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Christus Vivit and Formation of Young People in the Church: Implications, Challenges and Formation for Consecrated Life in Nigeria[1]

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I consider it a rare privilege to be asked to share my thoughts and experiences in this year's Lecture for the 2019/2020 Academic/ Formation Year. My sharing is based on the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit* of Pope Francis to Young People and the entire People of God. One wonders why the Church would convoke a Synod solely to deliberate on the youth! Could it be because the youth constitute one of the most troublesome groups in the Church or because they are promising and talented? Is it because they are said to be the hope and leaders of tomorrow or even hopeless and wasted generation? One could even ask, is it because of the numerical strength of the young? Or perhaps, the Synod Fathers have a message for youth animators and those involved in the formation of the youth? All these and many more are possible answers why the Church devoted a whole Synod to discuss the youth.

The significance of the youth in the growth and development of the society, nation, or the Church cannot be overemphasised. There is no age so rich with energy, high ideals, and new possibilities as the youthful age. Yet it is an age that is open to natural tendencies which if left unchecked can become dangerous as to destroy a nation or the Church. You may agree with me that the youth possess the most vitalising attributes of all ages of human development. In the words of Late Sani Abacha: "If the elders possess the experience, the youth have the energy, if the elders are planners, the youth are the builders, and if elders are blessed with the benefit of hindsight, the youth are enriched by foresight, powerful dreams, and visions. Indeed theirs is the faith that moves mountains in the economic, political, social, and cultural arenas of the nation."[2]

Who are the Youth?

The term youth means "the state of being young." This is, however,

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[1]Being an Inaugural Lecture for 2019/2020 Academic and Formation Year on October 7, 2019..

[2]General Sani Abacha, GCON "Special Message to the Youth," in *Nigeria: Youth Agenda for the 21st Century*, ed. Sonni Gwanle Tyoden (Ibadan: Sibon Books Limited, 1995), iii–vi, at iii.

analogical because it implies being young in age or being young at heart. The word could also be used negatively to mean inexperience or one who is uncultured in manners. But for our purpose, we refer to the period between childhood and adult age. Specifically, we refer to boys and girls in the post-pubertal age who are young both in biological age and at heart. Chronologically speaking, they are delineated as persons who are between the ages of 16 and 30 years old. But the Synod considered as youth persons who are between the ages of 16 and 29 years of age (see *Christus Vivit*, no.68). However, there are physiological and psychological dimensions of youthfulness. Physiologically, it begins at puberty and ends when the body has become more or less fully grown. Psychologically, it continues through the various phases of adolescence and post-adolescence. "Youth also is a social category which is culturally determined."[3] There are other descriptions or definitions of the youth. For example, the National Youth Policy describes youth as

> a period of complex change or rapid physical change and awakening mental alertness and search for the truth and meaning of life, emotional development and upsets resulting in sudden changes in mood and behaviour ... a change from childhood to adulthood and feeling of growing up with all the assumptions (right or wrong) of what it means to grow up.[4]

For Pope Francis, "Youth, as a phase in the development of personality is marked by dreams which gather momentum, by relationships which acquire more and more consistency and balance, by trials and experiments, and by choices which gradually build a life project."[5] On the whole, we can say that the youthful age is characterised by vigour, enthusiasm, energy, excitement, ideas, and freshness. Think of the most succulent part of sugar cane.

Formation of Formators

In *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Pope John Paul II states: "The formation of future priests, both diocesan and religious, and life-long assiduous

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[3].C. Cangia, "Youth: A Gift and Challenge. A Global Perspective," in *Youth Challenge – Tangaza Occasional Papers,* no. 16 (Nairobi: Pauline Publications 2004), 15.

[4]M. U. Ojih, *Problems of Nigerian Youth and their Solutions* (Lagos: Oye Ventures Ltd., 1995), *21.*

[5]Pope Francis, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Christus Vivit to the Young People and to the entire People of God* (Abuja: Paulines Publications Africa, 2019), no. 137. Henceforth, C.V., and followed by the number and given within the text except where necessary.

care for their personal sanctification in the ministry and for the constant updating of their pastoral commitment are considered by the Church one of the most demanding and important tasks for the future of evangelization of humanity."[6] Formation is the most demanding and important because "the whole Church depends in great part upon a priestly ministry animated by the spirit of Christ."[7] Further on in the *Pastores Dabo Vobis* the Pope says "there cannot exist any genuine formational ...work without the influence of the Spirit . . . . Everyone involved in the work of formation should be fully aware of this."[8] It is in the context of the above quotations that many documents issued by the Church at different times refer to priestly formation. *Christus Vivit* is not an exception even though it is addressed directly to the youth.

Formation is a dual transformation process. It transforms not only the one who is formed but also the one who forms, though in different respects. But in *Christus Vivit*, Pope Francis is not just referring to the passive transformation of the formator but the formator must actively trust himself to be transformed. The Pope recognises that we "are immersed in a culture of zapping" where we can "interact . . . with two or three virtual scenarios" (C.V., 229) This is what Eugene Kennedy refers to as being "under siege from artillery of communications, from the big guns of the mass media."[9] In this circumstance, formators have difficulty hearing what goes on within them; thus they need wisdom that goes beyond reason and prudence to the "mysterious plan that God has for us" (C.V., 282). This is where Pope Francis calls for the formation of conscience which is the "work of a life to become transformed to virtuous life and wisdom "to give an overall direction to our life through concrete choices" (C.V., 282).

Formation in this context must be recognised and understood as a vocation which is "a very personal decision that others cannot make for us." Thus it requires "solitude," "silence" and "prolonged prayer" (C.V., 283). Pope Francis is not proposing some strange doctrine or practice especially for us priests and religious. Experience teaches us

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[6]John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Pastores Dabo Vobis to the Bishops, Clergy and faithful on the Formation of priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day* (Iperu-Remo: Ambassador Publications, 1992), no. 2.

[7]Vatican II, "Decree on the Training of Priests of Vatican II *Optatm Totius,*" October 28, 1965, "Introduction".

[8]*Pastores Dabo Vobis, no. 65*

[9]Eugene C. Kennedy, *The Pain of being Human* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1974), 45.

that it is in silence and solitude that we can penetrate the depth of our being to listen to the personality that lies within the real man or woman. It is here that we come out of our comfort zone and remain open before God, before others, and the reality that surrounds us (C.V., 284). It is here that we face and take responsibility for ourselves; it is here that we ask the hardest questions of ourselves; it is here that we know our strength and our weakness and how to build on our strength. It may be hard or painful, but it is here that we become true to ourselves, free from our illusions and inclinations. Above all, it is here that we become available to serve others and society. It is here that we truly realise that we "are for God" and that God "has decided that you should also be for others, and he has given you qualities, inclinations, gifts and charisms that are not for you, but to share with those around you" (C.V., 286). In other words, it is in the inner sanctuary of ourselves that we get "a profile of ourselves that is truthful even if it is sometimes difficult to look at."[10]

The implication of all this is that as priests and religious in general and as formators in particular, our life is for others and our vocation is a gift from Christ who gives as a to a friend to "benefit others" (C.V., 287), but also "a gift that will give you more joy and excitement than anything else in this world" (C.V., 288). The vocation of a formator is demanding but the demands are not imposition "but an incentive to let that gift grow and develop, and then become a gift for others" (C.V., 289). Here we must recognise that God calls us not because we are fit and good but because of what he wants to make of us. There is no doubt that the desire and striving for what God wants us to be "will be tempered by time and painful experiences" yet "the choice that Jesus sets before us is to follow him as friends follow one another, seeking each other's company and spending time together out of pure friendship" (C.V., 290).

Discerning the Vocation of the Young

So far, we have been concerned with the vocation of the formator which is a call to service. Now we turn to the application of that call in discerning the vocation of the youth. There is no doubt that the responsibility of youth formation is not the exclusive prerogative of priests and religious. Lay men and women, professional persons, and the youth themselves are included in the responsibility of vocation discernment for the young, provided they possess the requisite "ability to listen" (C.V., 291). Pope Francis outlines three levels of

[10]Ibid., 46.

sensitivity in discerning the vocation of the youth. The first of these sensitivities is listening. Listening is not the same thing as hearing. To listen is to enter into the world or the inner chamber of another person's life to see things through their own eyes not as spectators or as judges but rather to engage ourselves in sensing, feeling the words, gestures, the signs, the illustrations and the inner motivations which the person struggles to put into words. Pope Francis notes that "More than the amount of time we spend, it is making others feel that my time is their time, that they have all the time they need to say everything they want. The other person must sense that I am listening unconditionally, without being offended or shocked, tired or bored" (C.V., 292).

We cannot presume to think that this kind of listening stops at the level of physical presence. If we are to accompany the youth in discerning their vocation, the listening must be holistic, thus including emotional, psychological, social, spiritual, presence. In other words, it is to listen to life's rhythm of the youth. Listening in this sense is an active, not a passive process otherwise we can hear everything but not understand and see everything without perception. In listening, we must be conscious of our inner self that our concerns and distractions do not block the link of our attentiveness. It requires dying to oneself and all the possible personal interference which could hinder understanding. It requires commitment.

The second level of sensitivity, according to Francis, is discernment. With the attentive commitment, trust, and assurance we give to the youth, we can ask: "What is it that the other person is trying to tell me, what they want me to realize is happening in their lives" C.V., 293). Here we may recognise their aspirations, their hopes, and fears, which may not necessarily be revealed in their words, but which through their emotions may reveal what God through "the good Spirit who proposes to us the Lord's truth," is telling the young person. Pope Francis adds that "it takes courage, warmth and tact to help others distinguish the truth from illusions or excuses" (C.V., 293).

The third level of sensitivity is what Pope Francis refers to as "the ability to *perceive what is driving* the other person." Having listened and having possibly discovered the spiritual or emotional state and intention of the young, the question is what next? According to Pope Francis, this demands "a deeper kind of listening" to ward off "superficial wishes and desires" to reach the "deeper inclination of the

heart, beyond the surface level of their likes and feelings" (C.V., 294). This is where it becomes a struggle a "spiritual combat" between mere inclinations to attractive professions and real vocation that "respects the dignity of our person and our life" and lead to "freedom that brings to full fruit what is unique in each person, something so personal that only God knows it" (C.V., 295). It is important to note that young people resist dictatorship, they want to be consulted in matters that affect them, they want to contribute meaningfully to society.[11] Such resistance may lead to rebellion and loss of focus. It is in this context that Pope Francis instructs that "at a certain moment we ourselves have to disappear in order to let the other person follow the path he or she has discovered" (C.V., 296).

However, the honest and genuine interest of the formator coupled with the trust and confidence of the youth provides a meeting point for affirmation, encouragement, and even correction. Thus the Pope notes that "we need to encourage and accompany the processes, without imposing our own roadmaps" (C.V., 297). We pointed out earlier that formation is a dual transformation process. In other words, the more transformed a formator is, the more he is capable of being used as God's agent of transformation. Pope Francis is emphatic on this point. "If you are to accompany others on this path, you must be the first to follow it day in and day out" (C.V., 298). The more we live out the gospel values, the more able we are to influence others by words and deeds.

Ever New Ever Ancient

Pope Benedict XVI, in *Africae Munus*, states that "The Church regards the elderly with great esteem"[12] because "length of years teaches one the grandeur and fragility of life."[13] Again, in the same document, Pope Benedict says "Youthfulness is a gift and a treasure from God for which the whole Church is grateful to the Lord of life."[14] From these passages, we can see that the Church cherishes both the young and the old because they have their respective and yet important roles to play not only in the Church's family but also in human society. Because of the materialistic and utilitarian inclinations, there is a general, albeit tacit tendency to think that what

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[11]T. Kearney and V. De Roza, "Helping Youth to find Identity," in *Ministry to Yuoth and Young Adults; Tangaza Occasional Papers,* no. 13 (Nairobi: Pauline Publications, 2001), 28.

[12]Pope Benedict XVI, *Africae Munus, Post-Synodal Exhortation on Africa's Commitment* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2011) no. 50.

[13]Ibid., no. 47.

[14]Ibid., no 60.

is new is better than the old, what is foreign is better than the local but even more so, that the young and productive ages are more valuable than the old and elderly. We can understand why Pope Francis emphasises that "The world has never benefited, nor will it ever benefit, from a rupture between generations . . . . When intergenerational relationships exists a collective memory is present in communities, as each generation takes up the teachings of its predecessors and in turn bequeaths a legacy to its successors" (C.V., 191)

It is possible and sometimes necessary to discard the old in the material world but not in the human world. In the human world, the elderly and the aged cannot be discarded without paying a heavy price because they are a treasure and store-house of hidden wisdom. The elderly and the aged are the dreamers whose future is wrapped in a hidden treasure. "All of us, even before our birth, received a blessing from our grandparents, a dream filled with love and hope, a dream of a better life" (C.V., 194). "That is why it is a good thing to let older people to tell their long stories, . . . they are the dreams of old people – yet are often full of rich experiences, eloquent symbols, hidden messages" (C.V., 195). The proverbs of the elderly, their stories, legends, and even sometimes what may be regarded as taboos, are not without the wisdom of life and for life. Pope Francis exhorts the young people not to so "focus on the future" as "to give little attention to the memory of the past from which they come" (C.V., 187) neither should they "confuse happiness with an armchair" or live their lives "behind a screen" (C.V., 143), and "to realize that the wisdom needed for life bursts the confines of our present-day media" (C.V., 195).

For us, Nigerians and Missionaries of St. Paul, in particular, have our ideals and dreams risen above that of the Rectors and the General Administrations at different times? Are they in consonance with the dreams and visions of our elders in faith? We could be running well but on the wrong track if we forget the mission minded-vision and dream of our ancestors. In the words of Jim Sheerin, SPS, it is possible for us to "come through a missionary seminary and emerge without a missionary spirituality, missionary psyche, missionary commitment and conviction."[15] Therefore, we can learn from our

[15]Jim Sheerin, SPS, *Priests for the People. A Rreflection on the Nigerian Priesthood; Formation, Renewal and Ministerial Life,* Faith and Life series, Gaudium et Spes Institute (Abuja: Daily Graphics Nigeria Ltd), 51.

ancestors "that there is more joy in giving than in receiving, and that love is not only shown in words, but also in actions" (C.V., 197).

You are *Mission*, not a *Missionary*

More often than not whenever reference is made to mission or missionary, we tend to think of it as work or even a process different and independent of us. This kind of thinking influences us to look at mission as something we have to do for the benefit of the other – the recipient – directly or indirectly. Pope Francis notes that "mission . . . is not just a part of my life or a badge I can take off, it is not an *extra* or just another moment in life. Instead, it is something I cannot root from my being without destroying my very self. I am a mission on this earth; that is the reason why I am here in this world" (C.V., 254). Pope John Paul II describes the Catholic youth and, indeed, the youth in general as "a special gift of the Spirit of God"[16] to the Church and the world. In other words, the youth are gifts to be given for the benefit of others. Gifts do not exist in the abstract. Gifts do not exist in themselves but in individual persons. It is the gifts that make us who we are, they define our character. Thus Pope Francis can say that your "vocation does not consist only in what you do, though that is an expression of it. Your vocation is something more, it is a path guiding your many efforts and actions towards service to others" (C.V., 255).

In other words, the youth are not only carriers of the message, they are the message, they are the good news. This is what Pope Francis means when he says: "You too need to see the entirety of your life as a mission"[17] We cannot but acknowledge that our formation houses, MSP included, are youthful communities which are blessed with all the positive attributes and qualities of youthfulness. We are inspired and edified by the strong faith that we find among our youth. The simplicity, the humility, and the dynamism with which this faith is expressed give us a lot of hope to believe that there is a future for the Church. The thoughtfulness of our young people, their optimistic eagerness to do the good, to better their lots and those of others, their desire for God, and to discover the meaning of life are positive signs for the future. We should not, however, be deceived to think or believe that our youth have no problems and weaknesses that characterise not only their own age but also the present-day society. Yes, theirs is an age that opens to natural tendencies which if left unchecked can

[16]Pope John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte,* 2001, no. 9.

[17]Pope Francis, *Rejoice and Be Glad: Apostolic Exhortation Gaudete et Exultate on the Call to Holiness in Today's World*, March 2018, no. 23.

become dangerous as to destroy. They are also children of an imperfect society – a society plagued with greed for wealth, honour, prestige, recognition, etc. Pope Francis warns: "Your work stops being just about making money, keeping busy or pleasing others." It is a "vocation because you are called to it; it is something more than merely pragmatic decision . . . . it is a recognition of why I was made, why I am here on earth, and what the Lord's plan is for me" (C.V., 256).

However, the youthful tendencies and societal vices do not present enough reason to lose hope or be pessimistic, because deep within the young is a strong desire for true values of life – values that can only be found in Christ because they bring "meaning and direction" (C.V., 257). The wealth of initiatives among our youth is a constant reminder that young people are a gift to the Church and the world. Their enthusiasm to see these initiatives fulfilled are signs of their willingness to share these gifts with the rest of the world. The youth are a mission, they have a mission. They are truly gifts to be given.

The Missionary as a Messenger of Hope

In his Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Eultate*, Pope Francis says "Do not be afraid . . . to allow yourself to be loved and be liberated by God."[18] It is, therefore, the task of a missionary to make a Christian God more concrete, human, and historical in the person of Jesus of Nazareth whom he represents. Our vocation as missionaries is a response to God's call in love and to love.[19] Our vocation is God's initiative which is founded on love. This is what Pope Francis sets out to expound in the "great Message" to the youth – a message which consists of "three great truths." Firstly, the Pope reminds us that God loves us irrespective of what happens to us in life, we are infinitely loved (C.V., 112). Since God's love is the heart, the centre of Christian message, our basic required human qualities for admission into MSP Seminary are "strong faith, love of Jesus Christ, love of people and [good] health."[20] To have strong faith in God is to place oneself totally, completely and vulnerably into the hands of God where "you can find security in the embrace of your heavenly Father . . . who first gave you life and continues to give it to you at every moment" (C.V., 113). God's love is not afraid of human mistake since every mistake provides an

[18]Ibid., no. 34

[19]See *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, no. 35.

[20]Cf. MSP Vocation Guide, *The Catholic Ambassador* 36, no. 2 (March/April 2019): 10.

opportunity for growth (C.V., 115) because "we know and believe the love God has for us. God is love."[21] "In this love we possess the radiating centre which rather than eliminating the riches of the manifold mystery of the Catholic, sheds light on each of its individual truths, illumines their meaning, and discloses their interconnection, as well as their derivation from that personal centre."[22] We can neither run away from God's love nor be separated from it. Pope Benedict XVI could not be more punching when he says: "Whoever wants to eliminate love is preparing to eliminate man as such."[23]

The love of God to humankind is not only affective, but it is also an effective love. It would have been difficult for Christians and, indeed, all peoples of goodwill, to understand and appreciate God's love if God did not enter into human history with his salvific actions. The greatest of these is what we celebrate in the Paschal Mysteries – the life, death, and resurrection of Christ – God's effective act of love. This is what Pope Francis expresses in the second great truth of his great message – Christ saves you (C.V., 118). "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life . . . [and] that they might be saved through him."[24] The redemptive death and resurrection of Christ is a clear manifestation of God's love. Pope Francis points out that, "only what is loved is saved" (C.V., 120), as missionaries, if we must answer God's call in love, our response must be total and unconditional, demanding not only the gift of our knowledge but also our time, comfort and leisure simply because we love our mission. Pope Benedict XVI instructs: "a pure and generous love is the best witness to the God in whom we believe and by whom we are driven to love."[25]

Finally, on this point, Pope Francis admonishes us: "You are not up for sale! Please, do not let yourself be bought. Do not let yourself be seduced. Do not let yourself be enslaved by forms of ideological colonization that put ideas in your heads, with the result that you end up becoming slaves, addicts, failures in life. You are priceless" (C.V., 122). And here we can add, do not let yourself be consumed by the craving for wealth and material things. Do not give in to greed for

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[21]John, 4:16 (RSV).

[22]Roch Kereszty, "*Deus Caritas Est:* A Pontential to renew Christian Life and Thought," *Communio International Catholic Review*m XXXIII, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 473-490, at 477.

[23]Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas est, First Encyclical Lettter*, *God is Love* (December 2005), no. 28.

[24]John 3: 16-17.

[25]*Deus Caritas Est,* no. 31.

money. You are free. "Fall in love with this freedom, which is what Jesus offers" (C.V., 122).

Life is the last word of human history because as the book of wisdom tells us "God did not make death and he does not delight in the death of the living. For he created all things that they might exist."[26] Therefore, God wants us to have life, yearn for life, cherish that life, and live for that life. Is it possible that the one who gave us life and sustains our life in himself, is not alive? Pope Francis takes up this theme in the last great truth, that Christ is not just a memory, "Christ is alive" (C.V., 124). That Christ is alive is not and should not just be an article of faith to believe in; it is rather an invitation to a new life. Christ is alive not in history. Christ is living even in your life as a Christian. St. Paul reminds us that "your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."[27] Francis insists that Christ "did not only come in the past, but he comes to you today and every day, inviting you to set out towards ever new horizons" (C.V., 125).

To exist and to be alive is better than merely to exist because life and, specifically human life is a greater good. The medical profession in all its forms exists for the sole purpose of understanding life, sustaining life, and prolonging life. Technology in all its ramifications exists to improve life, to give meaning to life, and make life worth living. All this exists for no other reason than for the fact that life is a good and a value on which every other good and value depends. Therefore, if Christ lives and if your life hangs on Christ, the ultimate good, Pope Francis says: "there can be no doubt that goodness will have the upper hand in your life and that all our struggles will prove worthwhile" (C.V., 127). This is what it means to be a missionary, that we are sent with and we carry the good news of hope namely, that God loves humankind, that his Son Jesus Christ died to save humankind and that Christ rose from the dead to give life to humankind. What a great assurance and how great a weapon with which we are armed to conquer the world.

Being a missionary "is not about speaking about the truth but living it, embodying it, and being transformed in Christ," it is about "being the light" (C.V., 175) in the midst of darkness. We are to respond with renewed zeal to the injunction of the Master "Go into all the world and

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[26]Wisdom 1:13-14.
[27]Colosians 3: 3-4.

preach the gospel to the whole creation."[28] Pope Francis echoes the words of the Master that our mission, therefore, has "no borders, no limits: he sends us everywhere. The gospel is for everyone, not just for some." For Christ "invites us to be fearless missionaries wherever we are and in whatever company we find ourselves: in our neighbourhoods, in school or sports or social life, in volunteer service or in the workplace" (C.V., 177). Pope Francis notes that we must not see our mission as a future enterprise (when I am ordained or when I am sent on mission), neither is it without sacrifice. Thus, our mission "is not an *in-between time."* We "are the *now* of God." Therefore, we must respond "with commitment and generosity" (C.V., 178) This is what we earnestly prayed for in the just concluded General Chapter of our Society: "The zeal for Missionary apostolate; the vision to read the signs of the times and the wisdom to understand them."[29]

Ministering to the Youth in Nigeria

Although *Christus Vivit* is addressed directly to the youth and it is about the youth, Pope Francis devotes one whole chapter to those involved in youth ministry. The Pontiff, however, notes that his intention is not to draw up a *manual* for youth ministry (C.V., 203) but rather to create awareness for the involvement of the entire community which must "take on a greater role in pastoral outreach" (C.V. 202) to the youth. Young people need "to be helped and guided, but at the same time left free to develop new approaches, with creativity and a certain audacity" because they "themselves are agents of youth ministry" (C.V., 203). The youth, therefore, need the support and the encouragement of the Church and the community, as a whole to participate fully in evangelizing themselves. According to Pope John Paul II,

> The Church in Africa knows well that youth are not only the present but above all the future of humanity. It is thus necessary to help young people to overcome the obstacles thwarting their development: illiteracy, idleness, hunger, drugs. In order to meet these challenges, young people themselves should be called upon to become the evangelizers of their peers. No one can do this better than they.[30]

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[28]Mark 16: 15 and Matt. 28: 19.

[29]"MSP Prayer for the Fifth General Chapter," par. 3.

[30]Pope John Paul II, *The Church in Africa – Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in Africa* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1995), no. 93.

The youth are called to be evangelisers not in a foreign land but among themselves. There is no doubt that the youth in Nigeria are very active, ready, and willing evangelisers. But it can also be said that they are not receiving nearly the support and encouragement proportionate to these dispositions. There are myriads of reasons for this scenario. First of all, many of our youth are not socially, morally, and financially empowered to play their roles. The hierarchical structure of the society and including the Church is an inhibition. Secondly, not many bishops and pastors are ready to commit their resources and energy to support the youth. But also working with the youth is energy-sapping, time-consuming, financially draining, and non-lucrative among other reasons. In a society that is materialistic inclined, it is difficult to find committed and willing lambs for the sacrifice. The flexibility that youth ministry requires as opposed to a more structured system of organisation (C.V., 204) poses a problem.
Pope Francis, however, suggests two main approaches to youth ministry. First is the *outreach* approach in which an opportunity is provided and the youth are encouraged to reach out to themselves through sports, social media, text messages, songs, videos, dramas, and other ways since God works in "mysterious ways" (C.V., 210). Here, "the language of closeness" that "radiates life by those who are there for them and with them" (C.V., 211) is spoken. Following the outreach is the growth process. In other words, how is the growth of the newly formed group sustained? Pope Francis holds that the growth of such a group cannot be sustained by the immediate introduction of "moral issues" such as "social doctrine, chastity, marriage, birth-control" etc., we must "first try to awaken and consolidate the great experience that sustain Christian life" (C.V., 212) and which must not be void of "Christian doctrine and morality" (C.V., 213).

This is because "it would be a serious mistake to think that in youth ministry the *Kerygma* should give way to a supposedly more *solid* formation. Nothing is more solid, profound, secure, meaningful, and wisdom-filled than that initial proclamation. All Christian formation consists of entering more deeply into the *kerygma*" (C.V., 214). In addition to outreach and growth, Pope Francis makes an important point that we cannot ignore in ministering to the youth. "Many young people today" are products of "failed dreams of their parents and grandparents, dreams betrayed by injustice, social violence, selfishness and lack of concern for others" (C.V., 216). Therefore, the community of youth must be made into a home where the youth can come and go, grow, and express themselves freely. "In a word, to

create a *home* is to create *a family*" (C.V., 217). Such a family-home will then become a place of worship, recreation, sharing, and developing good relationships (C.V., 218-220).

This point is very important for us priests and religious who work in houses of formation with young people. We must note that every family is not a home but every home is a family. Could it be possible that our seminaries and houses of formation can become places that young people come to work out their ordination or profession in fear and trembling? This could be the case if young people in formation houses are not given the freedom to grow, express themselves, form, and develop healthy relationships that will sustain them beyond formation houses and formational years. A healthy home and family, the sense of trust and loyalty, the virtue of generosity and sharing, the sense of commitment and support, are developed not after ordination or profession, but in the formation house.

Campus Ministry

Pope Francis is very strong on the point that schools and educational institutions are nurseries where faith is nurtured, teachers, leaders, and administrators are trained, holy men and women are raised. Schools are not "bunkers" to protect "students from errors *from without*." Francis notes that schools with these tendencies are not schools but "caricature" of schools (C.V., 221). There should not be a "disconnect between what they [students] were taught [in schools] and the world in which they live." In other words, schools should provide the opportunity for young people to develop in knowledge and faith, spirituality, and intellectuality. In particular, Pope Francis emphasizes that "Catholic schools remain essential places for the evangelization of the young." This is where they encounter other cultures, promote dialogue, and "integrate the knowledge of head, heart and hands" (C.V., 222). Even in non-Catholic institutions, the Second Vatican Council in the Declaration on Christian Education says:

> Pastors of the Church . . . in their solicitude for the spiritual formation of all their flock . . . should provide joint Episcopal action the establishment of Catholic residences and centres even in the non-Catholic Universities. In these, priests, religious and laymen, carefully chosen and prepared for the task should provide permanent centres of guidance, spiritual and intellectual, for the students.[31]

[31]Vatican II, "Declaration on Christian Education *Gravissimum Educationis* (October 1965)," in *Vatican Council* II, ed. Austin Flannery, no. 10.

What all this means in principle is that young people should be given holistic education to pursue "knowledge that is human and humanizing" (C.V., 223). The Council Fathers point out that "the well-being of society and of the Church herself is intimately related to the development of students pursuing higher studies."[32] Unfortunately, many private institutions and even government-owned institutions do not encourage religious activities. For example, many government-owned universities and higher institutions in Northern Nigeria do not provide official places of worship for Christians. Lands are not allocated for Churches. Many private universities too, especially those owned by religious groups give little or no attention to other religious bodies. But as Emmanuel Mbam points out, "the Church has not always been forceful in insisting on its rights to minister to its flock irrespective of the schools they attend."[33] These make it difficult, in particular, for Catholics to penetrate.

New Initiatives

There is no doubt that here in Nigeria serious efforts are being made to appreciate and promote Campus Ministry. There is an appreciable attempt to integrate and establish a co-operation between Campus Ministry and the mainstream of local Churches. In the year 2000, during the celebration of Jubilee for University Workers, Fr. Ugonna Igboaja of Enugu Diocese was appointed by the Bishops Conference of Nigeria to coordinate religious activities in Nigerian Higher Institutions. Thus, the first meeting of Catholic Chaplains was convoked in June 2001 at DRACC Enugu. Since then, Catholic Chaplains of higher institutions in Nigeria meet yearly to compare notes, share experiences, and learn from one another. The attendance, however, has been poor. Many institutions do not have well-organised functional Campus Ministry. Lack of qualified and willing personnel has been one of the factors. In many others, young people are not given the opportunity and freedom to manifest and exercise their potentials due to the dominance of the adults. These situations pose new challenges. Thus, in their search for truth and meaning, we are witnessing the movements of young people from one

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[32]Ibid., no. 10.

[33]Emmanuel-Mary Mbam, "Rethinking Youth Ministry in Nigeria: A Case for Comprehensive Method of Youth Ministry," in *Youth Formation and Globalisation in the Nigerian Context,* Proceedings of the 32nd Conference of Catholic Theological Association of Nigeria (CATHAN) held at Divine Love Retreat and Conference Centre (DRACC), Lugbe, Abuja, 2017, ed. Luke E. Ijezie, Stephen Audu & Agnes I. Acha (Port Harcourt: CATHAN, 2018), 384-401, at 393.

"fellowship" to the other attending religious programmes of all sorts. Yes, because young people are asking more questions about their faith that many years ago were not asked. According to Kanyike, "what motivates this movement is an encounter with the Sacred, within the context of modernity, which is recognized as such."[34]

As part of new initiatives, Pope Francis has recommended several lines of action, many of which are already being used in Nigeria, though they are hampered by lack of funds, adequate attention, and continuity. These include Eucharistic Adoration, lively Liturgy, and contemplative prayer (C.V., 224). Others include several forms of music, arts, theatre in addition to sports that promote joy, togetherness, exercise, health, and to help the young "overcome idleness and boredom" (C.V., 226-227). But the Pope warns that "The world of sport needs to be helped to overcome some of its problematic aspects, such as idolization of champions, subservience to commercial interests and the ideology of success at all cost" (C.V., 227). However, the Pope insists that the above line of actions can neither be substituted for nor take the place of the Word of God, the Holy Eucharist, the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the "spiritual riches" of the lives of the saints, these "are the gifts of God that never grow old, for they contain a power transcending all times and places" (C.V., 229).

The youth in Nigeria are not only talented and creative; they are also industrious. But these are like passive potentialities waiting to be activated. This is where Pope Francis speaks of "popular youth ministry, with different style, schedule, pace and method" (C.V., 230) that are "flexible," e.g., Talents hunt. Youth ministry of this nature does not need to be elitist or structural. It must provide opportunities for the youth to generate employments for themselves and their peers, to raise popular leaders who care for the masses (C.V., 231). Since "all the young without exception, are in God's heart and thus in the Church's heart" (C.V., 235), the church should be inclusive with "open mind towards all those who have the desire and willingness to be encountered by God's revealed truth" (C.V., 234). Young people are open to learning wherever they find the embrace of acceptance. As Etienne Triaille points out, the "youth do not reject discipline. In fact, they need discipline and accept to submit themselves to rules that are

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[34]Lawrence Kanyike, "Why Young Intellectuals are not Happy with the Church," in *Christian Campus Ministry: A Selection of Experiences and Documents from Chaplains' Training Workshop* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2009), 24-29, at 25.

understandable, clear and right."[35] But the Pope cautions that Popular Youth Ministry "is a process that is gradual, respectful, patient, hopeful, tireless and compassionate" (C.V., 236). Much is left to be done for the teeming population of the Nigerian youth – a ministry that is not only popular but also comprehensive involving the youth themselves, parish communities, families, schools and the wider community.[36] However, at the end of the day, we must recognise that God is the builder of a community. When we have done our best we should leave the rest to God.

Mentorship and Accompaniment

A mentor is a trusted companion to whom one can always turn for advice, inspiration, encouragement, and counsel. A mentor is one who accompanies another for direction in a journey of life. A mentor does not live the life or walk the walk of a mentee but guide the mentee to live his life and walk his walk. Young people need mentorship and accompaniment, a process that must be carried out with a great sense of respect for the young. Pope Francis is not oblivious to this need for the youth. He places the first responsibility for this need on the family and the community which is "collectively responsible for accepting, motivating, encouraging and challenging" and avoiding at the same time "judging them or demanding of them a perfection beyond their years" (C.V., 242-243)."[37] Mentoring and accompanying the youth should not be left for family and community alone. Francis says there is '"the need to train consecrated persons and laypeople, male and female"' who are gifted with the charism of listening"' '"to accompany the young people"' and this should be recognized '"as a form of ecclesial service"' (C.V., 244).

The tradition of appointing some men and women as patrons and patronesses to youth organizations is a common practice in Nigeria. But we can ask: What formative roles do these men and women play in the lives of the youth? Can we see them as mentors who accompany the youth in their lives' journeys? More often than not we see them as financial backbones who are called in to donate and receive

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[35]Etienne Triaille, SJ, "Helping Building a New Community" in *Christian Campus Ministry: A Selection of Experiences and Documents from Chaplains'Training Workshop* (Nairobi: Paulines publications Africa, 2009), 24-29, at 25.

[36]See Mbam, MSP. "Rethinking Youth Ministry in Nigeria," at 391-395.

[37]Cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis,* no. 68. Even in the case of youth in formation to the priesthood, the family and the parish community "should accompany the formative journey with prayer, respect, the good example of the domestic virtues and spiritual and material help, especially in difficult moments."

recognition on occasions. Above all, most of them can be everything but role models. In accompanying the youth, the mentor should recognise and help to develop leadership potentials and qualities in the youth. Particularly, "'young women feel that there is a lack of leading female role models . . . they too wish to give their intellectual and professional gifts to the Church . . . . seminarians and religious should have an even greater ability to accompany young leaders'" (C.V., 245). The Church's schools remain the most fertile grounds for accompaniment especially if they open to people of all faiths (C.V., 247).

The qualities of a mentor include:

> 'being a faithful Christian who engages with the Church and world; someone who constantly seeks holiness; someone who is confidant without judgement; . . . someone who actively listens to the needs of young people and responds in kind; someone deeply loving and self-aware; someone who recognizes . . . the fact that they are human beings who make mistakes: not perfect people but forgiven sinners. . . . Mentors should not lead young people as passive followers, but walk alongside them, allowing them to be active participants in the journey. They should respect the freedom that comes with a young person's process of discerning and equip them with tools to do so well. A mentor should believe wholeheartedly in a person's ability to participate in the life of the Church. A mentor should therefore nurture the seeds of faith in the young people without expecting to immediately see the fruits of the work of the Holy Spirit. . . . All such mentors should benefit from being well-formed, and engage in ongoing formation' (C.V., 246).

We do not believe that all these qualities can be found in or possessed by one person. But together as priests and religious, formators and seminarians, lay men and women, we can mentor and accompany young people to discover their true vocation in life.

Work and Family

The greatest anxiety of young people especially after higher institution is to work and to raise a family of their own. This is not unexpected because at that state they want to put their knowledge to use and to contribute to the life of the society. Secondly, they have

attained a certain level of maturity thus becoming independent and ready to start their own family. But from experience, this anxiety differs depending on the gender of the youth. For young males, the immediate anxiety is to get a job, work, make money, become responsible and stable in life. Starting a family comes much later in the male folk. But females desire to become stable in marriage partly due to societal pressure and partly because of pressure from parents. And more importantly too female's fertility does not correspond with their span of life. Thus, while marriage comes later for males, work comes later for the females. As Pope Francis rightly observes, "these are the two major issues worrying them and, at the same time, exciting them" (C.V., 258).

Pope Francis encourages young people "not to expect to live without working, depending on others for help" (C.V., 269). Work, in this sense, must be understood not as limited to manual but

> work as essential in providing the basic and physical needs of food, clothing and shelter and other explanations given at different times for the existence and purpose of work for human survival; and work as a human value for self-fulfilment, and, thus re-creational. This is to say that human beings work not so much simply because they want to earn a living, but also because work in itself is a value, a good and, hence desired.[38]

However, Pope Francis acknowledges that unemployment and lack of work increase the level of poverty and deprive young people of their dreams (C.V., 270). But he encourages the youth "never to give up on their dreams . . . and never to accept defeat" (C.V., 272) because work is not only to make money but also "an expression of human dignity" and gives glory to God (C.V., 271). When one discovers one's talent in his/her work, it becomes a vocation, and it gives meaning and brings "a sense of deep fulfilment" (C.V., 273). For us priests, religious and young people in formation, our vocation is our work; our mission is our field of work. We are not only to encourage the youth that there is dignity in working, we too must seek to find fulfilment in our vocation and our missions not based on the material benefits.

Marriage and starting a family of their own are the general desires of the young. Yet, within this general desire, is hidden anxiety of finding

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[38]Augustus Essien, "Work and an African Technology: Towards Economic Emancipation," *A Journal of Business and African Economy* 2, no. 1 (2016): 35-43, at 36.

the right partner. The experience "of separations, divorces, second unions and single-parent families can cause great suffering and crises of identity in the young people" (C.V., 262). Since many of these young people are products and victims of broken families and failed marriages, sometimes the strong desire to marry is tempered with the pains of growing up without the love of father or mother. Francis encourages the youth not to allow the failures of their parents to rob them of their future because it worths "every effort to invest in the family" (C.V., 263) and "to opt for marriage" (C.V., 264). The "spouses are not perfect but are called to overcome their weaknesses" because marriage is a path to maturity (C.V., 265-266). Moreover, "the family is the great resource for achieving an authentic pastoral conversion in a Church that is entirely missionary."[39]

Conclusion

The *Christus Vivit* of Pope Francis is an inspiring and empowering document. The document is so important that it responds to all the questions we raised at the beginning of this presentation. To the youth, it is a message of hope and encouragement. The youth are God's mission in the world. The youth are not an accident in the world. God has a plan for them and he has not finished with them. To the animators of the young and those involved in the formation of the youth, it is a challenge and a call to responsibility. For the seminarians and those in formation houses, the future of the youth is in your hand. For us formators, priests, and religious, we must remove our shoes for the ground on which we stand is holy ground. We hold a delicate treasure in our hands, we must trade with care. May God help us!

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[39]Cardinal Marc Ouellet, "Marriage and the Family within the Sacramentality of the Church: Challenges and Perspectives," *Communio International Catholic Review* XLI, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 226-244, at 243.