

## CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES IN THE CATHOLIC PERCEPTION OF CONSECRATED LIFE IN THE LIGHT OF JOHN 17:17-19

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### **Abstract**

The Catholic faith tradition adopts a state of life known as “consecrated life”. This life style is mainly for individual members who freely submit themselves for special screening and training towards it. These persons after a public pledge are accepted as “consecrated persons”. Great socio-moral standards are then set for judging them. These include evaluation of their personal consecration in the light of mortification, abstinence and sacrifice, towards the society’s edification, the wellbeing and spiritual growth of the church etc. Here the major challenge is that consecration does not immune these persons from social attractions of humanity. Hence they are often wheeled towards materialism and modernism. These facts raise serious questions, suspicions and skepticism as to the level of compliance to their vows and validity of their consecration. The skepticism has even made some to query and consequently doubt the relevance of the whole idea of consecrated life to the contemporary society. Against this backdrop, the paper seeks to re-examine the catholic perception of consecrated life, and the challenges confronting it in today’s world. This is done with a view of comparing the Catholic idea of consecrated life with the biblical standard, using John 17:17-19 as paradigm. The paper adopts exegetical method in this exercise.

**Key words / phrases:** - Catholic perception, consecrated life, contemporary challenges.

### **Introduction**

The key word of the paper, consecration etymologically, a noun of action, is derived from Latin *consecrationem* (nominative *consecratio*), *consecrat* past participle stem of *consecrare* (Harper 2010), is in the Bible the devoting or setting apart of anything to the worship or service of God. The race of Abraham and the tribe of Levi were thus consecrated (Ex. 13: 2, 12, 15; Num. 3:12, Schulte 1908). It is an act by which a thing is separated from a common and profane to a sacred use, or by which a person or thing is dedicated to the

service and worship of God by prayers, rites, and ceremonies. The custom of consecrating persons to the divine service and things to serve in the worship of God may be traced to the remotest times. Among the Semitic tribes it consisted in the three fold act of separating, sanctifying, or purifying, and devoting or offering to the Deity. In the Hebrew Law it is found to apply to entire people whom Moses, by a solemn act of consecration, designates as the people of God (cf. Exodus 24, Schulte 1908).

Later there was a consecration of the priests, (Aaron and his sons Exodus 29). Here the act of consecration consisted of purifying, investing, and anointing (Lev. 8) as a preparation for their offering public sacrifice. Distinct from the priestly consecration was that of the Levites (Num. 3:6) who represented the first-born of all the tribes. Another type of personal consecration among the Hebrews was that of the Nasserites (Num. 6). It implied the voluntary separation from certain things, dedication to God, and a vow of special sanctity. Similarly, the rites of consecration of objects – such as temples, altars, first fruits, spoils of wars, etc. – are minutely described in the Old Testament. Among the Romans wherever that was devoted to the worship of their gods (fields) animals, etc) was said to be consecrated, and the objects which pertained intimately to their worship (temples, altars, etc.) were said to be dedicated. The two words “consecration” and “dedication” were, however, often used indiscriminately, and in both cases it was understood that the object once consecrated or dedicated remained sacred in perpetuum (Schulte 1908).

Obviously, the gesture of Joseph and Mary in bringing the child Jesus to the Temple of Jerusalem was an evidence that the New Testament borrowed the Old Testament idea of consecration as an act of separating a person or thing for a sacred and divine purpose (Luke 2:22-24 ). It was a part of the Law of Moses to the Hebrew race in loyalty to the Lord their God, that the new people of God begun by the birth of Jesus, had to embrace.

The church apparently takes over from the example of Jesus through his parents the custom of consecration as a spiritual state that elevates a person by the grace of God to live for the service of God. Consequently, according to the Catholic faith, by the virtue of the anointing of oil of Chrism at baptism, every baptized person is consecrated. The same catholic faith tradition allows diversity in living out this consecration. Many choose the married state, others in the single status, and a very few opt for the vowed consecrated life (Mbonu 2015). Those who make this choice are commonly called consecrated persons (Poruthur ). Today, the title “consecrated persons” is used of some religious men and women in the catholic church distinguished and revered for embracing simple, holy, prayerful and dedicated life style in service of God and humanity, and particularly taking three evangelical vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. Despite the high reverence, and even admiration people have for the consecrated person, the whole idea of consecrated life is

indeed open to questions, suspicion and skepticism; centering on the sincerity and fidelity to the ideals professed, the fitness to right reason in the whole idea, its practical advantages and relevance to the contemporary society. Against this backdrop, the paper seeks to examine the catholic perception of consecrated life/ consecrated person and its challenges in the contemporary society. It does this with the view of comparing the catholic idea of vowed life with the New Testament consecration standard using John 17:17-19 as a paradigm. The paper's four headings with introduction and conclusion consist: First, the catholic perception of consecrated life as a background. Second, the study of the text of John 17:17-19. Third, the illustration of contemporary challenges of consecrated persons and the fourth the evaluation of catholic conception of consecrated persons in the light of John 17:17-19.

### **The Catholic Perception of Consecrated Persons**

The catholic perception of consecrated person is derived from the context of humanity's discovery of the beauty and grandeur of the vocation to love and the service of life (John Paul II 1981). According to Mbonu (2015) this vocation is for the baptized who by virtue of the anointing of the oil of chrism at baptism, become consecrated person. According to Mbonu as catholic faith tradition allows diversity in living out of this consecration, many choose the married state, some go for a single state while a few opt the vowed consecrated life, commonly called "Religious Life" in the catholic World. Those who opt for the option of Christian vocation to love and to serve humanity are both called and regarded as consecrated persons.

Consecrated persons form themselves in community of males or females or both called "society", "congregation" or "order". The persons are given the title "fathers", "brothers", or "sisters". They are generally revered and respected in both the church and the society and are looked upon as role models in the areas of spirituality and morality. For the Catholics, consecrated persons are holy and saintly, and their presence in the society reflects the holiness of God shared by mankind through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

A state of consecrated person is entered into by a "profession", religious ceremony by which one takes three evangelical vows of chastity, poverty and obedience as an act of consecration of his/her life and person to the service of God and humanity (Colin 1961). Catholics see this state (the religious state) as "one of the surest ways of imitating Jesus Christ and the richest forms of Christian spirituality" (Colin 1961: 1). The state is one of a special life in response of men and women who by predisposition desire to unfold their lives in concentrated presence to the holy unencumbered by family duties (van Kaam 1968). Consequently consecrated persons' vows of celibacy, poverty and obedience, the great demands and sacrifices on them, which are made manifest in their life styles are well acknowledged and

appreciated among the catholic societies. Most ordinary Catholics believe that the religious consecrate themselves to the service of God; and God in his turn, ratifies and confirms the consecration by his graces. High degree of holiness and moral discipline is, therefore, often expected from them. Their ability to conform to these is also often exaggerated. Consequently, consecrated persons are often faced with the danger of willfully forcing of oneself into perfection leading to a delusion. A misunderstanding of religious perfection so projected has also a negative effect of making consecrated persons incline especially to repress the awareness of their gross imperfections (van Kaam 1968).

One of the most remarkable aspect of life of the consecrated persons rating after celibacy, poverty and obedience, is a community life. They share in common their prayers, meals, property, gifts and are other spiritual and material resources. They see this as part of their chosen particular form of the discipleship in Christ, which plays a fundamental role in the life and mission of the church at the service of God's reign (Second Synod of Bishops for Africa 2009). Within the community life of the consecrated persons, the church perceives the great values of their prayer life. Most Catholics faithfully attach personal value to this. One often hears people requesting that they share in the daily prayers of this or that consecrated person. John Paul II sees community life consecrated persons along with their prayer life, indicating to all, a call to holiness, as their two particular functions in the church understood as the family of God (John Paul II 1995). Theirs is a realization of the church as a fraternity of equals devoted to a common purpose (sharing in the mission of Jesus Christ) according to the specific tradition of their society / congregation (Tavard 1964).

Along with prayer and community life, consecrated persons are seen as specially well – disposed to be devoted to the church in her social work in the areas of education, health, human promotion and pastoral service. In carrying out these services they follow the specific charism of the founders of the Institute they belong to. They pay particular attention to the relevant spirituality of their congregations in these services (Aniebonam 2005). Such professionalism, proficiency, expertise and dedication observed in consecrated persons, often admired by people, spring from this.

Perhaps the most remarkable characteristic of the consecrated persons is their simplicity of life. This is seen in every facet of their life. For them it fosters a singularity of focus making the advance of God's kingdom ones central concern. Their preoccupation with doing their Lord's will and work frees them from narcissistic concerns for comfortable and easy lifestyle. Simplicity of life is another form of poverty that sharpens the consecrated persons' immediate sense of identification with the downtrodden of the society, which in turn, greatly intensifies radical commitment, sense of sharp departure from the whole cluster of societal values surrounding abundance

and consumption (Au 1993). However, while most Catholics would admire, appreciate and even envy as quite heroic, spiritually meritorious and heavenly, the great sacrifice and self denial that consecrated person make by the these vows, it does not appear they are much influenced by them.

Celibacy compels consecrated persons to voluntarily give up marriage and abstain from all sexual acts. It is a practice which has always aroused the curiosity of the world at large; and has often provoked feelings either of admiration or revulsion, but rarely been properly understood (Legrand 1963).

Consecrated persons take to religious poverty which is rooted in the personal experience of Jesus. It too compels them to freely surrender to their congregations their full right of ownership of property. Through this gesture their material resources are pulled together for a common use. Religious poverty is what gives the community life of the consecrated persons its backbone. Without a common ownership of property, the bonds that unite religious communities would be eroded by privatistic and individual concerns. But with it community is being fostered by individuals placing the common good at the centre of their concern (Au 1993).

The third of the “positive virtue” that consecrated persons freely embrace is obedience. This for Mbonu (2015) is the most interpersonal of all their three vows. She goes on to point out that fundamentally, the vow of obedience does not deprive a person of his /her freedom. Rather, the vow is really a wonderful way of freedom, freedom to give ones’ life to the mission of the congregation. In this sense, obedience becomes a radical act of profound generosity; a radical, unconditional, and unreserved self – gift to the mission of the congregation.

Consecrated persons are generally perceived by the Catholics as a form of Christian vocation, whose specific point lies in the special way in which it is prophetic of the kingdom of God. Their entire life is lived in view of striving for this kingdom for themselves and others, and as a sacrament of the communion of saints. Their purpose does not lie in perpetuating themselves as a society but in service. They preach the kingdom of God by setting an example of total mutual obedience in the following of one common spirit. Theirs is already on earth the eschatological community, spreading from the centre of liturgical action to the periphery of apostolic work (Tavard 1964).

### **Contemporary Challenges of Consecrated Persons.**

In the contemporary society consecrated persons face many challenges, some of which are not identifiable. Some of the identified ones include the consecrated life itself. Berglar (1994:254) points to the existence of “stumbling blocks in some fundamental characteristics of life in our age worldwide, technologically advanced civilization”. In such a world, undue

emphasis, attention and interest are on materialism, abundance in possession, consumption, freedom and luxury; the whole idea of consecrated life appears illogical and nonsensical. What Kaam said nearly six decades ago that “a modern man is in the midst of crisis of meaning” (1968:15) still holds. Consequently consecrated persons have this problem of crisis of self identity, appearing odd in the midst of the society, their knowledge of their voluntary religious vocation not-with – standing.

The three evangelical vows that the consecrated persons take constitute a big challenge to them. In the contemporary society that has gone berserk in sexual romanticism due to advancement in communication technology and mass media, it is obvious the consecrated persons will require heightened efforts in self-restraint and self-control to meet the demand of chastity vow. People’s curiosity toward its observance by the celibates is also heightened by the present realities. Consecrated persons are most often prone to yielding to “distorted notions of obedience” (Au 1993) that their superiors are most often prone to demanding. Such unauthentic obedience would include: all obedience with deficient motives such as fear, pragmatic necessity, insecurity, and a desire for external approval or the rewards that come to those who quietly conform. Consecrated persons are, in living out the vow of obedience faced with the challenge of discerning between the genuine adult obedience, which like the obedience of Jesus, is based on freely chosen motives and centered on love of God, and unauthentic obedience with deficient motives that have ill effects on people’s lives. Duffey (1960) talks of religious authority and religious obedience and thinks each is made for the enhancement of the other. He also insists that the two are meant to cooperate and collaborate in high purpose of doing God’s work and will, which is another name for holiness. Consecrated persons may be challenged in their full understanding of this fact and in not equating religious authority and religious obedience with those of the military. In the vow of poverty too, consecrated persons are also faced with the challenge of proper understanding of poverty for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. This consists first and foremost poverty that has a value that enriches others after the example of Christ (cf. 2Cor. 8:9 becoming poor that people might become rich). Consecrated person must be fully convinced of these negative facts about poverty: 1/ many social ills such as crime and violence are rooted in the degradation that results from poverty. 2/ Poverty often destroy individual dignity and like a cancer it can threaten human community. 3/ Poverty is a public enemy and a disease that all must battle ( Au 1993).

Consecrated persons can be challenged by what Akubue (2004: 224) calls “the danger of maintaining a public image”. This danger occurs in a consecrated person when the observance of the religious vows became a matter of maintaining a public image of him/her rather than a pure religious motive or aim. The issue is that of religious conviction which is the life-wire

that binds all the undertakings of the consecrated person. People's appreciation, interest and even admiration of the consecrated life may have a rather advert effect on the consecrated persons whereby their whole attention in living the consecrated life become focused on maintaining good image with them and satisfying their individual expectations. Van Kaam (1964) talks of the consecrated person unconsciously manifesting an external holiness in order to obtain the respect of persons of his /her environment. The vows of consecrated life must be religiously motivated and focused commitment to God and his kingdom in loving service to humanity.

Much of human life issues from sexual instinct and the need for affection; all of life is conditioned to some degree by these factors (Kiesling 1977). How to envision and manage these very intimate, deep, and pervasive feelings is what the prospective and actual celibates are eager to learn. How celibates understand and handle these feelings is what constitutes a big challenge.

Consecrated persons, who belong to families, and in most cases brought out and educated by these, often face the challenge of the pressure of family ties. The implications of their poverty and obedience vows may not be understood by the family members. Consequently the consecrated persons are prone to being misunderstood by their families in terms of lack of adequate care, concern and solidarity, in consonance with the commitment of their consecration. On themselves, consecrated persons at times suffer from inability to detach themselves from their families. Consequently they allow themselves to be distressed by family problems. Family challenge can also come from what Poruthur (2004: 58) titles, "human foundations of religious life." He points to a situation where distorted one's state of consciousness due to repressed family hurtful feelings at childhood can destabilize a religious (consecrated person) making community life quite problematic. Describing family as the corner stone of religious life, Poruthur holds that parents and siblings can contribute to the attitude and thinking of a religious. He believes that odd memories and emotions from home can be carried into the religious houses.

### **A Study of Text of John 17: 17-19.**

The text is about the sanctification by the truth of God's word, and is in Jesus' prayer for his disciples (6-19). It is important to note the synonymous use of sanctification and consecration in the text by versions of the Bible.

The Gospel of John is believed by most Bible scholars to be authored by John the beloved apostle based on the evidence within the gospel as well as the writings of the Church Fathers. It is believed by most scholars also to have been written between 70 and 90 AD. Quite different from the synoptic, this gospel contains Jesus' deepest thoughts and sayings (Hale and Thorson

1996). Having as his purpose in writing, the disciples belief in Jesus as the Christ the son of God, in order to have life in his name, the evangelist John, records each of the incidents as specifically included to prove that Jesus is indeed the son of God. The Gospel's literary style is simple and easy to understand. Each incident and discourse is treated as an isolated event or statement, rather than being incorporated into an overall frame work (Barker 2008).

V. 17 *hagiason autous en tē alēthia*: *ho logos ho sos alētheia estin*. “Consecrate them in the truth, your word is truth”. *Hagiason* has two meanings: 1/ it signifies to consecrate, to separate from each and common use, and to devote or dedicate to God and his service. 2/ it signifies to make holy or pure. The word in the prayer of Jesus may be understood in both these senses. Thus he prays: that they may be fully consecrated to the work of the ministry, and separated from all worldly concerns. *Hagiason* is from the verb *hagiazō*, dedicate, or set something apart for God's holy purposes (Palmer 2015). Hence it denotes: 1/ to render or acknowledge to be venerable, to hallow. 2/ To consecrate from things profane and dedicate to God, to consecrate and so render inviolable. 3/ To purify. Note three possible ways of purification: a/ to cleans externally b/ to purify by expiation, free from the guilt of sin. c/ to purify internally by reformation of soul (Pratte 2015) that they may be holy, and patterns of all holiness to those to whom they announce the salvation of God. The phrase *en tē alētheia* “in the truth” is note worthy. It is not only according to the truth of God that the apostles are to be set apart to the sacred work; but it is from the truth, and according to it, that they must preach to others (Clarke 2015).

Jesus has prayed that his apostles be kept from evil one (John 17:15); but this is not enough unless they are perfected by what is good. Jesus is aware of the Psalmist's words “Depart from evil and do good” (Psalm 37:27). Accordingly he prayers that his apostles be sanctified by the Father, that is, be made to be holy; and do this in the truth, that is, in him, his Son who is the truth (cf. John 14:6). Jesus repeated that he was sending apostles into the world as the Father sent him into the world. But though they must be in the world, they should be consecrated by God's word, the truth, just as he Jesus had consecrated himself by the truth. “Consecrate” means to be made holy or set apart for special purposes.

Sanctification/consecration/holiness as synonymous in meaning is a common them in the Bible. Jesus here says that he has consecrated himself. God the Father is holy and the Son is holy too and insists the apostles have to be holy (1Peter 1:14-16). A person who is sanctified or consecrated or holy is a “saint” so Christians are called in the early church (Acts 9: 13; 1Cor. 1:2). The disciples are the priests of the New Law. Just as the priests of the Old Law were consecrated (“made holy”), so are those of the new, but in a far more personal and intimate way. The phrase *ho logos ho sos alētheia estin*

(your word is truth) may be a citation of (LXX) Psalm 118:142. The word of God itself (v.14), which is truth, is the consecration of the disciples (Vawter 1969). But to be consecrated the disciples must obey God's word, God's truth. God's word by itself per se does not consecrate them. They must obey it (Hale and Thorson 1996). Hagiazō (to make holy) ie. (ceremony) purify or consecrate, (mentally) to venerate – hallow, be holy, sanctify. It is derived from hagios, from hagos (an awful thing); sacred (physical pure, moral blameless or religious, ceremony consecrated) (Baker 2008).

V. 18 Kathōs eme apesteilas eis ton kosmon, kagō apesteila autous eis ton kosmon, (Just as you sent me into the world, I also have sent them into the world). The key word here is *apostellō* (from *apo* and *stello*, to withdraw from, avoid, to send, to sent off, forth, out), set apart, ie. (by implication) to send out (properly on a mission) literal or figurative – put in, send (away, forth, out) (Baker 2008). Note here, (1) Christ speaks of great assurance of his own mission. He the author of the Christian religion has his commission and instructions from him who is the origin and object of all religion. He is sent of God to say what he says, and do what he does, and be what he is to those that believe in him; which is his comfort in his undertaking, and may be disciples abundantly in their dependence upon him; his record is on high for thence his mission is. (2) He speaks of great satisfaction of the commission he has given his disciples to preach the same doctrine and to confirm it with the same proofs (Henry).

Jesus explains the purpose of the consecration that he requests for his disciples. He has “sent them into the world” with a mission (cf. 13:20;15: 26-27; 20:21) just as the Father has sent him the Son into the world with a mission (10:36). In both cases consecration is essential for the success of the mission (Constable 2015). The apostles have the same commission which Christ has, considered as man – they were empowered with the same Spirit, so that they can be holy, and their word is accompanied with the same success (Clarke 2015). Jesus is saying in effect that he has come to preach the truth, and so he has sent his disciples to preach the truth.

V.19 Kai huper autōn (egō). Hagiazō emauton, hina ōsin kai autoi hēgiasmenoi en alētheia (And on their behalf I consecrate myself, so that they also may be ones consecrated in truth). The actual mission of the disciples is not recorded till 20:21f, but again the perspective of the prayer (vv.7f.,10) sees the future as the accomplished fact (Vawter 1969). This is due to the reality and nature of the word. The word of God, revealed in the scriptures, is the only completely reliable and sure guide for the disciple's spiritual lives. Only it is infallible, true and cannot be wrong (Pratte 2015). Jesus does not mean that intend to make himself more holy than he already is, since that would be impossible. He sets himself apart to do God's will partially for the “sake” of his disciples. He is their example of perfect consecration, and his consecration makes theirs possible. Without the sacrificial death of Jesus

there would be no salvation and no mission for the disciples. There would be no consecration either. One of the purposes of Jesus' death is to set believers apart to God, and his mission, in order for them to function as priestly people in the world (cf. 1Peter 2:9; Constable 2015). By his death, the disciples were made holy in God's sight. Jesus took their sins upon himself, and they became clean. In the same way, through faith in Jesus and through his death for them they too are sanctified and made fit for God's service (Hale and Thorson 1996).

### **Evaluation of the Catholic Perception of the Consecrated Persons and Its Challenge in the Light of John 17:17-19**

Consecrated persons take to consecrated life following after Jesus idea of consecration in his priestly prayer in John 17:17-19 as part of his last discourse to his disciples. There he aims at his disciples being separated from each and common way of life to devote and dedicate themselves to God and his service. Maritani many years ago describe the church as one "whose head is Christ, whose soul is the Holy Spirit, but whose members are born sinners like all men since the fall" (1942: 152). In Jesus' prayer, he also aims at holiness of some members of this church, to serve as a model to others, and to proclaim the life of holiness to be learnt by all.

The community life of the consecrated persons is in line with Jesus' prayer for a way to be holy and patterns of all holiness. To get committed to the way and pattern of being holy is a big step towards holiness. For O'Grady and MacNamara (1970) consecrated life is linked to the New Testament only in the sense that the Holy Spirit calls forth a life of holiness in the church in conformity with certain gospel ideals. The words of Jesus in the gospel continue to be a source of inspiration and an ideal in new situations. Community life as a way of self abandonment, renunciation and detachment (cf. Mt. 19:20-22) is a big gesture of commitment for consecrated persons. Such commitment will enable the consecrated persons to be more disposed for participating in the mission of Christ.

With holiness of life and service as sharing in the redemptive mission of Jesus as its base, consecrated life has from its origin manifested itself in a multiplication of forms, institutions and conceptions closely associated with changing needs and with the development of the society, culture, institution and theology (Kinsella 1970). This is certainly to be achieved according to the truth and power of the Holy Spirit whose function is to guide and lead the faithful to the truth. It is, therefore, the will of Jesus that consecrated persons be men and women of the Holy Spirit, who should be a motivating factor and engine house of their life and work. Theirs is the mission of Jesus that can be undertaken with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8)

Jesus' prayerful attitude in his last discourse in John's gospel that 17:17-19 is a part, brings out his consciousness of being dependent on the Father. Sending the disciples as the father has sent him (John 20:21) they (the disciples) should be dependent on him. The consecrated persons must be conscious of their dependence on Jesus. This must be expressed by their faith in Jesus. This faith must be deep, one that has no admixture of worldliness in it. Consecrated persons must have faith that, as Kenrick (1962) would say, is in its proper dimension. Such faith is that, which dealing as it does with the infinite majesty of God, his sublime attributes, his deep mysteries, the relationships of divine goodness to human weakness, can be ever-evolving in its fruition, no limit or point existing at which the consecrated persons can say, now we need go no further (Kenrick 1962).

Duffey (1960) warns against consecrated persons being bitten with the bug of infidelity. This is because in the mess, they smother the faith which should be the animating principle of their vows. The three vows of celibacy, obedience and poverty are undertakings that can only be carried out in faith. The faith of consecrated persons should be fully bound to their existence. In the etymological sense, existence in derived from the Latin "*ex*" meaning out and "*sistere*", meaning to stand. With, reference to the personality of the consecrated person, it means to stand out more and more towards God, to participate increasingly in his life, to be present to him and beyond all things. (Kaam 1964).

Jesus' prayerful attitude also reflects his faith in the Father and what the Father can do to glorify him. In the same way prayerful attitude of a consecrated person reflects his/her faith in Jesus and what Jesus can do. Hence Kieshing (1977) is quite right in holding that consecrated life without prayer can lead only to an aching void in life.

Jesus full awareness of his mission in accordance with the Father's will is what generates in him the need to consecrate himself that his disciples be consecrated in truth. Kaam 1968 talks of crisis of meaning in life, and insists the consecrated persons are invited to plunge deeply into well-springs of their lives and the foundations of their institutions so that together they may discover a new their meaning and value. Such discovery involves conviction on why and the end of consecrated life. Clear grasp of why and end will eliminate undue anxieties and inordinate desires for identification, recognition and acclamation.

Fagan depicts the programme for consecrated life as one process of information on the theological, cultural and professional, formation in emotional maturity, community life, authority and obedience, freedom and responsibility, apostolate and spiritual life, and final transformation of the whole person (Fagan 1970). The consecrated persons must realize that this process of information is on going until final transformation of the whole person. In the process, they must take the advice of Biskupek (1950) that they

keep their eyes open to the needs of modern times, changing and adjusting non-essential matters which might hinder the attainment of the objective intended by the founder.

Jesus' motive of consecrating himself and his aim in wanting the disciples to be consecrated in him is both for the spiritual wellbeing of the disciples and for the salvation of humanity in the world. For Hillman ( ) the crisis of consecrated life is in its placing of the "good" of the religious institute and sanctification of its members before the primary purpose of the church viz mission. Consequently, he thinks that

There may be new life, joy and hope if religious life and its institutions begin to be understood and to be totally reformed in function of mission, a function embodying willingness to adapt, to change, to move on and out in service of the living God (118-131).

O'Grady (1970) gives two precise ways of how a renewed understanding of religious life has meaning in a secularized world: 1/ when it is a commitment to the development and progress of this world, 2/ when it provides necessary reminder that the world's own future transcends itself. In the same vein of service to humanity in the mission of Jesus, Duffey 1960 quotes Pope Pius xii shortly before his death, as speaking about the irreplaceable presence of consecrated persons in a great many fields of the catholic apostolate, above all in the fields of education, in schools and social work in general.

The mission focus of consecrated persons motivates them to be dynamic in their attitude towards the society, the environment and the people around them. The dynamism is not to change and become like them but to be attentive to them as to influence them to be reflective and even critical of the new way. Change as a concept for a consecrated persons is a critical one. It involved a response rather than an alteration. When the consecrated persons see God's will and God's presence as incarnated in every changing situation (Kaam 1964 ) they think about the demand of their generous response to the appeal of a strange new environment. A spiritual life that is marked by stiffness, rigidity, formality and inability to move or change is, therefore, unauthentic (Kaam 1964).

Jesus' ultimate aim in consecrating himself is for the sake of his disciples, that they may be consecrated in truth. This truth is the word of God, which Jesus himself is and reveals (John 1:1; Pratte 2015). Consecrated persons should find their ultimate happiness, fulfillment, interest, strength and security in the word of God. Their daily closeness with God's word should keep their mind away from worldly attractions and mundane infatuations of the modern society. Mbonu (2015) seems to consent to this view when she cites Karl Rahner as terming "listening to and acting on the word of God" as incarnational spirituality. For them, (Mbonu and Karl Rahner) incarnational

spirituality draws on an interpretation of Emmanuel “God-with-us” (Matt 1: 23). “Awareness of “God-with-us” recognizes the significance of finding and serving God in all aspects of human existence, even in the most ordinary and routine” (Mbonu 2015:7). Consequently, the contemporary society’s judgment of the consecrated persons in “being” and “not-being” relevant should be over looked, since relevance here is most often relative and from a narrow perspective. Amadi (2015:9) who recommends “passion and passion for humanity” for the consecrated persons, points that from Vatican 11 to date, consecrated life has made a great effort to return to its source, to encounter God’s gifts in his word through its founding inspiration and identity. Since according to him the word of God has been placed in the centre of consecrated life and affects all its aspects, there is need for consecrated persons to imbibe inculturated and incarnated spirituality based on the word of God.

### **Conclusion**

A critical study of the catholic perception of consecrated life with its contemporary challenges reveals that it is basically a spiritual life. This is so because it embraces the whole of the Christian life as oriented to self transcending knowledge, freedom and love in light of the ultimate values and highest ideals perceived and pursued in the mystery of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit in the community of disciples (Amadi 2015). For Colin such life, taken as a religious state, is not a human discovery considered, not in the multiplicity and variety of its accidental forms, but in its immutable substance, there can be no doubt as to its divine origin (Colin 1970).

Consecrated life is better situated in relation to ministry, sacrament and lay non-religious life. It also can be outlined as charismatic, secular, apostolic, communitarian and eschatological. The nature of its three vows of celibacy, poverty and obedience is better discussed in this whole context (O’Grady 1970). The same rule that applies to religion as the first duty of humanity towards its creator applies to consecrated life: glorification of God and enrichment of humanity individually and socially. As one of the two main forms of human love (Kaam 1968), celibate love of the consecrated life, has humanity as its main aim. On these, consecrated life has always in a very special way enriched the life of the church. If questions, doubts and skepticism that have always confronted consecrated life, are at their zenith in the contemporary world, that may also been seen to be obvious. Surely the more the effect of the advancement of science and technology is felt on contemporary world, the more the logic of men’s reasoning intellect comes to play on human affairs. Consequently, for Mbonu (2015) to renounce everything and follow Jesus on the road, on mission, produces an experience that finds description only in an eschatological context. This paper, therefore, insists with her that, put differently, the deeper meaning of the consecrated life resides in its eschatological character. This should be the focus in all efforts

towards meeting its challenges rather than on its relevance to the needs, values and ideals of the contemporary society.

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