

# Consecrated Life in Africa: Chances and Challenges<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The positive outlook of Vatican II on the culture and religion of Africa has helped Theologians and Philosophers to reflect on Consecrated Life from African perspectives. Concepts like adaptation, incarnation and inculturation have been explored in these reflections. Some are certainly more adequate in the reflection of the relevance of Consecrated Life in Africa. In this article, we explore with the help of Eunice Karanja Kamaara's concept of unification, how the African culture in itself has core values that, if lived to the full, are really the best of the Gospel of Jesus. These values include the sense of the omnipresence of God, the dignity of the human person, the relationship in community and care for the weak of society. These values are held together in the Utu spirit of interdependence and can be rightly considered as stepping stones upon which Consecrated Life in Africa (and elsewhere) can flourish. However, Consecrated Life is currently challenged by several factors like internal discrimination in our communities, individualism and consumerism, taking advantage of one's social status, crisis in permanent commitments, hiding behind culture to justify some failures in living the evangelical counsels, and facing the institutional challenge of living the charism and responding to the local pastoral needs and caring for the poor today while preparing a sustainable future tomorrow. It is important to overcome these challenges by using them as further stepping stones rather than considering them as stumbling blocks.

## 1. Colonial Masters and Consecrated Persons: What is the difference?

There is a popular saying among the Dagara of Northwestern Ghana "How can one tell the difference between a white person and a Father". This is so because since the priests and religious and the colonial masters were white, one could not, at first go, tell the difference between one and the other. It is only with time that people got to know them and distinguish one group from the other. Colonialism and Christianity have often gone hand in hand at the beginning in Africa for better and / or for worse<sup>2</sup> with the consequence that at

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<sup>1</sup> The Italian title proposed was "*La Vita Consacrata come stato permanente di vita nella Chiesa: fondamenti, processi in atto, problematiche*"

<sup>2</sup> Oborji, Francis Anekwe. "Catholic Mission in Africa", in Bevens, Stephen B., (editor), *A Century of Catholic Mission. Roman Catholic Missiology 1910 to the Present*, (Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series), Cornwall, Regnum Books, 2013, pp. 13-15; Aylward Shorter, Léo Volker. *Architect of Aggiornamento 1957-1967*, Rome Istituto Salesiano, 2013, p. 27.

the time of the political independence in Africa, some felt that it was also time for a religious independence.

Consecrated Life has its roots in Africa with the experience of St Anthony and the desert Fathers and Mothers in the 4th Century, but it moved from there to Europe and America before coming back again to the continent. At the beginning of the evangelization in many parts of Africa, the presence of men and women who had come from the West (Europeans and Americans) who were not married and lived in community baffled many people. This was the first contact with consecrated people<sup>3</sup>.

I still recall the story of the curiosity of many people who attended the first priestly ordination of a Dagara priest in Northwestern Ghana. The consecrated people our people had seen were all white (Missionaries of Africa, Missionary Sisters of Our lady of Africa and Franciscan Missionaries of Mary). For many years, the seminarian, then later Cardinal Peter Porekuu Dery, had been seen living with the M.Afr. and learning from them. Since people knew that he wanted to be a priest, it was taken for granted that, when he finishes his training and is ordained a priest, his skin would change, and he would become white. So many curious people went to his priestly ordination waiting that magic moment when he would change from being a black person to a white man. As the ordination was over and no such transformation had taken place some people wondered if he was really a priest like the others. With time, as more young men joined the seminary and young girls joined the convents and completed their training and were ordained or made their profession without any radical change in the colour of their skin, people realized that there is more to consecrated life than the colour of the skin.

Although not perceived in the same way all throughout Africa, Consecrated Life as a permanent state of life in the Church-Family-of-God, has been initially perceived as foreign in many parts of Africa. It concerned people from elsewhere, foreigners who learnt and spoke the language of the people, served them loved them but were not really part of them as they did not know and value everything that the people of the land knew and valued. Consequently, being a consecrated person, or Africans at the beginning, was often equivalent to leaving behind one's culture in order to take on a new culture and way of life. The food, the habit and the language were just part of the new identity that was often admired by outsiders but that distinguished rather than made the consecrated persons part and parcel of the people.

Today there are consecrated people all over Africa and Consecrated Life is no longer foreign. However, a dilemma remains to some extent. Things worsen when the consecrated persons perceive themselves as being so different from the people that they cut themselves off from or disdain their own former cultural practices and think those of their new group are superior.

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<sup>3</sup> As a member of a Missionary Society of Apostolic Life, I use the term in its wide sense to refer to priests, sisters and brothers whether of Religious Congregations or of Societies of Apostolic Life. To the ordinary person, it is often difficult to tell one from the other.

As the saying goes: “you can take a person out of the village, but you cannot remove the village from the person’s heart”.

How do we as Consecrated persons in Africa and from Africa today ensure that our identity as Africans is not in contradiction with our total commitment to Christ but on the contrary is the bedrock upon which it is built? How can we better own and appreciate the sacred character of African culture? That is what I propose to explore through examining the resources / stepping stones for Consecrated Life in Africa and the challenges that Consecrated Life poses to Africa today.

## **2. From a Theology of “Adaptation” to a Theology of “Unification” in Africa**

Early stories of conversion to Christianity in Africa show that in the past, some Christians, in seeking how to respond to the Christians faith, often destroyed their past traditional effigies. Sometimes this was done willingly but at other times it was upon the instigation of missionaries who had brought the Gospel of Christ to them. It was as though in order to be really Christian one had to cease to be African and adapt a completely foreign value system.

Since Vatican II, an appropriate relation between culture and religion is sought. There is a rapidly growing theological reflection on the continent of Africa and various terms have been used to qualify this effort. There have been three major trends<sup>4</sup>: a theology of “adaptation”<sup>5</sup>, a theology of “incarnation”<sup>6</sup> and a theology of “inculturation”<sup>7</sup>. Underlying these efforts is the search to affirm the values of Africans as human beings created in the image and likeness of God like everybody else. Consecrated Life has also passed through these phases and is challenged to be at home in Africa and in the African culture.

In a workshop in Nairobi, Eunice Karanja Kamaara, a Kenyan professor, traced the evolution of Theology in Africa and came up with a fourth category – that of “unification”. This can throw light on our affirmation that African culture offers resources / stepping stones for consecrated

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<sup>4</sup>Cf. Eunice Karanja Kamaara, “No Longer Truly African, but Not Fully Christian: In Search of a New African Spirituality and Religious Synthesis”, in Agbonkhiangemeghe E. Orobator, (editor), *Theological Reimagination. Conversations on Church, Religion, and Society in Africa*, Nairobi, Paulines Publications, Africa, 2014, pp. 90-91.

<sup>5</sup>This was the term that was initially in vogue after Vatican II. Adaptations in Liturgy, for example, were not to be done at the expense of the “substantial unity of the Roman rite”, cf. Aylward Shorter *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, London, Geoffrey Chapman, 1988, p. 191.

<sup>6</sup>SECAM in 1974 emphasized the value of being created in God’s image with the consequence that all are of the same value.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Aylward Shorter, “Inculturation of African Traditional Religious values in Christianity – How Far?”, in Chidi Denis Isizoh, *Christianity in dialogue with African Traditional Religion and Culture. Seminar Papers Volume One*, Vatican City, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Ceedee Publications, 2001, pp. 60-82. Through inculturation the Gospel is presented or re-expressed through the forms and terms of the culture concerned. As a result, the culture itself is transformed and /or purified by the faith that it receives. Among the Theologians of inculturation we can mention Aylward Shorter, Charles Nyamiti, Laurenti Magesa, and others. Unfortunately, inculturation has often been associated with the external manifestations of the values in Liturgy, dress, music, etc. This is important but is not the essence!

Life and that we need to take them seriously as a gift we can and we bring to the Universal Church.

Since the challenge given by Pope Paul VI to the African Church when he said that the Church in Africa has the right to be African, several Theologians and Philosophers in Africa have tried to see what that entails. Speaking to the Bishops of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of African and Madagascar (SECAM) on 31st July 1969 in Kampala, Uganda, Pope Paul VI had said:

“The language and mode of manifesting this one Faith, may be manifold... a certain pluralism is not only legitimate, but desirable. ... you may, and you must, have an African Christianity. Indeed, you possess human values and characteristic forms of culture which can rise up to perfection such as to find in Christianity, and for Christianity, a true superior fullness, and prove to be capable of richness of expression all its own, and genuinely African”<sup>8</sup>.

If, like Kamaara, we try to look at things in a non-dualistic manner, but rather consider the perspective of “African” and “Christian” at the same time the identity question can be perceived differently. This has implications for Consecrated Life as a permanent state in the Church. To be truly African is to be true Christian. Consequently, Consecrated Life does not have to adapt, incarnate or inculturate African values. It is not a question of values of Christianity being taken up in Africa as such but the values in the culture being lived so radically that one realizes that they are actually presence of the Gospel of Jesus in African culture. Kamaara, from the theological perspectives, affirms that “what defines authentic *Africanness* is not so much the colour of the skin, the language, or culture in general but rather character”<sup>9</sup>. This character is what gives an identity to the African and is the bedrock for the Christian faith and, we could add, for Consecrated Life. Kamaara expresses it in the following terms:

“In indigenous African society, to be truly African is to be guided by the *untu philosophy*, to appreciate the dignity of human persons, communitarian and ethical living, and the centrality of relationships. If a person acts contrary to this, he or she is not considered African. In nearly all societies, a person who seriously violated these ethics is not considered human anymore and would be excommunicated”<sup>10</sup>.

Utu, also called Ubuntu philosophy, is well expressed in the Zulu proverb that says “Umuntu Ngumuntu Nganbuntu” (“A person is a person because of other people”). However, it is present in the writings of many African Philosophers and Theologians who do not belong to the Bantu group<sup>11</sup>. As Eugene Suom-Dery points out, among the Dagara of Ghana and Burkina Faso in West Africa:

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<sup>8</sup> Acta Apostolicae Sedis LXI, 1969, pp. 576-578, quoted by Chidi Denis Isizoh, *The Attitude of the Catholic Church towards African Traditional Religion and Culture*. 100 Excerpts from the Magisterial and Other Important Church Documents, Roma, Tipografica Leberit, 1998, pp. 28-29.

<sup>9</sup> Eunice Karanja Kamaara, “No Longer Truly African, but Not Fully Christian, p. 86.

<sup>10</sup> Eunice Karanja Kamaara, “No Longer Truly African, but Not Fully Christian, p. 87.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. V. Mulago, “Traditional Religion and Christianity, in J.K. Olupon (ed.), *African Traditional Religions in Traditional Society*, Minnesota, St Paul, 1991, pp. 125-126.

“It is unthinkable to conceive of the Dagara person without thinking of man as fundamentally a relation in a multidimensional sense”<sup>12</sup>.

This human solidarity always concerns the past, present and future generations also<sup>13</sup>. In the wake of the Vatican Council II, Pope Paul VI, identified, in 1967, the following 4 typical values of Africa religious culture: the spiritual view of life, the respect for the dignity of the human person, the sense of family and the importance given to community. We find these elements taken up in different forms by Kamaara and other Theologians in Africa.

Kamaara’s Theology of “unification” has something to offer in the search of the relevance of Christianity in Africa and, by extension, how that concerns Consecrated Life. By unification she means “a unity of Christian identity and African identity into a whole that is manifested by the internal value of love made evident externally in acts of sharing”<sup>14</sup>. Two such major values in African identity to which she draws our attention are the respect of the human dignity and the oneness of all creation that is expressed through the importance that is given to relationships in the community. These are core, non-negotiable values of African society and although they will be expressed or lived differently according to the contexts, they are always present. They are linked to the fundamental Christian values of love of God and neighbour and justice for all, especially for the needy. When the dignity of each person created in the image and likeness of God is respected, loving and just relationship become part and parcel of living.

It is true that it is difficult to find a pure indigenous African society today because of the different factors that have intervened in people’s lives since the colonial and post-colonial period and the advent of modern times with the impact of Internet Technology and globalization. Some practices have changed or are changing in many places in order to cope with the constraints of modern life. Sometimes these changes are for the better, but at other times it is not the case. Thus, it is true that “fifty years after Vatican II, and in keeping with the challenge of Pope Paul VI, it is time to make the next step to emphasize indigenous values and ethos”. Thus, the proposal of Kamaara that:

“The Church should take to itself not only the mere external manifestations of African culture but much more important, it should purify, strengthen, and elevate the internal African values to strengthen the whole Church towards fullness in unity”<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup>Eugen Suom-Dery, *Family as Subject of Moral Education in the African Context*. Incarnating Christian Ethics among the Dagara of North-Western Ghana (Theos-Studienreihe Theologische Fortsergebnisse Band 44), Hamburg 2000, p. 75; K.A. Dickson, “Continuity and Discontinuity between the Old Testament and African Life and Thought”, in K. Appiah-Kubi & S. Torres, *African Theology en Route*. Papers from the Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians, December 17-23, 1977, Accra, Ghana, Maryknoll 1979, pp. 103-105.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Julian Mujuru, “The Contribution of Africa to Consecrated Life”, and Thecla Ndegwa, “Ubuntu as a Contribution of Africa to Consecrated Life”; Papers delivered on 28th February 2015 to the Association of Africans and Malgascar in the Service of Generalates, Rome (in response to the Conference of Mgr Jose Rodriguez Carballo, “La Vita Consacrata in Africa”).

<sup>14</sup>Eunice Karanja Kamaara, “No Longer Truly African, but Not Fully Christian”, p. 91

<sup>15</sup>Eunice Karanja Kamaara, “No Longer Truly African, but Not Fully Christian”, p. 91.

This vision opens up our consciousness of the resource and at the same time is a major challenge Africa offers to Consecrated Life in Africa. If, as Steve Biko put it, the special contribution of Africa to the world will be in human relationships and in giving a more human face to the world, her Consecrated daughters and sons have a major opportunity and challenge ahead of them.

### **3. Some Resources for Consecrated Life in Africa**

There are elements in the life of the peoples of Africa that are really already fertile ground upon which Consecrated Life as a permanent state in the Family of God can thrive.

#### **3.1 The Omnipresence of God**

Belief in God is so much taken for granted in Africa<sup>16</sup> that, if there is a place where God is spontaneously invoked in the greetings, in blessings (and in curses also) it is in African Societies. There is no such thing as a simple and quick greeting in some places. It is a time of mutual blessing either upon arrival or at the time of leaving each other. An encounter is a celebration of God's presence in our midst. God is the God of life that is lived, celebrated and shared. God is the all-knowing, all powerful, but very close to people and is concerned about all creation. Believers of Traditional Religion, Christianity and Islam acknowledge the presence and action of God in their personal lives in different ways, in their families and in the society at large. This constant reference to God, places God in the centre of existence. Consecrated Life is precisely that: to make God the primary essence of our life. The evangelical counsels express this. However, the commitment has to be deepened, strengthened and purified through personal and communitarian prayer, frequent study and praying of the Scriptures and through accompaniment.

#### **3.2 The Dignity of Life of each Person**

There is a common awareness that life springs from God and that one receives this life in order to hand it on in a respectful manner to the next generation<sup>17</sup>. Consecrated Life is rooted in a personal experience of Jesus by each person as uniquely loved and called by God<sup>18</sup>. This relationship is life-giving for the person and especially for the rest of the community and society at large. The gift of life and its promotion are very important values in African societies. This promotion of life is not limited to physical procreation but also to the promotion and protection of values for society. There are cases where some people are chosen as guardians of these values on behalf of the rest of the society and they are known and respected as such. This type of witness would, in my opinion, correspond to the witness

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<sup>16</sup>Cf. John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, Johannesburg, Heinemann Publishers, 1991, pp. 45-59.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, pp. 112-115.

<sup>18</sup> The Instruction of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life of 2002 is appropriately entitled *Starting Afresh from Christ. A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium*. As Benedict XVI reminded the Church in Africa, New Evangelisation is possible only as a result of a personal encounter with Jesus and not an idea. Cf. *Esortazione Apostolica Postsinodale Africae munus*, del Santo Padre Benedetto XVI All'episcopato, al clero, alle persone consacrate e ai fedeli laici sulla Chiesa in Africa al servizio della riconciliazione, della giustizia et della pace, Vatican, Editrice Vaticana, 2011, n° 165

of consecrated persons in the Church-Family-of-God. From this point of view, Consecrated Life has a stepping stone upon which to build. It is to the degree that one loves one's life, that one feels called to share it with others. Life, as all recognize, is God's most precious gift to us.

### **3.3 Relationship and Community Life**

Community life is often taken for granted in African families. However, the fact of living together, eating together working, playing and grieving together strengthen bonds in the community. It is indispensable for the person as person in Africa. According to the *Ubuntu philosophy*, the individual is always identified as a member of a family or a clan and not just by himself / herself and his or her achievements. His behaviour has consequences not just for himself but for the wider community.

Community is a fundamental Christian value as it brings us to the source of life itself in the Triune God. God is an open and life-giving community. Each person exists in relation to the other and yet is distinct and has a definite role to play in salvation history. The fact that people from different cultural backgrounds hear the same call and choose to help each other respond to it by living in community is a source of strength and is an eloquent witness of the Good News that Consecrated Life is for the world<sup>19</sup>. Extended solidarity as expressed in the *ubuntu philosophy*, is a fertile ground for Consecrated Life and is to be enhanced whenever possible. Solidarity as an attitude of love or affection, leads members of the society to adopt towards one another behaviours similar to those of members of the same family. If Consecrated Life is to be open to all people, especially in international and inter-racial communities, it should be rooted in this African value.

In theological terms we recognize sin as the violation of the relationship between human beings and God, among themselves and deep down in the person's heart. The lack of respect for life or the lack of care for the good relations between people is really a dehumanizing of self. It cuts oneself off from the community, God's chosen instrument to share his life with us. That is why, in such circumstances, the person is not considered as a real human being anymore. The graver the harm done, the graver the sin! Reconciliation in and through Christ reconstructs these relations with God, with others and with self.

### **3.4 Justice for the Weak of Society**

The life and dedication of African mothers to their children and their spirit of loving service show that the weak and vulnerable in the society are to be loved and helped. Like in the Hebrew Bible (Dt 10,17), the African Society, in its healthy form, protects the weak, the poor, the stranger, the orphaned, etc. It is forbidden to take advantage of a stranger or a poor person or to refuse to give a traveler a place to sleep and food to eat and water to drink. The stranger is considered a source of blessing and thus to be welcomed. This attention to the weak is at the core of Consecrated Life as a desire to follow and act as Jesus did and invited his disciples to do. The Gospels show that Jesus always identifies preferably with the

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Africae munus*, n° 108-112

little ones of society and defends their cause (Mt 25:40)<sup>20</sup>. This sense of concern for the other irrespective of the personal profit that one can get from this relationship is a Gospel value that a life rooted in the Gospel can further deepen.

#### **4. Challenges for Consecrated Life in Africa**

There are challenges facing Consecrated Life in Africa. Some of them are particular to the continent while others are common to Consecrated Life itself as a permanent state of life in the Church Family of God all over the world.

##### **4.1 Internal Discrimination**

At a time when the majority of the members of communities of consecrated persons were not people of the country, we were not always aware of the internal divisions and struggles. However, in the present configuration of communities, there is sometimes the temptation, in some cases, for people to take the side of the person of their country or of their tribe or clan regardless of whether the common good is thus defended or not. In cases like this it is no longer obedience to the Word of God and living by it as a new family of Jesus (Mt 12:46-50) but the human origins of the person that counts. Anything less than adherence to the Word of God in daily life undermines the new bond in Jesus in the community and in the witness.

##### **4.2 Individualism and consumerism**

The thirst for personal development can and does sometimes lead some to act solely in reference to personal ambitions and desires. We can be so easily taken up by what is trendy and fall into a consumerist attitude. Personal fulfillment becomes more important than a common goal to be attained in our participation in God's mission. In this state of affairs, the person is no longer consecrated to God but to self. This affects the quality of witness and the courage to speak out in God's name, either to show the way forward or to denounce what is not according to the Gospel.

##### **4.3 Taking Advantage of a Social Status**

Consecrated persons are still at the higher scale of the social ladder in many of our societies in Africa. They have had or still have access to education, travel and health facilities at the cost of their respective religious families or dioceses. This, at times, creates willingly or unwillingly, a superiority complex in some whereby they distance themselves from the people from among whom they have come and thus they reverse the roles. They expect to be served rather than to serve them. It can also result in failure to develop ways of being attentive to the people's needs because we do not know the "smell of the sheep" anymore and, therefore cannot accompany their growth in faith. Superiority complex, wherever it exists, is a big threat to Consecrated Life as it goes against the Gospel value of service in the footsteps of our Lord and Master who came not to be served but to serve and to give his life for us (Mk 10,44-45).

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel*. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* of the Holy Father, Nairobi, Paulines Africa, 2013, § 2019-2016.



How does it witness to our commitment to Jesus, poor, chaste and obediently at the service of all? Jesus the Servant is, in some cases, to be promoted more consciously than Jesus the Chief! We need to look for ways of really sharing the lives of the people and especially of the poor and the marginalized.

#### **4.4 “No Condition is permanent”**

“No condition is permanent”. This slogan that can be read on some vehicles in Ghana can be applied to the different states of life today. Modern society is going through a time of “crisis” in long term commitment. Commitments that were thought to be for life are no longer so permanent as such. They are changed when what is thought to be a better opportunity comes up or when one feels that one is no longer fulfilled in this commitment. Short term commitments are yielding fruit in some cases and are taken seriously. However, on the whole, temporary commitments undermine some institutions like marriage that definitely need stability in order to function properly. Consecrated life is also affected by this crisis and is challenged to promote fidelity to God and to the neighbor in the midst of permanent changing options.

#### **4.5 The Culture as a “Scapegoat” in failing to live the Evangelical Counsels**

Sometimes culture is used as a scapegoat or as an excuse for not living fully the radical call of the Gospel to a commitment to consecrated celibacy, poverty or obedience. Claiming, for example, that since Africans cherish life, celibacy is contrary to African culture and that sexual promiscuity can be condoned, is actually going against the culture is not supported. It is sexual promiscuity that is foreign and not consecrated celibacy. A radical sense of the Gospel value of consecrated total oblation / self-gift is needed in order not to follow two paths at the same time and thus lead a double life. The example of Blessed Anuarite of the DR Congo shows that there is a price to pay to be faithful to one’s commitment.

When it comes to the family obligations, also culture can be a stumbling block. Excessive attachment to the family and material care for the family can lead one to not be entirely free in his / her decisions. One can succumb to family pressure and feel obliged to cater for the needs of the family and even the extended family. This has implications for the call to live Gospel poverty for the Mission of God. Jesus cautions us in Lk 9, 57-62 about such tendencies.

We also have the challenge as Institutions of living poverty among the people to whom we are sent while preparing/investing for our future as Institutes. How do we keep the balance between sharing with the poor today and investing for our members tomorrow? In a similar vein how do share with the poor while working for the self-reliance of the Institute?

#### **4.6 Some Institutional challenges**

There are two types of institutional challenges: one external and the other internal. At the external level, it appears sometimes that the local leaders (Bishops and Pastors) do not

always know and appreciate the specific charism that Consecrated People bring to the Local Church. They are readily seen as good forces / personnel for different services in the Church irrespective of whether it corresponds or not to their Founder's charism. They simply answer a personnel need of the Local Church. How do we ensure, as Pope Francis puts it, that "the charism of various religious orders (are) respected and fostered because they are needed in dioceses"<sup>21</sup>?

At the internal level there is an institutional challenge to make the Founder's charism relevant and actual to the local context today not as a foreign body but as African Christians so that consecration is not perceived as something foreign but as deriving from living fully the values and ethos of the African culture. In his address to the male Superiors Generals in November 2013, Pope Francis challenged them saying:

"The charism is not a bottle of distilled water. It needs to be lived energetically as well as reinterpreted culturally. But in this way, there is the danger of making a mistake, of committing errors. It is risky. Certainly: we will always make mistakes, no doubt about it. But this should not stop us, because there is the chance of making worse mistakes.

... I am not speaking of folkloric adaptations or customs ... it is a question of mentality, of a mindset"<sup>22</sup>.

Cardinal Lavigerie founded the Missionaries of Africa (1868) and the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa (1869) for the *ad Gentes* mission in Africa. His episcopal motto was *Caritas* and he encouraged his sons and daughters to live St Paul's policy of "all things to all people" (1 Cor 9,22). How do we actualize that without falling into a fanaticism that makes us think we have to be the saviors of all?

## Conclusion

As Pope Paul VI said in *Africae Terrarum* (29th October 1967):

"The Church views with great respect the moral and religious values of the African tradition, not only because of their meaning, but also because she sees them as providential, as the basis for spreading the gospel message and beginning the establishment of the new society in Christ"<sup>23</sup>.

The building of a new society permeated by the Gospel of Christ is still on the way in Africa (and elsewhere) and Consecrated Life has been contributing a lot to this. The lifestyle rooted in the Gospel and leadership lived as humble service will contribute to this. This message needs to be brought home in the early years of initial formation.

Consecrated Life is no longer a foreign product imported into Africa. It is part and parcel of our life and can really grow from the "values and ethos" of our mothers and fathers in a way that bears fruits of total and radical love of God and of neighbour leading to sharing and justice. It should no longer be a question of being a Christian who has adapted, incarnated or

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<sup>21</sup> Pope Francis with Antonio Spadaro, *My Door is always Open. A Conversation on Faith, Hope and the Church in a Time of Change*. Translated from the Italian by Shaun Whiteside, London, New Delhi, Bloomsbury, 2014, p. 161.

<sup>22</sup> Pope Francis with Antonio Spadaro, *My Door is always Open*, p. 151.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted by Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, p. 207.

inculturated African values, but rather of being a united character/identity as African Christian because these values and others are what Christ wants us to live in order to have life to the full in him.

In order to attain this life in Christ to the full, we also need to be aware of the stumbling blocks and, with Jesus' help, turn them into stepping stones! The type of initial formation and ongoing formation that is offered to new and current members is important. It should be contextualized and as linked as much as possible to the Gospel and to the culture in Africa because, as Pope Francis puts it: "Religious should be men and women who are able to wake the world up"<sup>24</sup>.

The challenge ahead is great but not impossible if we take our vocation seriously and live it joyfully in the Lord<sup>25</sup>.

### **Question for discussion**

*What, according to your experience, are some of the resources and challenges to consecrated life in Africa?*

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<sup>24</sup> Pope Francis with Antonio Spadaro, *My Door is always Open*, p. 146.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. Year of Consecrated Life. November 2014-2015. *A Letter to consecrated men and women*. A message from the teachings of Pope Francis.