

**QUITTE TON PAYS:  
CONSECRATED PERSONS AND THE CHALLENGES OF FAMILY  
OBLIGATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICA**

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**Abstract**

*Pope Francis, in October 8, 2013, announced that in October 2014 there would be an Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on topics related to the family and evangelization. In the year 2015, the Roman Pontiff called for the XIV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in October, which would continue the work of the III Extraordinary General Assembly by reflecting further on the points discussed so as to formulate appropriate pastoral guidelines for the pastoral care of the person and the family. Alongside these developments in the area of the family, Pope Francis, announced that 2015 would be the Year of Consecrated Life, and since November 2014 Religious Institutes and Societies of Apostolic Life all over the world have been putting in great effort at making this year a period of renewal. It is from these developments, in the areas of the family and consecrated life that this paper thinks it worthy to reflect on the relationship between Consecrated Persons and their families. The relationship between Consecrated persons and their families considered in this work is limited to their natural obligation to care for their aged or sick parents. This, therefore concerns how they can fully live out their vocation of "leaving their father's house and country" and still be attentive to the fundamental obligation of honoring their parents.*

**Keywords:** *Quitte ton pays, Consecrated Persons, Family, Africa.*

**Introduction**

A cursory glance at the historical evolution of the Church reveals that throughout the centuries, she has maintained her constant teaching on the family and marriage. In the Second Vatican Council document, *Gaudium et Spes*, an entire chapter was devoted to the promotion of the dignity of marriage and the family<sup>34</sup>. Pope Paul VI, in his Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*<sup>35</sup>, his Letter to Families [\*Gratissimam Sane\*](#)<sup>36</sup> and Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris*

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<sup>34</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 47-52

<sup>35</sup> Paul VI, *Encyclical Letter Humane Vitae on the 25th day of July, the feast of St. James the Apostle, in the year 1968, Vatican City*, 7-10.

<sup>36</sup> John Paul II, Letter to Families [\*Gratissimam Sane\*](#), *Saint Peter's, on 2 February, the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, in the year 1994, Vatican*.

*Consortio*<sup>37</sup>, devoted special attention to the family. More recently, Pope Benedict XVI, in his Encyclical Letters *Deus Caritas Est*<sup>38</sup> and *Caritas in Veritate*, took up the topic of family. He emphasized the importance of love as the principle of life in society<sup>39</sup>. In his Encyclical *Lumen Fidei*, the Roman Pontiff, Pope Francis, reflected on the relationship between the family and faith<sup>40</sup>. In October 8, 2013, the Roman Pontiff further announced that in October 2014 there would be an Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on topics related to the family and evangelization<sup>41</sup>. In this year 2015, the Roman Pontiff has also called for the XIV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in October, which would continue the work of the III Extraordinary General Assembly by "reflecting further on the points discussed so as to formulate appropriate pastoral guidelines" for the pastoral care of the person and the family<sup>42</sup>. Alongside these developments in the area of the family, the Roman Pontiff, Pope Francis, had also announced that 2015 would be the Year of Consecrated Life, and since November 2014 Religious Institutes and Societies of Apostolic Life all over the world have been putting in great effort at making this year a period of renewal. It is from these developments, in the areas of the family and consecrated persons that this piece thinks it worthy to reflect on the relationship between Consecrated Persons and their families. The relationship between Consecrated persons and their families is limited to their natural obligation to care for their aged or sick parents. This therefore concerns how they can fully live out their vocation of "leaving their father's house and country" and still be attentive to the fundamental obligation of honoring their parents.

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<sup>37</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, Rome, at St. Peter's, on the twenty-second day of November, the Solemnity of our Lord Jesus Christ, Universal King, Vatican City.

<sup>38</sup> Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est*, Rome, at Saint Peter's, on 25 December, the Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord, in the year 2005, 11.

<sup>39</sup> Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 44

<sup>40</sup> Francis I, Encyclical Letter *Lumen Fidei*, Rome, Saint Peter's, on 29 June, the Solemnity of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, in the year 2013

<sup>41</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. 2014/2015 Synods of Bishops on the Family. <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/2014-2015-synods-of-bishops-on-the-family.cfm#support>

<sup>42</sup> *Instrumentum Laborens*, Third Extraordinary General Assembly: The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization. [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/synod/documents/rc\\_synod\\_doc\\_20140626\\_instrumentum-laboris-familia\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20140626_instrumentum-laboris-familia_en.html). Vatican City, 2014.

## **The Theology of Consecrated Persons**

By consecrated persons, I mean the members of the Religious Institutes and Societies of Apostolic Life<sup>43</sup>. They are lay persons or clerics who assume the evangelical counsels by means of a sacred bond, and become members of an institute of consecrated life according to the law of the church<sup>44</sup>. They totally dedicate themselves to God with the goal of pursuing perfection in charity by faithfully embracing the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. In this sense, consecrated persons respond freely to the invitation of the Holy Spirit to follow Christ the poor, the celibate, the obedient son, more closely, thus becoming in this life a sign of the life to come. "The evangelical counsels of chastity dedicated to God, poverty and obedience are based upon the words and examples of the Lord. They were further commanded by the Apostles and Fathers of the Church, as well as by the doctors and pastors of souls"<sup>45</sup>. These counsels are referred to as evangelical because the religious vows are central to the life of Jesus and message and also because religious consecration is founded on baptismal consecration<sup>46</sup>. The consecrated life is also traceable to the post-apostolic church, especially to those early Christians who dedicated themselves to a gospel-oriented lifestyle, to a radical following of Jesus Christ<sup>47</sup>. The first person in this line was Anthony of Egypt. He was followed by a line of disciples, until it became an institution in the Church<sup>48</sup>.

Very significant is the idea of consecration. It is derived from the word 'holy' or 'holiness'. In Hebrew it is *qadash* and in Greek *Hagios*; these are translated to mean 'to consecrate'<sup>49</sup>. In Numbers 6:5-7, 12, the Nazirites were referred to as consecrated because of their vows to God. This makes the person holy, a consecration that separates the person from others. Thus the word consecration implies a setting apart or a separation. This separation does not in any way imply superiority<sup>50</sup>, or complete severance from those the

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<sup>43</sup> Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony, *Africae Munus and Consecrated Persons*, In *The Catholic Voyage: A Publication of the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria*. Vol. 11. January 2015. P.4.

<sup>44</sup> canon 573.2

<sup>45</sup> Lumen Gentium 43

<sup>46</sup> Fleming, D. L., *Understanding a theology of Religious Life*. In G. A. Arburckle and D. L. Fleming (Eds.). *Religious Life: Rebirth through Conversion*. New York: Alba House, 1990, p. 22

<sup>47</sup> <sup>47</sup> Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony, *Africae Munus and Consecrated Persons*, In *The Catholic Voyage: A Publication of the Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria*. Vol. 11. January 2015. P.4.

<sup>48</sup> Mary-Sylvia Nwachukwu, *Consecrated: A Vision of Religious Life from the Point of View of the Sacred*. Lagos: Change Publications, 2010, pp. 34-35.

<sup>49</sup> Leviticus 15:31; Ezekiel 14:7

<sup>50</sup> Myers, A. C. *Holiness*. The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1987, p. 493.

consecrated are called to serve<sup>51</sup>. The Second Vatican Council Document says, "The state which is constituted by the profession of the evangelical counsels, though it does not belong to the hierarchical structure of the church, nevertheless, undeniably belongs to the life and holiness of the church"<sup>52</sup>. The document continues, "The holiness of the Church is fostered in a special way by the observance of the counsels proposed in the gospel by the Lord to his disciples. An eminent position among these is held by virginity or the celibate state"<sup>53</sup>. Thus, another Second Vatican Council Document exhorts consecrated person thus, "Members of each institute should recall first of all that by professing the evangelical counsels they responded to a divine call so that by being not only dead to sin<sup>54</sup> but also renouncing the world they may live for God alone. They have dedicated their entire lives to his service. This constitutes a special consecration, which is deeply rooted in that of Baptism and expresses it more fully"<sup>55</sup>.

### **The Socio-Economic Experience of the Aged in Africa**

The condition of the aged in Africa is no different from the general condition of Africa. The 1994 African Synod described Africa in the image of the biblical icon: the man who was on his way from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers, who robbed him, brutalized him and abandoned him half-dead (Lk 10: 30-37).<sup>56</sup> It is therefore not surprising that the challenges of Africa became the dominant points in the *Lineamenta* and *Instrumentum laboris* of the 1994 African Synod: instability and political violence, armed conflicts, poor democratic representation, poor management of public affairs, weight of external debt, corruption, ethnocentrism, arms trade, the collapse of health services and public education, exponential spread of HIV/AIDS<sup>57</sup>. All these factors also affect the condition of the aged.

The aged in Africa lacked the basic necessities of life as a result of the prevailing economic conditions in the continent. This is worsened by government's insensitivity to the predicaments of the aged and the present socio-economic crisis in Africa which favours the migration of young people

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<sup>51</sup> Myers, A. C. *Sanctify, Consecrate*. The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1987, p. 493.

<sup>52</sup> Lumen Gentium 44

<sup>53</sup> Lumen Gentium 42

<sup>54</sup> Romance 6:11

<sup>55</sup> Perfectae Caritatis 5

<sup>56</sup> Nikola Eterovic, Ecclesia In Africa: The onward Synodal march of the Church that is in Africa from the first to the second Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa. A paper presented at the celebration of the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Ecclesia in Africa, *From the 14th to the 17th of September 2005, Yaounde*, p. 1.

<sup>57</sup> Nikola Eterovic, Ecclesia In Africa: The onward Synodal march of the Church that is in Africa from the first to the second Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa. p. 1.

to big cities for livelihood. As such, the young who should take care of them are not there<sup>58</sup>. They therefore become victims of isolation, neglect/abandonment and poor nutrition. There are also health challenges linked to the predicament of the aged in Africa: visual impairment, immobility, cardio vascular condition, malaria and loss of memory. These conditions become more precarious each time they fall ill and there is nobody to administer drugs or take them to a nearby health centre<sup>59</sup>.

There is a difference between the family in Africa and the family in Europe, and this has to be considered in the relationship between the African Consecrated Person and his family. In Europe, the government gives great support to the aged and sick. In Africa, it is absent; and this makes the situation of the aged and sick parents of some Consecrated Persons precarious. In Africa, the aged rely on family to either meet the demands of everyday life, or for help with a chronic illness or during a crisis. Indeed, most of the assistance provided to frail and disabled elderly persons living in Africa come from family sources. The majority of the total support received by the elderly derives from informal sources, the majority from spouses and children. Social support from family can be represented by four basic types: instrumental support (tangible forms of help such as housework, transportation, shopping and personal care); emotional support (confiding, comforting, reassuring, listening to problems, "being there"); informational support (advice in seeking medical treatment, referrals to agencies, sharing family news), and financial/housing support. In the face of these obvious difficulties, how can the Consecrated Person in Africa fulfill his calling to the Religious Life and still respond to his natural obligation to honour his or her parents?

### **The Response of the Second Vatican Document *Quitte Ton Pays***

The Second Vatican Council document *Quitte Ton Pays* creates a bridge between the Consecrated Persons call to detachment from former material and spiritual values, including family and the fourth commandment's obligation to honour parents during times of sickness, age and infirmity<sup>60</sup>. This document is not concerned about persons who knew that they were under obligation to help their parents before joining the Religious Life, because Canon 542 advises such persons against joining the Religious Life; the document is rather concerned with those whose family's condition or

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<sup>58</sup> Odufowokan, B. A. *Managing the Aged in Contemporary African Society: Ogun State, Nigeria in Perspective*. E-Leader Croatia, 2011. pp. 1-12.

<sup>59</sup> Odufowokan, B. A. *Managing the aged in contemporary African society: Ogun State, Nigeria in Perspective*. E-Leader Croatia, 2011. pp. 1-12.

<sup>60</sup> *Quitte Ton Pays*, 1976, p. 228

situation disimproves as a result of sickness, age, infirmity or economic setbacks after the person might have entered the Religious Life<sup>61</sup>. When cases of this kind arises, the document teaches that,

More direct help from sons and daughters in religion may then become necessary. In principle, this problem concerns both men and women religious, but it must be acknowledged that, when it comes to providing nursing or home-help, sisters feel more directly involved because generally speaking they are better qualified to render such services<sup>62</sup>.

The document calls for this kind of assistance because:

1. People are living longer and this has led to an increase in the number of the aged who need help.
2. Urbanization, with family apartments in the cities not being big enough to accommodate the nuclear family. As such, the aged are not easily accommodated in the cities.
3. Increase in the number of religious sisters, and as such, increase in the number of aged parents who need attention.
4. Religious communities are beginning to be more aware of this need<sup>63</sup>.

Having studied the issue of Consecrated Persons and support for their aged and sick parents, the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes in 1976 came up with the following directives:

1. Members of religious institutes and societies of apostolic life cannot be unconcerned about the situation of their parents, especially when they are not able to provide for themselves as a result of sickness, infirmity or old age.
2. In responding to this need, those who have joined the Religious Life in the family are not the only ones who should be responsible for their aged and sick parents. Other members of the family must be involved.
3. When circumstances, like in the case of a religious sister being an only child or if her other relations are not able to help, the religious sister can do more in such circumstances. In such circumstances, the Religious Institute is to provide help that would facilitate the sister giving the desired help.
4. If reasons are adequately available, a religious sister could be given a leave of absence for apostolic reasons- that she may care for her parents.

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<sup>61</sup> *Quitte Ton Pays*, 1976, p. 228

<sup>62</sup> *Quitte Ton Pays*, 1976, p. 228

<sup>63</sup> *Quitte Ton Pays*, 1976, pp. 229-30

This is to be gauged and decided by the General Council of the Institute. Contemplative nuns are, however, excluded from this.

5. All this would demand a considerable understanding from the superiors of religious institutes.<sup>64</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The importance of this piece is anchored on the current focus of the Roman Pontiff, Pope Francis I on the family alongside the Consecrated Life. The Bishop of Rome had called for an Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the Family and Evangelization in 2014, while preparing for the XIV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in October 2015, during the same year, in 2014, he declared 2015 as the Year of Consecrated Life. Since the last year 2014 to the first quarter of the year 2015, articles reflecting on Consecrated Persons and the family have moved on parallel lines. This piece has attempted to establish a link between the two fundamental celebrations: the link between Consecrated Persons and their families. Although the document lays greater emphasis on religious sisters, the document is employed in such a way that it addresses not just religious sisters but also religious brothers and priests. All have parents who are subject to the same socio-economic situations in contemporary Africa.

This piece, therefore, calls for a positive action from Religious Institutes and Societies of Apostolic Life in favour of the family. This call for positive action is first of all important, because of the place the elderly and family occupy in the life of the African. Pope Benedict XVI taught that,

In Africa, the elderly are held in particular veneration. They are not banished from families or marginalized as in other cultures. On the contrary, they are esteemed and perfectly integrated within their families, of which they are indeed the pinnacle. This beautiful African appreciation of old age should inspire Western societies to treat the elderly with greater dignity. Sacred Scripture speaks frequently of the elderly. "Rich in experience is the crown of the aged, and their boast is the fear of the Lord" (*Sir 25:6*). Old age, despite the frailty which seems to accompany it, is a gift that should be lived each day in serene openness to God and neighbour. It is also a time of wisdom, since length of years teaches one the grandeur and the fragility of life. As a man of faith, the elderly Simeon with joy and wisdom offers not a

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<sup>64</sup> *Quitte Ton Pays*, 1976, p. 231

sorrowful farewell to life but rather a song of thanksgiving to the Saviour of the world (cf. *Lk* 2:25-32)<sup>65</sup>.

This is not just peculiar to the African society, it is part of the constitution of the Church's wisdom to care for the aged.

The Church regards the elderly with great esteem. Echoing the words of Blessed John Paul II, let me repeat that "the Church needs you!"<sup>66</sup>

This call for a positive action is not in any way to move religious persons away from their communities or their consecration, but rather, it is a call that would enhance the profundity of brotherly and sisterly affection. It is in this regard that the document teaches: "Institutes ought to be engaged in renewing community life, making it more warm and fraternal, full of cordial sympathy, constituting a sisterly and brotherly support, surrounding with an even more attentive affection the companion whom family duties have distanced, materially, from the community for some time"<sup>67</sup>. Members of Religious Institutes cannot be building hospitals and old people's homes to care for the sick, the poor and the aged, while neglecting the aged and sick from their families. The clarity of charity is not found when it is only extended to the farthest while neglecting the nearest. It is said that "charity begins at home". More fundamental are the parents of Religious who are working in far away countries from their home lands. While they are away, the members of their congregations who are nearer to their aged or sick parents have the responsibility of caring for them. It is in the expression of such actions of love that their brotherhood and sisterhood would be strengthened. For if a Religious is burdened by his or her needs not met, his or her mission in distant lands would not be attended to with an attentive attention. While their parents are cared for, the mission is not denied but enhanced. As different Religious Institutes and Societies of Apostolic Life celebrate the Year of Consecrated Life, it can be considered as an opportunity for Consecrated men and women, especially from Africa, to look into the possibility of generating a more positive action towards the family.

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<sup>65</sup> Benedict XVI, *Africae Munus*, No. 47

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<sup>67</sup> *Quitte Ton Pays*, 1976, p. 231