarian life and action of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Such a synodal approach is characterized by communion, participation, and mission. It demands an integral formation of the whole person, which enables the candidates to integrate human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral aspects of their lives and develop them simultaneously. Proper disposition to formation fosters growth in communion with God, internalization of Christ's values, and participation in the salvific mission under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Formation to total self-giving and consistent heart response to God's love is an ongoing process that involves both initial and ongoing formation. Today, contemporary society demands not only the testimony of work and intellectual capacity but also the testimony of concrete life experience, personal encounters with God, and shared responsibility, which synodal formation shapes and sustains.*

**Keywords:** Communion, Formation, Integral, Mission, Participation, Self-giving, Synodal

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## 1. Introduction

The incorporation of young candidates into the institutes of consecrated life and in the seminaries involves an integral formation of the individual, which is a lifelong journey of total self-giving. Through active participation in the life and mission of the Church, the candidates give a practical and living testimony of their faiths. The Church, in following the footsteps of Christ, feels called to relive the disciple's experience with Christ through a new commitment. Every aspect of formation aims at the candidate's interior transformation and union with God for effective pastoral ministry and apostolic activities. Hence, a synodal way characterised by a life of communion, participation, and mission is recommended for the formation of young candidates in institutes of consecrated life and seminaries. The article considers the etymology and meaning of formation. It looks into the models and agents of formation. Finally, the article examines specific challenges to synodal formation. It offers some recommendations to foster growth in candidates' communion with God, shared responsibility, and participation in the life and mission of the Church.

## 2. Etymology and Meaning of Formation

Etymologically, the word 'formation' is derived from the Latin word *formare*, meaning to mould or shape or form.<sup>2</sup> Formation is a broad term that can be applied in many senses (formation of a group or soccer). Still, this article focuses on the formation of young candidates in institutes of consecrated life and in the seminaries for the synodal way. In this sense of formation, the root meaning of the term expresses the essential elements of formation - formation processes, agents, and candidates. It expresses the idea of formation as the process of giving shape, journeying with, taking care of, and opening up. These fundamental principles of formation are common to candidates in institutes of "consecrated life."<sup>3</sup> and in the seminaries, but only in the method of application, which respects

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<sup>2</sup> Mathew Anatharackal, C.M.I., *Psycho-Spiritual Dimensions of Formation* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2001), 218. See also Lourdu Wilson, "Priestly Formation in the Post-Vatican Documents," (2023), 1, accessed 26/4/24, DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.36741.73447.

<sup>3</sup> Consecrated life, deeply rooted in the example and teaching of Christ the Lord, is a gift of God the Father to his Church through the Holy Spirit. It is a form of Christian life that exists within various canonical institutions, among them Religious Congregations, Secular Institutes, Orders of Virgins, Hermits, etc. (cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* on the Consecrated Life and Its Mission in the Church and the World [hereafter *VC*], 25th March 1996, no. 1; Guy Lespinay, O.P., *Introduction to Religious Life, A Journey of Faith and Service* (New York: St. Pauline Publications, 2015), 3).

their unique roles and contributions in walking together in the building of the Church. The reality of formation can be explained analogically using certain images: the Trinitarian relation, discipleship experience, artisanal craft, and potter and clay.

The formation of young candidates in institutes of consecrated life and the seminaries is a Trinitarian action of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, which is fundamental to a synodal way for formation (synodal formation). By synodality, the Church means “the specific *modus vivendi et operandi* [way of living and working] of the Church, the people of God, which reveals and gives substance to her being communion when all her members journeying together, gathering in assembly and take an active part in her evangelizing mission.”<sup>4</sup> Hence, a synodal way of formation is a style of formation that moulds candidates to be more instruments of union with God and unity of all humanity, share gifts and tasks in the mission of the Church, and creatively and actively participate in developing processes, structures, and institutions of the Church to strengthen the exercise of responsibility and authority in the missionary life of the Church.<sup>5</sup> It fosters the candidates' potentialities and dispositions, especially in the areas of becoming balanced and mature, reciprocal and ordered relations, attentive mutual listening and dialogue, internal transformation, and familiarity with personal and community discernment.<sup>6</sup>

John Paul II affirms that formation is a “participation in the action of the Father who, through the Spirit, shapes the feelings of the Son in the hearts of young men and women.” He presents a Trinitarian approach to formation by emphasizing the communal action of the Trinity in the life of the young men and women called to participate in the life and mission of the Church, which flows from the divine mission of the Son and Holy Spirit. Hence, a synodal formation is modelled in the Trinitarian image, as affirmed by John Paul II. He says that “in every age, there have been men and women who, obedient to the Father's call and the promptings of the Spirit, have chosen this special way of following Christ to devote themselves to him with an 'undivided' heart (cf. 1 Cor 7:34).”<sup>8</sup> Consecrated

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<sup>4</sup> International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2018, nos. 6, 70a.

<sup>5</sup> Catholic Church, *Instrumentum Laboris*, XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, for the First Session, October 2023, nos.46 - 60, accessed 15/5/24, <https://rcan.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/ENGLISH-INSTRUMENTUM-LABORIS-2023.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Catholic Church, *Instrumentum Laboris*, no.58. See ITC, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, nos.3.

<sup>7</sup> John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vitae Consecrata* on the Consecrated Life and Its Mission in the Church and the World [hereafter *VC*], 25th March 1996, no. 66.

<sup>8</sup> John Paul II, *VC*, no. 1.

and priestly life is God's gift of living a total life of self-giving to God in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Synodal formation fosters growth in communion, participation, and the mission of the Church by shaping the talents, gifts, minds, and hearts of the candidates in imitation of Christ through self-giving, service, and a life of perfect charity, which describes especially a consecrated life.<sup>9</sup>

The idea of shaping the candidates after the heart of Christ gives rise to another image of synodal formation as discipleship experience, that is, the disciples learning at the feet of Jesus. Pope Francis affirms that formation means "guarding and fostering vocations, that they may bear ripe fruit. They are diamonds in the rough, ready to be carefully polished with respect for the conscience of the candidates and with patience so that they may shine among the people of God. The formation is, therefore, not a unilateral act by which someone transmits theological or spiritual notions. Jesus did not say to those he called: come, let me explain, follow me, I will teach you: no! The formation offered by Christ to his disciples came rather as a 'come, and follow me', 'do as I do', and this is the method that today, too, the Church wants to adopt for her ministers. The formation of which we speak is a 'discipular experience' which draws one to Christ and conforms one ever more to Him."<sup>10</sup> The Holy Father, Pope Francis, understands formation as a journey of discipleship, to be in union with Christ, learn from Him by listening and imitation, and embrace inner transformation and heart response to Christ's continuous call.

Pope Francis, like John Paul II, recognizes the communal and mission-oriented nature of formation but further emphasizes the Christological dimension of formation owing to the practical imitation of Christ's method of formation, which focuses on experiential formation - 'come, follow me' (Mtt 4:19). He believes that the discipleship experience is fitting and meaningful for the candidates of today coming from a world of different ideologies and influences of social media. Pope Francis maintains that "formation understood as discipleship accompanies the ordained minister his entire life and regards his person as a whole, intellectually, humanly, and spiritually."<sup>11</sup> He appeals to candidates in

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<sup>9</sup>Congregation for the Clergy, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation: Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, L'Osservatore Romano, Vatican City, 8th December 2016, no. 28, accessed 14/5/24, <https://www.clerus.va/content/dam/clerus/documenti/ratio-2026/Ratio-EN-2017-01-03.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup>Francis, Speeches, *Address of Pope Francis to the Plenary of the Congregation for the Clergy*, 3rd October 2014, par. 3, accessed 14/5/24, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/october/documents/papa-francesco\\_20141003\\_plenaria-congregazione-clero.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/october/documents/papa-francesco_20141003_plenaria-congregazione-clero.html). See also Congregation for the Clergy, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation Ratio: Fundamental Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, no. 1.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

formation, both in the institutes of consecrated life and in the seminaries, to grow in their awareness of being good shepherds and mission-oriented.

Pope Francis further presents an analogy of formation as “an artisanal craft, not a form of policing.”<sup>12</sup> He speaks of a formation that guides the candidates in developing their creative potential and is open to new ways of communicating the Gospel message to the people of God. This dynamic approach to formation fosters candidates' assimilation and internalization of Christ's values and makes Christ present in the world. Similarly, an image of art is evidenced in the African concept of formation.

In African culture, especially in Nigeria, formation is associated with the analogies of the potter and clay or the sculptor and wood. These images express the creative arts of the Nigerian people and give insight into the nature of formation. The shape of the pot is in the potter's mind. God is the principal agent of formation, and the mission of every candidate in formation is in God's mind. Each candidate is individually called to be united with God in collaboration with others. Rose Uchem affirms formation as the process that helps one to develop fully and respond to life in a Christ-centered way.<sup>13</sup>

*Instrumentum Laboris* for the first session (October 2023) affirms that “formation is the indispensable means to make the synodal way of proceeding a pastoral model for the Church's life and action.”<sup>14</sup> It emphasizes the importance of formation in making the Church synodal. The document also highlights the need for a formation plan to include “an integral scope, affecting all the abilities and dispositions of the person, including mission orientation, the ability to relate and build community, willingness to listen spirituality, and familiarity with personal and community discernment.”<sup>15</sup> The formation of young candidates in institutes of consecrated life and seminaries for the synodal way aims to prepare candidates for a communion that radiates co-responsibility in mission, participation, governance, and authority.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Francis, *Meeting of Pope Francis with the Superiors General*, Vatican City, 29 November 2013, accessed 14/5/2024,

[http://vd.pcn.net/it/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1748:il-dialogo-di-papa-francesco-con-isuperiori-generalis-usg&catid=38:vita-consacrata&Itemid=49](http://vd.pcn.net/it/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1748:il-dialogo-di-papa-francesco-con-isuperiori-generalis-usg&catid=38:vita-consacrata&Itemid=49).

<sup>13</sup> Rose Uchem, “Towards a Holistic Seminary Formation in Nigeria: Forming Candidates for Ministry in the Twenty-First Century,” *Koinonia*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2006), 95, [95-112] accessed 16/5/24,

[publication/271515510\\_Towards\\_a\\_Holistic\\_Seminary\\_Formation\\_in\\_Nigeria\\_Forming\\_Candidates\\_for\\_Ministry\\_in\\_the\\_twenty-first\\_century](publication/271515510_Towards_a_Holistic_Seminary_Formation_in_Nigeria_Forming_Candidates_for_Ministry_in_the_twenty-first_century).

<sup>14</sup> Catholic Church, *Instrumentum Laboris*, no. 59. Synodal is an adjective drawn from the word synod, which means the path along which the people of God walk together (cf. International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, nos. 3, 5).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 58.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 46.

### 3. Models of Formation to Consecrated and Priestly Life

Considering the goal of formation, which is to assist candidates in institutes of consecrated life and the seminaries to grow in union with the Triune God and actively participate in the mission of evangelization, calls for a proper model to be applied. The formation of candidates for consecrated and priestly life has experienced different updates in the life of the Church. The first is the traditional or institutional model of formation. Before the Second Vatican Council, the Church adopted the traditional model, which focuses on structures, uniformity, and strict observance of the rules and regulations as a sign of authentic vocation.<sup>17</sup> Such a formation process fosters a high sense of obedience, asceticism, discipline, and regard for legitimate authority. Instructional methods are being used because some formators were not adequately trained. Despite these positive impacts, the traditional model paid little attention to individual uniqueness. Consequently, candidates assimilate compliance and conformism as an authentic way of responding to religious and priestly vocation. Hence, the lack of emphasis on the individual uniqueness of the candidates and the legalistic approach to formation calls for a renewal of the formation model.

Secondly, the updated, progressive model of the formation of candidates for consecrated and priestly life emphasizes self-fulfilment and individual uniqueness.<sup>18</sup> The attention was on the subjective mode of formation, contrary to the objective mode of the traditional model. Chinyeaka Ezeani affirms “the conviction that individuals have an innate capacity to grow and develop on their own.”<sup>19</sup> Candidates see themselves as the primary agents of formation and avoid being overdependent on others for their spiritual growth. However, the subjective notion of freedom promotes self-centeredness and a laissez-faire attitude toward formation norms. The progressive model challenges the goal of formation, which is to assist candidates in growing in every aspect of the human person.

Finally, the Vatican Council II recommends the integrated model, which integrates human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral formation to give shape to the totality of a person's participation freely and responsibly in the Trinitarian life of communion and mission.<sup>20</sup> The document *Pastores Dabo Vobis* further elaborated on these four essential dimensions of formation.<sup>21</sup> The document

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<sup>17</sup> See Chinyeaka Ezeani, *Rooted in Christ: Insights into Contemporary Religious and Priestly Formation* (Iperu-Remo: The Ambassador Press, 2007), 57.

<sup>18</sup> Ezeani, *Rooted in Christ: Insights into Contemporary Religious and Priestly Formation*, 60.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 60-61.

<sup>20</sup> Vatican Council II, Decree *Optatam Totius* on Priestly Formation [hereafter *OT*], 28th October 1965, no. 4.

<sup>21</sup> John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* [hereafter *PDV*], 25th March 1992, no. 43.

focuses on priestly integral formation, which is also fundamental to the formation of candidates in institutes of consecrated life, such as *Instrumentum Laboris*, XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, reaffirmed.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, the structure and formation process for a synodal formation of candidates in institutes of consecrated life and the seminaries should not downplay any of these dimensions of formation. Candidates should be helped to integrate and develop these four fundamental aspects of formation simultaneously.

### **(a) Human Formation**

The Post-Synod Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (PDV) affirms human formation as the foundation of the entire religious and priestly formation.<sup>23</sup> The Synod emphasizes the need for young candidates in institutes of consecrated life and seminaries to develop their human personalities, potentials, and talents as people called to be living images of Christ in their self-giving for the mission of evangelization. The disposition to be shaped in the image of Christ enables the candidates to grow in maturity (affective, emotional), which respects the nuptial meaning of the body through a chaste life, human qualities, sensitivity to the value of communion, and consciousness of the Church's mission. The human formation process should assist candidates to grow in responsible freedom in imitation of Christ's true friendship and sincere fraternal affection.<sup>24</sup> Candidates should be accompanied in developing an internal locus of control, which gives them a sense of responsibility and accountability for their actions, as opposed to an external locus of control.<sup>25</sup> Adequate human development and formation foster the action of grace in the lives of the individual candidates, fostering a loving desire to be in communion with God.

### **(b) Spiritual Formation**

Reflecting on the fundamental goal of synodal formation, which is to foster growth in union with God, one finds the need to provide the candidates with a heart-centred formation that focuses on the candidate's inner orientation and transformation. The Post-Synod Apostolic Exhortation states that spiritual formation is “the work of the Spirit and engages the person in his totality;

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<sup>22</sup>Catholic Church, *Instrumentum Laboris*, no. 59.

<sup>23</sup>John Paul II, *PDV*, no. 43.

<sup>24</sup>John Paul II, *PDV*, no. 44.

<sup>25</sup>Kevin P. McClone, “Intimacy and Healthy Affective Maturity: Guidelines for Formation,” *Human Development*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (2009), 6, accessed 2/5/24, [https://www.issmccclone.com/pblctns/Intimacy%20and%20Healthy%20Affective%20Maturity\\_fa-winter09b.pdf](https://www.issmccclone.com/pblctns/Intimacy%20and%20Healthy%20Affective%20Maturity_fa-winter09b.pdf).

introduces us into profound communion with Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd; it leads to a lifelong submission to the Spirit, in a filial attitude towards the Father and a trusting attachment to the Church. It is rooted in the experience of the cross to be able to introduce, in a profound communion, to the totality of the paschal mystery.”<sup>26</sup> Spiritual formation facilitates growth and the desire to live in intimate communion with the Triune God. It consists of a gradual and constant longing and seeking for Jesus all through one's life. The Vatican Council II recommends a threefold path to follow in seeking for Christ. These include faithful meditation on the Word of God (*Lectio Divina*), active participation in the sacred mysteries of the Church, and the service of charity to the little ones, the sick, sinners, and unbelievers.<sup>27</sup> By listening and meditating on the Word of God, candidates are helped to discover, understand, love, follow, and accomplish their mission.<sup>28</sup> The young candidates are expected to communicate the fruits of their meditation and contemplation in the light of God's wisdom.

### (c) Intellectual Formation

God created human beings in His image and likeness and bestowed upon them the intellectual capacity to know and love Him (Gen 1:27). By this gift of intellect and will, a human being, according to *Gaudium et Spes*, “participates in the light of God's mind.”<sup>29</sup> The Church emphasizes intellectual formation as an essential element of formation for effective pastoral ministry. The present era is “heavily marked by religious indifference and at the same time by widespread mistrust concerning the real capacity of reason to reach objective and universal truth, and from unprecedented problems and questions provoked by scientific and technological discoveries, forcefully requires an excellent level of intellectual training.”<sup>30</sup> Contemporary society has challenged religious values with arbitrary freedom and sceptical ideologies. Intellectual formation should pay attention to the intellectual creativity of the candidates “to make priests capable of announcing, precisely in a similar context, the immutable Gospel of Christ and to make it credible in the face of the legitimate needs of human reason.”<sup>31</sup> The intellectual formation process should dispose the candidates to creative thinking and seeking new ways of carrying out missionary activities. This kind will meet people from where they are and find a way of responding to both Christians and

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<sup>26</sup> John Paul II, *PDV*, no. 45.

<sup>27</sup> Vatican Council II, *OT*, 8. See also John Paul II, *PDV*, no. 45.

<sup>28</sup> John Paul II, *PDV*, no. 46.

<sup>29</sup> Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* on the Church in the Contemporary World [hereafter *GS*], 7th December 1965, no. 15.

<sup>30</sup> John Paul II, *PDV*, no. 51.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*



non-Christians. In the world of today, people are far more convinced by concrete things. The contents of intellectual formation should include studies in philosophy, theology, human spirit, Trinitarian relation, human sciences, and human sexuality.<sup>32</sup> All these different areas of study influence different aspects of human life positively and foster in the candidates the integration of life, prayer, and action for effective pastoral activities.

#### **(d) Pastoral Formation**

The integration of human, spiritual, and intellectual formation culminates in pastoral formation, which forms the candidates for the practical experience of the mission of evangelization. The Church, consistently in her teachings, emphasizes the essence of pastoral formation as the end of the entire formation process. *Lumen Gentium* highlights the point that the future priest on formation is prepared to participate in the life and mission of Christ as the *Alta Christi* and recommends that the formation process should equip the candidates to preach and teach what they believe and live what they teach concretely.<sup>33</sup> Consecrated life is not left out in the concrete life experience of Christ's way of life in their different apostolates as bride and beauty of Christ in the world. Also, *Optatam Totius* recommends that the entire formation process must aim at forming true shepherds of the souls in imitation of Jesus Christ, who is a teacher, priest, and shepherd.<sup>34</sup> It affirms that formation must have a pastoral character characterized by listening, a passionate heart, charitable activities, shared responsibility, and mutual cooperation. In affirmation, the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* emphasizes the need for adequate equipment for candidates to share Christ's charity and believes that through the virtue of charity, religious and priests imitate Christ in their self-giving and service.<sup>35</sup> Pastoral formation is conceived as the unifying force of all other aspects of formation, guiding growth toward maturity and wholeness.

#### **4. Agents of Formation**

A synodal formation involves a communal character and shared responsibility. George Okorie affirms that “formation is a mystery that involves the initiative of God who calls, the active freedom of the candidate who answers, and the help of the formator who guides.”<sup>36</sup> The formator accompanies the

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Vatican Council II, *LG*, 28.

<sup>34</sup>Vatican Council II, *OT*, 4.

<sup>35</sup>Vatican Council II, *PDV*, 56.

<sup>36</sup>George Maduakolam Okorie, *The Potter and the Clay* (Umuahia: Soul-Saving Publication, 2021), 34

candidate to freely respond to God's call through constant listening and communion with God in readiness to participate actively in the life and mission of Christ and the Church. The community atmosphere should foster positive growth in the candidate's personal encounter with God and other members of the community. Hence, the article considers the Holy Trinity, candidates in formation, formators, and community as fundamental agents of formation of the young candidates in institutes of consecrated life and seminaries.

**(a) The Holy Trinity**

The Triune God is the principal agent of formation. Individual candidates are formed according to God's design. John Paul II affirms that “God the Father, in the continuous gift of Christ and the Spirit, is the trainer par excellence of those who consecrate themselves to Him. But in this work [work of formation], He calls human mediation, placing some brothers and sisters alongside the one He calls.”<sup>37</sup> God arouses the feelings of being called for a special mission. The burning zeal for self-giving of one's life to God is the work of the Holy Spirit, who prompts, directs, teaches, and works in cooperation with the candidates.

**(b) The Person in Formation**

The primary human agent of formation is the person undergoing the formation process as a unique individual. The candidate's growth in inner freedom and responsibility is facilitated by the person's consistent disposition and openness to formation and desire for intimate union with God. John Paul II affirms that “saying yes to the Lord's call by personally taking on the dynamics of vocational growth is the inalienable responsibility of every called person, who must open the space of his or her life to the action of the Holy Spirit; it means following the formative path with generosity, welcoming with faith the mediations that the Lord and the Church offer.”<sup>38</sup> Each person is required to respond freely and wholeheartedly to the unique call to live a life of perfection through total self-giving and service as a participation in Christ's salvific mission. The candidate should be committed and cooperate with the formation process provided to assimilate and internalize the values of Christ, who reveals and manifests the reality of one's higher vocation.<sup>39</sup> He/she needs to realize the mystery of vocation that gradually unfolds in his/her life. The person in formation unites and conforms to Christ's life and action because the integration of one's strengths and weaknesses is possible only in the cruciform love of Christ, as

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<sup>37</sup>John Paul II, *VC*, no. 66.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, no. 65.

<sup>39</sup>Vatican Council II, *GS*, no. 22.

affirmed by *Ratio Fundamentalis*.<sup>40</sup> Every candidate is the agent of his/her formation. The candidates are required to develop a basic ability to engage with the reality of normal human tension and challenges; build basic trust in God, oneself, and others; and sincerely cooperate with the formators.

### **(c) The Formators**

The formator is the person who accompanies the candidates in the process of becoming and leads them toward a path to perfection. John Paul II affirms that God “calls human mediation, placing some brothers and sisters alongside the one He calls.”<sup>41</sup> Formators are called to imitate the Trinitarian approach to synodal formation in nurturing the vocation of young candidates, which is called a special way to internalize the values of Christ as a religious and priest. Adequate education is required of the formators, especially those in the institutes of consecrated life, to ensure a fruitful and effective formation of the candidates. Since formation entails the totality of a person, a synodal way for formation opens the door to a collaborative formation where qualified priests, religious men and women, and lay people join the formation team in the institutes of consecrated life and seminaries.

Through the joint creative and experiential processes, the team of formators assists, stimulates, facilitates, and strengthens the candidates to grow in grace according to the mind of God. The Church affirms that “the training effectiveness depends on the mature and strong personality of the trainers from a human and evangelical point of view. For this reason, on the one hand, the careful choice of trainers and, on the other, the encouragement of trainers to constantly make themselves more and more suitable for the task entrusted to them become particularly important.”<sup>42</sup> Formators are called to ensure the effectiveness of the candidates' formation process by establishing trustful, life-enhancing, appropriate confidentiality, healthy boundaries, and a conducive atmosphere to the candidates' formation.

The team of formators should prepare the formation program under the guidance of the Bishop or Religious Superior to promote communion, collaboration, and participation in the formation house as a living testimony for the candidates. The Congregation for the Clergy affirms that “it is appropriate to involve, in prudent ways adapted to the various cultural contexts, the collaboration of the lay faithful, men and women, in the formative work of future

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<sup>40</sup> Congregation for the Clergy, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation: Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, 29.

<sup>41</sup> John Paul II, *VC*, no. 66.

<sup>42</sup> John Paul II, *PDV*, no. 66.

priests. They must be chosen with care, within the framework of the laws of the Church and according to their particular charisms and their proven skills.”<sup>43</sup> Collaboration in the work of formation might yield beneficial fruits for the balanced growth of the candidates. It might bridge the gap between formator and formandee, initial and ongoing formation, society and Church, faithful and minister. Formators, as companions, have an educational responsibility to help candidates be aware of their conditions, gifts, talents, and weaknesses so that they can become more open to God's act of grace.<sup>44</sup> A Trinitarian communion and mission that flows down to the Church should be sustained by formation in preparation for embracing society at large.

#### **(d) The Community**

The community is a unique setting for growth as it helps candidates to be in touch with who they are via their lifestyle choices, constructive feedback, mutual support, and encouragement. The community also accompanies candidates in their initial and ongoing formation. The *Ratio Fundamentalis* affirms that “community life during the years of initial formation must make an impact on each individual, purifying his [or her] intentions and transforming the conduct of his [or her] life as he [or she] gradually conforms himself to Christ. Formation comes about every day through interpersonal relationships, moments of exchange, and discussion, which result in the development of that 'fertile soil', in which a vocation matures concretely.”<sup>45</sup> Hence, the community life that encourages and challenges the candidates to grow in solidarity and fraternal charity should be provided. The spirit of community is rooted in the image of the Church as a family, so the formation house should be marked by mutual friendship and fraternal charity.<sup>46</sup> Community experience prepares the candidates for the mission by exposing them to issues related to family dynamics, challenges, problems, and demands.

### **5. Challenges to Synodal Formation**

The formation of young candidates in the institutes of consecrated life and seminaries for the synodal way is very challenging, especially in this contemporary world influenced by social media and different ideologies. The

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Congregation for the Clergy, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation: Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, 46.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>46</sup> Congregation for the Clergy, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation: Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, 51.

question of why it is difficult for young candidates in formation to internalize the values of Christ is quite challenging. The lack of integration and internalization of Christ's values manifests itself in the disconnection between the initial and ongoing process of formation. The inability to cooperate with the formation process and grow towards union with God has its possible challenges.

First, the effect of family upbringing and societal moral standards. Ezeani believes that “we are all children of our history. We bring these influences along with us as we journey through life.”<sup>47</sup> Some family experiences left emotional trauma in the life of the candidates who see all around them as oppressors or who are loose at home and hardly take instruction willingly from the formators or who lack love and affection in the family tend to please everyone in search of affection, love, and approval. Everything is centred on the self, whereby the candidate's free response to the formation is affected.

Second, unrealistic expectations. Often, some candidates' road map towards self-transcendent and internalization of Christ's values is blocked by "unrealistic expectations, subconscious motivation, superficial proclamation of Christ's values, insufficient grounding in the basics of faith, among other things."<sup>48</sup> These obstructing factors hinder a candidate's capacity to internalize Christ's values. There is a dichotomy between the ideal self and the actual self because of certain hidden intentions that manipulate the candidate's attitude. In some other cases, candidates tend to give a subjective interpretation of Christ's values to suit their needs and desires.<sup>49</sup> Such candidates might lose the sense of interior freedom that makes the internalization of values and configurations related to Christ's life possible. They might end up being depressed and perpetually sad because of unfulfilled expectations.

Third, dilemma in accepting and living Christ's values.<sup>50</sup> Sometimes, candidates find themselves struggling with tensions of renouncing long-formed attitudes, which might cost them the deprivation of some inordinate pleasures and attachment. The candidate may not be competent to resolve such internal conflict alone. Therefore, he/she requires the attention of the formators, which should help the candidate attain self-actualization and self-transcendence. Openness and docility are essential.

Fourth, Personality traits. Ezeani mentions certain forms of addictions that mitigate against the internalization of Christ's values. These include difficulty with authority, impulse control problems, excessive anxiety, deep-seated anger,

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<sup>47</sup>Ezeani, *Rooted in Christ: Insights into Contemporary Religious and Priestly Formation*, 40.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 20.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 37.

<sup>50</sup>Ezeani, *Rooted in Christ: Insights into Contemporary Religious and Priestly Formation*, 19.

irresponsibility, unresolved issues concerning sexual orientation, traumatic experiences, and physical and emotional abuse.<sup>51</sup> These are 'psychological baggage' and unhealed wounds that call for attention while in formation. Otherwise, they will hinder the candidates' formative response.

Fifth, fear of the unknown. Some candidates, even at the start of their formation process, are already preoccupied with the end of the formation, whether successful or not. All effort during the formation is to succeed and be professed as a religious sister or ordained priest. Thereby losing sight of the whole formation process, which aims at union with God and internal transformation. There is no stage in life when one stops to internalize Christ's values. The idea is to grow more in living the life of Christ as a sign of the kingdom of God (religious) and a vicar of Christ (priest).

Sixth, the gap between the formator and formandee.<sup>52</sup> Despite the emphasis on integrated formation, some institutes of consecrated life and seminaries still emphasize discipline, rules, and regulations, which lead the candidates into compliance and conformism. This downplays the holistic formation that touches the totality of a person and promotes a synodal way of formation.

## **6. Recommendations**

In following the footsteps of Christ, the formation process should embrace a synodal way for formation, which is based on an integrated, experiential, and heart-centred that allows for a creative development of the whole human person called in a specific way to intimate union with God and participation in the life and mission of the Church. Formators should make Christ's values attractive and realistic so that the candidates will be willing to embrace the values as the ultimate.

The formation process should be structured to evoke in the young candidates the African communal system of life and missionary spirit, which promotes individual collaboration and participation in society. Africans make a home wherever there is none and grow wherever they are planted. Hence, the African values of communal life and missionary spirit, which enable active participation, are to be revitalized in the formation process of candidates in institutes of consecrated life and seminaries. Promoting the culture and spirituality of synodality founded in communion, mission, and participation, formation raises balanced candidates who can freely walk together and gather the

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 43.

<sup>52</sup>Rose Uchem, "Towards a Holistic Seminary Formation in Nigeria: Forming Candidates for Ministry in the Twenty-First Century," 97.

people of God as one family where the contribution and dignity of each member are honoured, respected, and valued whether man or woman or clergy or lay persons. Candidates should be prepared to be mission-oriented by learning the meaning and content of the Church's mission.

The formation plan of candidates should pay attention to the candidates' personal experience and family background of the individual candidate, especially the wounded souls. Healing should be offered to such candidates through counselling, spiritual direction, and spiritual exercises, which will help them resolve their psychological and spiritual baggage and grow towards self-transcendent. The candidates should be open to sharing their inner worries and struggles to avoid hindrances to spiritual growth and effective companionship. Docility to the promptings of the Holy Spirit is essential because the person in the formation needs to grow in virtues to embrace the difficult good that fosters the conversion of the heart that is essential to the missionary life of the Church.

Creativity and the art of doing things in a new way are African values that should be integrated into the formation plan of candidates in institutes of consecrated life and seminaries. Alongside the growth of this natural endowment (creativity) should be the virtue of prudence, which is the ability to discern what to do at any given moment while dealing with the difficulties and realities of pastoral ministry and apostolic activity in real-world scenarios.

The formation process should enable candidates to cultivate interior silence and attentive listening to the Word of God, the Tradition of the Church, Magisterial teachings, the inner self, and other fellow creatures (human and things). All these are important for synodal formation.

## **7. Conclusion**

Formation is a Trinitarian action in which the young candidates are shaped in the image of Christ, who manifested in His life and action the necessity for formation in preparation for a lifesaving mission. It aims at union with God through the imitation of Christ. In the footsteps of Christ, the Mother Church continued the mission of evangelization by preparing her members for the mission. Hence, formation is understood as a participation in the Trinitarian action in shaping the minds and hearts of young men and women to feel being called by God to a total life of self-giving for the mission of evangelization. The Church, through the formation of her members, especially young men and women in the institutes of consecrated life and seminaries, relives Christ's formation of His apostles and the Trinitarian communion and mission which the *Instrumentum Laboris* of XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops emphasizes as a synodal approach to formation. Such integral formation engages candidates with God, others, and self for effective participation in the mission of the Church.

It involves experiential and heart-centred formation for effective, attractive, and vision-oriented pastoral ministry in the synodal way, where all the members of the Church collaboratively and harmoniously work together to make Christ present to the world through the testimony of word, work, and life.