

# Theology of priesthood in the African context: a critical assessment

Author: Jean Audrey Touloulou Doudiam

Persistent link: <http://hdl.handle.net/2345/bc-ir:108455>

This work is posted on [eScholarship@BC](#),  
Boston College University Libraries.

---

Boston College Electronic Thesis or Dissertation, 2019

Copyright is held by the author, with all rights reserved, unless otherwise noted.

**Theology of Priesthood in the African Context:  
A Critical Assessment**

Jean Audrey Touloulou Doudiam, SJ

Directed by: Sr. Margaret E. Guider, Th.D.

Second Reader: Fr. John F. Baldovin, Ph.D.

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

**SACRAE THEOLOGIAE LICENTIATUS**

Boston College School of Theology & Ministry

Spring 2019

~ 0 ~

## **Contents**

### **General Introduction**

#### **Chapter I: The African Catholic Priesthood and Chieftdom**

- I. Missionary Activity and Priesthood in Africa
- II. The African Catholic Priesthood and Chieftdom
- III. Priestly Identity Crisis in Africa: A Socio-Cultural Hermeneutic
- IV. Rethinking Priesthood in Africa: A Challenging Task

#### **Chapter II: Understanding the Theological Foundations of Priesthood**

- I. Understanding the Theology of Priesthood
- II. Models of Priesthood: The Cultic Model vs. the Servant-leader Model
- III. The Priestly Office of Christ and the Dynamics of Power
- IV. Pope Francis and the Catholic Priesthood Today

#### **Chapter III: Pathways toward Renewal of the African Catholic Priesthood**

- I. Discipleship and the African Catholic Priesthood
- II. Priestly ministry and the Uniqueness of African Hospitality
- III. Revisiting Priestly Formation in Africa
- IV. The African Priest as a Healer: A Way Forward

### **General Conclusion**

### **Bibliography**

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Efforts at inculturation in Africa have given rise to a model of priesthood not seen in other parts of the universal Church, least of all in Europe: that of the priest-as-chief. Across the centuries, a number of different models of priesthood have developed and, at different moments in the Church's life, prevailed in one or another context: the cultic, prophetic, and servant-leader models, for example. But

In some parts of sub-Saharan Africa, priests are welcomed, after their ordination, into the rank of traditional chiefs. This takes place through a cultural rite which installs the newly ordained priest in the elder's seat and proclaims him leader of the local community.<sup>1</sup>

This practice started with the first missionaries who came to Africa and its aim was not only to make their cultural integration easier, but also their ministerial priesthood more effective and relevant. The inculturation of ministerial priesthood is socially significant because it helps people establish and maintain a genuine relationship with the priest and the Church at large. Despite these benefits, however, this model of priest-as-customary-chief also has serious negative consequences. It implies a theology of priesthood that reduces mutual accountability, privileges personality cult, can ease the way to abuses of power, and lead to an inappropriate sense of entitlement.

Informed by the consequences of the African model of priesthood, which is based on the idea of chiefdom, this study intends to demonstrate the necessity of promoting a more balanced theology of priesthood, and one more in accord with the great streams of Catholic tradition,

---

<sup>1</sup> Jordan Nyenyembe, "Stewards of God's Mercy: Vocation and Priestly Ministry in Africa," *Journal of Global Catholicism*, Vol. 1, no. 2 (July 2017): 81.

among candidates for the priesthood and those already engaged in pastoral ministry. The purpose of this project is to rethink the theological and socio-cultural foundations of priesthood in sub-Saharan Africa. This project is more important than ever because it raises the question of priestly identity among the African clergy and candidates to priesthood as well. I will limit this research to an examination of the diocesan priesthood<sup>2</sup> because the religious priesthood raises a different set of questions that go beyond the scope of the present discussion. Despite some similarities, it is important to remember that African culture is not a homogenous system. There are differences in how chieftdom is regarded in different regions. For this reason, I will focus mainly on Anglophone Africa, especially the Eastern African region.<sup>3</sup> Since there are some similarities among some African English speaking countries and for the sake of illustration, I will also take some examples from Nigeria and Ghana.

In fact, the main argument of this study is that the model of the priest as chief is a critical issue for the future of the Church in Africa and its relations to the universal Church. This model prevents a genuine collaboration within the community of faith and encourages priests to overlook their ministry by considering themselves more important than the laity. This African model of priesthood is spreading to many dioceses across the continent. It is based on an understanding of the church as hierarchy and revolves around the issue of authority and power over the laity.

The stratification of power in this model creates a clear distinction between the laity and the clergy. It has encouraged the laity to view clergy as set apart with special virtues and power. Power spells privilege, especially when a role entails a divine calling. Clerical power is further

---

<sup>2</sup> cf. Canon Law, no. 265, 282, and 286.

<sup>3</sup> For future revision of this work, I will also consider documents not easily accessible outside of Africa, especially those on the priesthood produced by the AMECEA (Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa). This consists of the Episcopal Conferences of Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan and Eritrea. There are also two affiliated members, namely Djibouti and Somalia.

supported by the loyalty of the faithful who trust that clergy are of strong moral character and will always act with their best interest in mind.<sup>4</sup>

In other words, the model of the priest as chief reinforces the inequality of power within the community of faith. It privileges the clergy and creates opportunities for them to take advantage of the most vulnerable people who seek pastoral service. Given these facts, my goal in this research is to raise greater awareness and understanding among the clergy and candidates for priesthood of the necessity of self-critical evaluation as far as priestly identity is concerned.

By exploring this question, I do not pretend to be addressing, or still less solving, all the issues and challenges related to priestly formation, identity, and ministry in Africa. Rather, my intention is to start a genuine conversation with seminarians, ordained ministers, and African theologians about how to articulate a model of priesthood that is both relevant in the African cultural context and in the context of a community of faith. This question is critical for seminary training because it will determine the future of the Church in Africa, especially the relationship between the clergy and laity. Last but not least, my profound desire in writing this research project is to help people think about priestly identity from a systemic perspective rather than as an individual-centered problem. Instead of proposing ready-made solutions, I would rather seek to identify some points for further consideration and suggest processes that could lead toward a renewal of the theology of priesthood in Africa.

The methodology for a study such as this is necessarily two-fold: while engaging, on the one hand, theologies of priesthood developed throughout the universal Church, it must also take account of the socio-cultural realities particular to the African context. By analyzing the model of priest-as-chief from a theological and socio-cultural perspective, I aim at least to do the groundwork necessary to formulate a genuine theology of priesthood that not only takes into

---

<sup>4</sup> Richard Gula, *Just Ministry: Professional Ethics for Pastoral Ministers* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2010), 119.

consideration African cultural values but also challenges them by inviting priests and seminarians to let their identity be formed in the light of Christ, who is the priest *par excellence*.

This research project is divided into three chapters. Chapter one examines the emergence, strengths, and limitations of the African Catholic priesthood. It is a general reflection on the model of the priest-as-chief, and how it affects not only the African ecclesial context, but also the universal Church. This chapter explains why the Church needs to promote a genuine theology of priesthood in Africa. Chapter two discusses the theological foundations of the Catholic priesthood. It provides us with critical information and resources for rethinking the African Catholic priesthood. This chapter bridges the gap between the model of the priest-as-chief and the priesthood as intended by Jesus. Chapter three explores some key ways through which the Church can foster the renewal of the African Catholic priesthood. This chapter intends to expand the horizon of the priesthood in Africa, encouraging priests in any efforts toward their personal growth and that of the Church as well. The common feature that unites these three chapters is the search for a genuine theology of priesthood in Africa. A close examination of the Africa ecclesial context reveals that the identity of the African priest needs to be renewed, revitalized, and made more responsive.

## **Chapter I: The African Catholic Priesthood and Chiefdom**

### **Introduction**

Most people might agree that cultural context influences the way people understand religious beliefs and practice their faith whether as individuals or as a community. This applies especially in the African context, which is quite distinct from other cultural contexts in which the church ministry has developed. One such difference is the way priests in Africa perceive priesthood and exercise their ministry. This will be a particularly significant issue considering current discussions about models of priesthoods across the history of the Church. Because of the significance of priestly identity in the Church and the different ways in which priests understand themselves, reflecting on how priesthood has been inculturated in the African ecclesial milieu will be a crucial topic to explore.

The African Catholic priesthood is highly influenced by values, principles, and belief systems that shape the African traditional society, especially chiefdom.<sup>5</sup> Because of this influence, the priest is considered as the chief of the people he ministers to. Despite the importance and success of inculturating ministerial priesthood in Africa, it is important to ask whether the model of the priest-as-chief has helped African priests become better pastors and imitators of Christ in their daily lives. To better understand what the African Catholic priesthood is all about, I will start by explaining briefly how Catholic priesthood started in the African

---

<sup>5</sup> Cf. John L. Comaroff & Jean Comaroff, eds. *The Politics of Customs: Chiefship, Capital, and the State in Contemporary African* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2018).



Church, and then discuss the image of priest-as-chief, especially its strengths and limitations. In the third part, I will discuss the root causes and impact of the priestly identity crisis in Africa, and conclude by showing why it is necessary to rethink the African Catholic priesthood.

## **I. Missionary Activity and Priesthood in Africa**

This section does not intend to give a comprehensive history of colonial missions in Africa; that has been done by scholars and historians.<sup>6</sup> Rather, it seeks to explain briefly when and how Catholic priesthood was introduced in Africa. It is important to remember that “the Church in Africa is to a great extent a missionary church brought to us by missionaries of goodwill mostly from Europe.”<sup>7</sup> In most parts of Africa, the missionary arrival goes back to the nineteenth and twentieth century. This mission was driven by the Great Commission given by Jesus not only to the early disciples, but also to all the followers to come: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, missionary activity was intended to spread the gospel to all nations in order to make more converts. It was also intended to expand the church and thus hasten the coming of Jesus Christ.

Missionaries who came to Africa were also interested in providing indigenous people with education and general health care. They built numerous schools and health services, but also some specialized hospitals and universities. Education was a major success for them because it helped them get more indigenous people with skills for teaching catechism and preparing the catechumens for sacraments. Besides their contribution to the education of indigenous people,

---

<sup>6</sup> Brengt Sundkler & Christopher Streed, *A History of the Church in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> John B. Kariuki wa Karega, “Priestly Formation: Challenges, Problems and Prospects,” *African Ecclesial Review*, Vol. 48, no. 4 (2006): 245.

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 28:18-20.

missionaries encouraged and supported many vocations to the priesthood and religious life in several parts of the continent. Most of the first African priests were trained in Europe, and their presence helped even more missionaries to spread the gospel in different parts of the continent.

In connection with this fact, Bengt Sundkler and Christopher Steed observed that

On the eve of the First World War the Catholic Church in Africa had 7,000,000 baptized together with 1,000,000 catechumens and these figure doubled in the decade 1928-38, while the number of African priests was minimal: only 278 for the whole of Africa. To be sure there were some bright spots. The Masaka diocese in Uganda had its first African Catholic priest in 1913 and Tanzania in 1915. Masaka had forty-six African priests under its African bishop from 1939. Near Lake Tanganyika the White Fathers were able to refer to the early ordination of one the first African priests, Stephen Kaoze (1885-1951), the first in the whole Zaire, ordained in 1917.<sup>9</sup>

In 1919, especially after publishing his encyclical letter entitled *Maximum Illud*, Pope Benedict XV encouraged missionaries to learn local languages and to identify more indigenous people on whom Christianity would be able to develop and flourish. The Pope's argument was that "the local priest, [...] is remarkably effective in appealing to their mentality and thus attracting them to the Faith. Far better than anyone else he knows the kind of argument they will listen to, and as a result, he often has easy access to places where a foreign priest would not be tolerated."<sup>10</sup>In fact, Pope Benedict XV's intention was to help missionaries understand that training indigenous priests is necessary for the future of the Church in Africa. Evangelization should not be the work of foreign missionaries alone. It also requires the contribution of the local priests who can easily interact with local people and help them engage in the Paschal Mystery in a more meaningful way. Another reason for having a well-trained indigenous clergy was to prepare African priests to take over from missionaries. The words of Pope Benedict XV are meaningful here:

---

<sup>9</sup> Bengt Sundkler and Christopher Steed, *The History of the Church in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 627.

<sup>10</sup> Pope Benedict XV, *Maximum Illud*, no. 14, <https://www.svdcuria.org/public/mission/docs/encycl/mi-en.htm> (access February 15, 2019)

For the local clergy is not to be trained merely to perform the humbler duties of the ministry, acting as the assistants of the foreign priests. On the contrary, they must take up God's work as equals, so that someday they will be able to enter upon the spiritual leadership of their people.<sup>11</sup>

The growing number of African priests was necessary to build up the African Church. Their contribution was important to spread the gospel even more deeply in other parts of the continent, especially where linguistic barriers were a challenge for missionaries.

It is worth emphasizing that “the ordination of the first African priests was a true sign that missionary work had begun to bear fruit. However, this growth and development of the Church created challenges and problems.”<sup>12</sup> One of those challenges was the question of priestly identity. The issue was whether or not the first African priests should adopt the Western European model of priesthood. In fact, this issue was a dilemma for many of the first Africa priests and theologians who noticed that “the future of the African Catholicism hangs very much on ministerial priesthood. It is the ministerial priesthood that enables the local congregations to become Eucharistic. The presiding role of the priest prepares the way for the faithful to celebrate the Eucharist.”<sup>13</sup> The rationale behind this is that African priests were wondering about a model of priesthood that fits into the African worldview and that is at the same time suitable to the needs of the people they will minister to.

In order to make the ministerial priesthood more relevant in this African context, several African bishops and priests started providing priests with titles used only to designate traditional customary chiefs. This could, for instance, include terms like *igwe* in Nigeria and *mfumu* in

---

<sup>11</sup>Pope Benedict XV, *Maximum Illud*, no. 15.

<sup>12</sup> John B. Kariuki wa Karega, “Priestly Formation: Challenges, Problems and Prospects,” *African Ecclesial Review*, 48, no. 4 (Dec. 2006): 245.

<sup>13</sup>Jordan Nyenyembe, “Displacement and Conflicts: Plea for a Changed Image of an African Priest,” *African Ecclesial Review* 59, no. 3 (2017): 192.

Democratic Republic of Congo. Both terms literally mean “chief.” Most people started using such titles for priests because the chief, in African traditions and cultures, does not only play role of the community leader, but also that of a spiritual guide who cares for the well-being of the community. The chief is considered as “a person living under the gaze of God, ancestors, and spirits, a person living in attentive listening to the community in order to accomplish adequately the ministry of custodianship of that Word which belongs to the community.”<sup>14</sup>

Actually, the image of the priest-as-chief emerged in most African countries when African priests started taking leadership of the parishes from the missionary priests. It was a way of making Christianity reflect African values and customs and also of building a Church where both the clerics and the laity can feel at home. This process was inspired and influenced mainly by the movement of inculturation that emerged after the Second Vatican Council. As Pope John Paul II describes it in his post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*, inculturation is a

process that includes the whole of Christian existence – theology, liturgy, customs, structures – without of course compromising what is of divine right and the great discipline of the Church, confirmed in the course of centuries by remarkable fruits of virtue and heroism. The challenge of inculturation in Africa consists in ensuring that the followers of Christ will ever more fully assimilate the Gospel message, while remaining faithful to all authentic African values.<sup>15</sup>

Part of this inculturation process was to establish and promote a model of priesthood that takes into consideration the question of priestly identity in the African context. The main issue was to see how the African priest could remain faithful to his African identity while exercising his ministerial priesthood. The purpose of this process was not only to help priests understand themselves, but also to help the local communities understand the relevance of priestly identity within African context.

---

<sup>14</sup>Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches* (New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 130.

<sup>15</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 78, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_14091995\\_ecclesia-in-africa.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_14091995_ecclesia-in-africa.html) (accessed February 20, 2019).

Finally, “the priesthood we have inherited from missionaries functioned in a top-down model and looked at the lay faithful as being at a lower grade in the Church, indeed like children.”<sup>16</sup> This model of priesthood, which was hierarchical and patriarchal, greatly influenced how African people see priests and view their mission. It is for this reason that John Kariuki wa Karega argues that “the models and lifestyles in which a priest operates derive from historical experience, thus, priests are sons of their own history or the fruits of our own history as a society.”<sup>17</sup> In other words, any model of priesthood has to be understood within its socio-cultural context and in the light of the Church’s mission.

## **II. The African Catholic Priesthood and Chiefdom**

After having analyzed the image that missionaries portrayed of priesthood in Africa and how it has influenced people, my task in this section is to discuss the strengths and limitations of the African Catholic priesthood. This discussion will revolve around two questions: how do African priests see themselves and how does their image of priesthood impact the Church? One way to understand the uniqueness of this model of priesthood is to start with the notion of the priest-as-chief.

### **II.1. The Priest as Chief: An African Model**

The word “chief” generally evokes respect, authority, and power. It is an expression that is often used to show reverence and designate those who have chosen and/or been appointed as the head of community. In most African cultures, a chief represents the tribe or ethnic group he stands for. His identity is profoundly linked to his mission and to what people expect from him.

---

<sup>16</sup>Jordan Nyenyembe, *African Catholic Priests: Confronting an Identity Problem* (Bamenda, Cameroon: Langaa Research & Publishing, 2011), x.

<sup>17</sup>John B. Kariuki wa Karega, “Priestly Formation: Challenges, Problems and Prospects,” *Africa Ecclesial Review*, 48, no. 4 (2006): 249.

Most importantly, a chief is in charge of a chieftaincy or chiefdom, which is “a group of people who comprise an independent polity, having a distinct territorial base, principles of hierarchical arrangement based on lineage (often male-descent based), and reliant on subsistence agriculture together with some craft specialization.”<sup>18</sup> Despite the fact that most African contemporary societies have inherited western forms of social and political organizations, it is not surprising to see that in most African countries chiefs are greatly respected for their wisdom and knowledge of the cultural values and traditions. They deserve respect because they are considered as authority figures within the family circle and custodians of cultural beliefs and practices.

The image of the chief as an authority figure is broadly acknowledged in the African Church, especially by some clerics who prefer to be seen more as customary chiefs than pastors. For instance, “African bishops and priests love the image of the priest as chief,”<sup>19</sup> because it makes them more who they are as Africans and clerics. To better understand why the image of the chief influences the African Catholic priesthood, one must first understand the chief’s status and role in African traditional society. First, “chiefs play a direct role in the provision of collective goods, in the sense that if villagers are to act collectively in their own behalf, it is the chief who organizes that cooperation.”<sup>20</sup> It is not surprising sometimes to notice the same attitude among diocesan priests. They usually make sure that the parish’s activities are well organized and that parishioners participate actively and constructively in the building of the church communities. Like chiefs, they assume that part of their mission is to foster collaboration among

---

<sup>18</sup>Natasha Erlank, “Southern Africa: Ethnicity, Language, Identity,” *Encyclopedia of African History*, ed. Kevin Shillington, Vol. 1 (New York: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2005), 707.

<sup>19</sup>Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *A Listening Church*, 130.

<sup>20</sup>Ann Swidler, “The Return of the Sacred: What African Chiefs Teach Us about Secularization,” *Sociology of Religion* 71, no. 2 (July 2010), 159.

the faithful and empower them so that they can become the subjects of their own growth and integral development.

“Second, the chief [...] literally embodies the name that gives the village its collective identity. [...] the village does not exist as a village except insofar as it has a chief.”<sup>21</sup> When applied to African priests, no activity can be organized in a parish unless the parish priest is informed and has approved. Because of that, some priests have the tendency to identify themselves with their parish, using sometimes the money or the parish’s infrastructures for their personal needs. Such behaviors are generally noticeable in parishes that have more financial incomes than others.

“Third, chiefs may provide justice in chiefly courts, advising, cajoling, and sometimes adjudicating matters ranging from marriage and divorce, to a lost or stolen goat, to inheritance claims.”<sup>22</sup> Besides their role as spiritual and pastoral leaders of the community, several African priests find themselves helping people address such issues. They usually assume that mission because of the people’s expectations. Part of their mission is not only to help people solve their problems, but also to foster reconciliation and sustainable peace among the people. For the African priest, playing this role is critical for the growth of local communities because in most African societies social harmony is more important than personal interests.

Last but not least, chiefs “typically control burial grounds and thus connections to ancestors, in societies where ancestors are a central source of both danger and help.”<sup>23</sup> African priests play that role in organizing Christian funerals and praying for the deceased people. Like chiefs, they also see themselves as valuable intermediaries between the living and the dead, for

---

<sup>21</sup>Ann Swidler, “The Return of the Sacred,” 160.

<sup>22</sup>Ann Swidler, “The Return of the Sacred,” 161.

<sup>23</sup>Ann Swidler, “The Return of the Sacred,” 163.

African people intuitively believe that the dead continue to live and remain in communion with them. “Because the invocation of the ancestors is so important, the bishops of Zaire thought it must be included in a truly inculturated Zairean liturgy.”<sup>24</sup> The ancestors whom people invoke are those who in the time of their human existence have brought honor to their families and descendants.

In fact, the image of the priest-as-chief emerged in sub-Saharan African countries after the Second Vatican Council. It is an inculturated model of priesthood, which generally manifests itself in the way some African diocesan priests and bishops carry themselves, and relate to the people they minister to. In other words, the idea of the priest-as-chief has to be understood within the context of inculturation, which “denotes the representation and re-expression of the Gospel in forms and terms proper to a culture.”<sup>25</sup> This idea was developed by several African theologians as a contribution to the inculturation of priesthood in African context. This could, for instance, include people like Archbishop Peter K. Sarpong, Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, and François Kabasele. By so doing, these theologians sought to achieve two objectives: first, to help African priests make their ministerial priesthood more effective and relevant, and second, to demonstrate that inculturation is not simply an intellectual exercise, but rather a theological and pastoral project that should affect and transform every aspect of Christian witness: doctrinal, liturgical, ethical, social, and philosophical. This is the reason why Paul U. Nwobi argues that

The inculturation is more of some intellectual debates among theologians and some liturgical translations among liturgists at certain levels in the African Christian communities. The Christian faith and the African culture are in some cases on a parallel relationship with each other. There are serious challenges on the road to an inculturated Christian faith in African society today. Part of the challenge is the need for an enabling environment for faith to become culture in the African

---

<sup>24</sup> Nathan Chase, “A History and Analysis of the *Missel Romain pour les Dioceses du Zaire*,” *Obsculta* 6, no. 1 (2013): 33.

<sup>25</sup> A. E. Shorter, “Theology of Inculturation,” *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 7 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America, 2002), 388.



Church which has much to do with an open and respectful dialogue between faith and culture at all levels of the Christian life and witness in African states.<sup>26</sup>

What Nwobi highlights here is that inculturation should not be limited to theoretical issues; rather, it has to address and respond to practical concerns that could help African Christian communities include authentic and relevant African cultural beliefs and practices into the teaching of the Church and its liturgy as well.

In most African countries, the inculturation of priesthood has taken place in liturgical celebrations, especially during ordination ceremonies. In Ghana, for instance, people inculturated the rite of ordination by including some cultural practices that symbolize the enthronement of chiefs in Asante culture. On this point, Bishop Sarpong argues:

We have also done a little inculturation in the ordination ceremony of priests and deacons. For the examination of the candidates, we put the questions and answers in a statement form for them to read as an oath, holding the Cross. This is what is done when a chief is taking office. He takes the swords and swears an oath of fidelity to his people.<sup>27</sup>

As developed here, the purpose of including this Asante traditional rite into the ordination rite is to help those to be ordained take their oath more seriously, for the chief should keep his word and stand up for his principles. This is also a meaningful way to remind the newly ordained priest that a word given is sacred, and that he has to live accordingly. In this sense, the oath becomes a covenant between the priest and God, on one hand, and between the priest and the congregation that came to witness, on the other hand. The reason why this oath has a dual aspect is because in most African cultures the chief is accountable not only to God, but also to the people entrusted to his care.

---

<sup>26</sup> Paul Uche Nwobi, *Poor Formation as a Principal Factor to the Crisis in Priesthood Today* (Bloomington, IN: Author House, 2012), 167.

<sup>27</sup> Bishop Peter K. Sarpong, "Inculturation (The Asante Model)," *Studia Missionalia* 44 (1995): 301.

Another important aspect of the inculturation of the ordination rite refers to the homily. Rather than being exclusively delivered by the bishop, the homily is organized in such a way that it includes some advice and expectations from the people. This is how Bishop Sarpong describes the inculturation process.

An introduction in the ordination ceremony that has caught on is also on traditional practices. We select a diocesan priest, a missionary priest, a lay man, a lay woman, and a religious sister or brother to advise the *ordinandi* in 2 to 3 minutes. Each tells them what the group she/he represents expects from them. My homily or admonition is more or less the summary of or an expatiation on what the selected persons say. Before a chief swears the oath, he is advised and warned by his councilors in public as to what they expect him to do or not to do as their chief.<sup>28</sup>

In fact, inviting these different people to address to the *ordinandi* during the ordination Mass is a meaningful way to remind priests that priestly formation does not end on the day of ordination; rather, it is an ongoing process that requires humility, commitment, and constant attention to the needs of the people they will minister to. The purpose of having those different people is to help the priest understand that people have different needs and expectations, and that part of his duty will be to help each group represented according to their gender and/or their matrimonial and religious status. By stressing some of the expectations raised by people in his homily, Bishop Sarpong intends to show that the priest has to listen constantly to the hierarchy of the church and the people of God, because both are interrelated and mutually supportive. They all constitute one body, which is that of Christ.

To make it more effective and meaningful for the people and the priest as well, the process of inculturation of priesthood continues especially outside the Ordination Mass. This part of the ceremony is critical for African priests because it refers to the moment when the newly ordained is finally installed as chief and receives the insignia of power. For example,

---

<sup>28</sup>Bishop Peter K. Sarpong, "Inculturation (The Asante Model)," 301-302.

After being ordained in some places of sub-Saharan African, priests are given a welcome to the rank of traditional rulers. This is done by special rite that installs them as leaders of the community. [...]. The rites differ from place to place. In some places, the new cleric is made to sit on a throne prepared for him. By taking a seat on the throne, he is installed as king or chief of the people. The officiating elder hands the priest with kingship tools such as staff, a shield and spear as symbols of power to govern the people.[...]. Usually, the throne is an official place of honour for tribal kings or chiefs.<sup>29</sup>

What Jordan Nyenyembe highlights here is that the inculturation of ministerial priesthood is socially significant in the African context. It shows that people of that particular area and ethnic group have accepted the newly ordained priest as their spiritual leader.

As a result, the priest has the mission and responsibility to care for that people and make sure that the entire Christian community is united in heart and mind with Jesus. In addition to that, the priest's mission is to protect the people against evil spirits and/or deliver them from malevolent forces. This particular mission is critical for his ministry because African Christian beliefs are largely informed and influenced by "the reality of the spirit world and the ardent desire to engage with it for the purpose of survival, health, fruitfulness, and longevity."<sup>30</sup> In this sense, the African priest is considered as a mediator between God and human beings, and part of his mission is to intercede for the people he ministers to.

## **II.2. The African Priest, Patriarchy, and Masculinity**

To better understand the African Catholic priesthood, we need to look at two major principles that underpin chieftdom, namely patriarchy and masculinity. In most African societies, these cultural principles carry a great deal of weight on gender identity. They influence and define the distribution of power and responsibilities among men, women, and children. When this mentality comes to the Church and influences the African Catholic priesthood, the problem

---

<sup>29</sup>Jordan Nyenyembe, *African Catholic Priests*, xi.

<sup>30</sup>J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "Spirit and Spirits in African Religious Traditions," *Interdisciplinary and Religio-Cultural Discourse on a Spirit-Filled World: Loosing the Spirits*, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, Kristeen Kim, and Amos Yong, eds. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 41.

has to be addressed because one of the vices that affects “the model of priest as chief is excessive masculinity, which leads to patriarchy.”<sup>31</sup> Before we move on, let us discuss briefly how patriarchy and masculinity function in African societies.

Patriarchy is “a system of social organization that institutionalizes male power over women and puts male interests and values at the center of social life.”<sup>32</sup> It is based on gender relations and submission. Its fundamental goal is to maintain women’s subordination to men. According to the logic of patriarchal societies, especially in Africa, women are seen as weak and submissive, and the highest accomplishment that they can reach is marriage and motherhood. However, men are expected to be physically strong, dominating, bread winners, and protectors of their family. Most importantly, patriarchy perpetuates the idea that women need the protection of men. This is the reason why the African patriarchal system often takes advantage of women, using masculinity as a path to power and control. Such an attitude is nothing less than a sign of an excessive masculinity because it favors domination and control over women. With regard to chieftdom, patriarchy and masculinity are one of the foundational principles that reinforce the status and identity of the chief in many African societies.

Actually, patriarchy and masculinity have a major influence on how African priests understand Catholic priesthood and exercise their ministry. That influence manifests itself in different ways, especially when the clerics want to get some advantages and/or protect their personal interests. For instance, some African priests use their masculinity as an argument to justify not only their priestly control over women, but also as a means to gain more and more power over them. As pastoral leaders, others think that they deserve leadership positions within

---

<sup>31</sup>Jordan Nyenyembe, “Stewards of God’s Mercy: Vocation and Priestly Ministry in Africa,” 84.

<sup>32</sup> Molly Dragiewicz, “Patriarchy,” *Encyclopedia of Interpersonal Violence*, Vol. 1 (California, LA: Sage Publication, 2008), 505.

the parish and special privileges from the faithful they minister to. This could, for instance, include material gifts, donation and financial discounts. This is a critical issue for the Church today because the model of the African priest-as-chief conveys a distorted image of Catholic patriarchy, which mainly revolves around paternalism, domination, and condescension.

In other words, some African priests base their authority on patriarchal masculinity in order to legitimate their domination and reinforce women's subordination to the clergy. By so doing, the image that they portray of the priest is that of an absolute master. The Church has to address this issue because

The idea of a priest who is master is a total misunderstanding of the call for mission as intended for one by Christ who chooses and calls. A misconceived call to priesthood therefore leads to frustration and dissatisfaction of the priest himself and of the people he is meant to minister to.<sup>33</sup>

The solution is neither to get rid of patriarchy nor to sublimate the masculinity of priests, but rather to develop and promote a healthy understanding of patriarchy within the African clergy. This has to start with seminarians because seminary training is the foundation of priestly identity. Seminary education should provide seminarians with the knowledge and awareness needed to understand the socio-cultural context they are trained in, and how it influences their view of power and leadership as future pastors. The purpose of this priestly formation is to enable candidates for the priesthood to deal with any form of hegemonic masculinity that could prevail over the moral and religious values that should shape their priestly identity.

It would also be helpful to remind African priests that “a dominant approach to ministry cannot work”<sup>34</sup> and will never bear fruit. Instead, African priests should use their spiritual fatherhood to care for people entrusted to them. This could, for instance, include the poor,

---

<sup>33</sup>John B. Kariuki wa Karega, “Priestly Formation: Challenges, Problems and Prospects,” 250.

<sup>34</sup>Jordan Nyenyembe, “Stewards of God’s Mercy: Vocation and Priestly Ministry in Africa,” 85.

widows, orphans, and all those who are marginalized because of their gender, age, or disability. To achieve this, “a priest must be open to continuous formation for growth and transformation in the process of becoming.”<sup>35</sup> This is a lifelong process and it requires the courage to undertake self-criticism, and humility to acknowledge one’s failings. This means that priestly identity is both a task and a call to conversion. It requires some personal effort to work on one’s growth and the desire to be constantly renewed by Christ who is the priest *par excellence*.

Another way to help African priests understand that “the age of the autocratic pastor is over,”<sup>36</sup> is to remind them that the masculinity of the priest is not made to be used as a means for oppression, but rather as a call to genuine leadership and spiritual fatherhood. There is no better way for priests to witness to Christ than to embody values such as respect, love, compassion, and integrity. This is the reason why Nyenyembe argues that “in the Church as Family of God, priests are to assist the lay faithful to discover their own talents. The image of priest as father has to change from that of a patron, to that of a support and animator.”<sup>37</sup> The image that African priests portray of priesthood has to be enlightened by the life and ministry of Christ because self-sacrificial love is the foundation of Catholic patriarchy. African priests should develop a collaborative approach to ministry, for collaboration is a key part of an effective and fruitful pastoral ministry.

Finally, “the Church, which is the Body of Christ made up of members who are equal, has to discourage and halt the oppressive behaviour”<sup>38</sup> of some African priests over the faithful. The masculinity of the priest has to be used as a model displaying virtues of love, chastity, and

---

<sup>35</sup>John B. Kariuki wa Karega, “Priestly Formation: Challenges, Problems and Prospects,” 242.

<sup>36</sup>Jordan Nyenyembe, “Stewards of God’s Mercy: Vocation and Priestly Ministry in Africa,” 85.

<sup>37</sup>Jordan Nyenyembe, *African Catholic Priests*, 86.

<sup>38</sup>Jordan Nyenyembe, *African Catholic Priests*, 73.

service. These virtues presuppose a life of prayer and sacrifice, and the capacity to think critically about the different factors that influence our understanding of priesthood. The future of the priesthood is not based on the priest's desire to lead others, but rather on his capacity and willingness to serve the people to whom he ministers. This is why it is important to encourage African priests to develop consensual ways of making decisions when dealing with Church issues.

### **III. Priestly Identity Crisis in Africa: A Socio-Cultural Hermeneutic**

The word “identity” generally refers to “the set of meanings that define who one is when one is an occupant of a particular society, a member of a particular group, or claims particular characteristics that identify him or her as a unique person.”<sup>39</sup> In other words, identity evokes qualities and attitudes that make a person or a group of people different from others. It is also related to the basic values that inform the choices we make. Oftentimes, those choices reflect who we are, what we ought to be, and what we value. With regard to the priesthood,

Priestly identity is a basic lifestyle of priestly life and ministry. A priestly identity is an immediate goal of a formation process. The final goal of a formation process is wholeness and holiness of life. [...]. Priestly ordination definitely is the essence and foundation of a priestly identity, yet it does not guarantee a priestly identity formation or an exercise of a priestly identity in his daily life and ministry.<sup>40</sup>

Given that priestly identity is shaped by and rooted in Christ's life and ministry, I would say that the more priests understand the essence and goal of their priestly identity, the better they will be able to serve and act in the manner to which Christ has called them. Yet we all know that this ideal is not so easy to accomplish because of our limitations and the impact of the socio-cultural context where priests live.

---

<sup>39</sup>Peter J. Burke and Jan E. Stets, *Identity Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 3.

<sup>40</sup>Paul Uche Nwobi, *Poor Formation as a Principal Factor to the Crisis in Priesthood Today*, 150-151.

Any close examination of the African ecclesial context reveals that the African priesthood faces a critical priestly identity crisis. This crisis is all about the failure of some African priests to live their priestly vocation according to their priestly promises and the evangelical counsels as well. As Jordan Nyenyembe describes it in his book, *African Catholic Priests: Confronting an Identity Problem*, “the African Catholic priesthood now more than ever faces a crisis of identity.”<sup>41</sup> This crisis is, in my opinion, due to the image that African priests portray of priesthood. Considering the priest-as-chief compromises the formation of an authentic priestly identity, and thus the ability of seminarians to shape their lives according to the moral and religious values that are expected from future priests. I would describe this crisis in terms of its behavioral manifestations: priesthood as a destination, an investment, and as a social promotion.

I will start with the idea of priesthood as a destination because this is one of the root causes of priestly identity crisis in most African countries. The problem here is that several African priests consider priesthood as a point of arrival rather than a life of dedication and service to the people of God. They believe that becoming a priest is like the final destination of their priestly formation. As a result, they consider that seminary training is nothing more than a succession of stages to be made in order to become chief. It is precisely for this reason that Uchenna Aba argues:

Some priests leave the seminary without any real interiorization of the formation given to them. In the disorder of parish life, their spiritual life then disintegrates. They do not keep regular confession or soul friends, and as a result lose focus on the priesthood. Consequently, many regrettable digressions enter their lives, both material and sensual... Spiritual numbness takes

---

<sup>41</sup>Jordan Nyenyembe, *African Catholic Priest*, ix.



over. It becomes extremely difficult for the priest to recover any of the ideals of his fervor. Indeed he might easily treat these ideals with scorn and see them as naïve...<sup>42</sup>

Actually, those priests went to the seminary not be necessarily and properly trained for ministerial priesthood, but rather to fulfill all the requirements needed to get ordained. Priestly ordination is their ultimate goal and becomes at the same time the main criterion that they use to check whether other seminarians have succeeded. For this reason, several seminarians do their best to pass examinations and avoid expulsion. In an attempt to prevent oneself from being dismissed from seminary, some seminarians do not hesitate to earn formators' trust and respect by pleasing them.

Because they value more priestly titles than seminary education, several African priests feel a great sense of relief shortly after their priestly ordination. To show that relief, some often say, "I have arrived," and others, "I have made it." They envision the day of their ordination as a special event on which they are installed as chief. For instance, "this image of chief is displayed in the popularity of the leopard symbol in both liturgical vestments and the development of related liturgies. The leopard is the chief of animals."<sup>43</sup> In some parts of Africa, the priest can also be installed on a chair to symbolize his authority and power. This installment often takes place on the day of thanksgiving, which gathers together friends and family members to celebrate the newly ordained priest. In this sense, some priests consider their ordination as a personal achievement and at the same time a means of access to more wealth and financial resources.

The second factor of the priestly identity crisis lies in the fact that people consider priesthood as a personal and family investment. For them, becoming a priest is a means for attaining a kind

---

<sup>42</sup> Uchenna Aba, *The Reception of the Second Vatican Council's Liturgical Reform in Nigeria (Nsukka Diocese)* (Zürich, GER: Deutsche Nationalbibliothek, 2015), 247.

<sup>43</sup> Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *A Listening Church*, 130.

of financial stability. This is precisely the reason why Frank S. Salamone and Michael C. Mbanuiké affirm that

In present-day Nigeria, for example, the priesthood is one of the better ways of becoming rich. Parish priests do not take a vow of poverty, and their position provides opportunities for both authority and wealth. Many Igbo families are willing to sacrifice in order to ensure that one of their family will become a priest or a nun. On ordination day, it is common to present the new priest with a new car as well as a large amount of money. The car, one of the clearest outward signs of wealth, is generally a gift from the extended family and the new priest's village. [...]. In return, however, these villagers expect priests to take financial and political care of their families and fellow villagers.<sup>44</sup>

In other words, becoming a priest or having a priest within one's family is a great achievement in some parts of Africa. This is because priesthood is somehow considered as a path to material prosperity. It provides both the priest and his family with a sense of material security and broader social protection. The problem posed by this vision of priesthood is that it forces some priests to use the money from the parish where they serve in order to support some family members in need. This could, for instance, include paying school fees for nieces and nephews, or financing some family projects.

This idea of a priest who is essentially a provider is a total misunderstanding of ministerial priesthood. It turns priests away their primary mission, which is to preach the gospel and administer sacraments. "It is functional, manipulative and only enhances individual gain. [...]. This leads to frustration which tempts one to become business oriented. Functionary and security models make a priest unavailable to his Christians except on Sundays."<sup>45</sup>The challenge with from model of priesthood is that it portrays a distorted image of priesthood and makes people believe that any African priest behaves or should behave in the same manner. In some parts of Africa, the image of a priest as provider has brought a lot of conflicts within some

---

<sup>44</sup>Frank S. Salamone and Michael C. Mbanuiké, "The Plight of the Indigenous Catholic Priest in Africa: An Igbo Example," *Missiology: An International Review* XXIII, no. 2 (April 1995):168.

<sup>45</sup>John B. Kariuki wa Karega, "Priestly Formation: Challenges, Problems and Prospects," 252.

families, and this is because their son who has become a priest does not respond to some financial expectations expressed by family members. This becomes even more complicated for those who exercise important clerical functions in their dioceses. This may be the case, for example, for Bishops, Episcopal vicars, Vicar generals, Rectors, including other priests who work in parish that are known throughout the diocese for their financial incomes. This is because most African people think that the more a priest assumes important responsibilities, the richer he becomes.

The third reason concerning the priestly identity crisis has to do with the idea of priesthood as social and professional climbing. In some parts of Africa, several people think that priestly ordination raises the newly ordained priest to an upper social class.

Once someone is ordained, he socially belongs to an upper grade, he is socially promoted. [...] It [priestly ordination] raises the priest to the platform. He is taken as someone who knows everything. He can teach, direct, invent, initiate and correct others. He is perfect and cannot easily commit errors.<sup>46</sup>

This vision of priesthood conveys a misconception of the priestly vocation because it considers ordination more as an accomplishment than a call for mission as intended by Christ. It views ordination as an important way to gain social and economic advancement. Among the factors that contribute to this misconception of priesthood is the lifestyle of some priests. Shortly after their ordination, some African priests adopt a lifestyle that is different from that they had as seminarians. For example, they could purchase a car, and develop and maintain friends only with rich people, business men and women, including politicians who can help them get some privileges such as exemption from taxes and customs.

---

<sup>46</sup>Jordan Nyenyembe, *African Catholic Priest*, 76.

Actually, this kind of lifestyle generally implies a theology of priesthood that revolves around money, wealth, and luxury. That theology is centered on material profit and prestige. “The question is stronger especially when this is done to a priest who originates from a poor family or parish. Are the politicians and the whole team of rich benefactors not to hinder the prophetic role of the priest?”<sup>47</sup> In other words, the idea of priesthood as a path to financial stability and economic prosperity is a challenging phenomenon for many African priests and seminarians. It compromises their integrity as pastors of souls and forces them to live a life full of anxiety, worry, and constant tension. This issue affects not only the African ecclesial milieu, but also the universal Church because all the priests throughout the world share the one and only priesthood of Christ who is the head of the Church.

The solution is not to oblige those priests to get rid of their wealth, because as diocesan priests they have the right to ownership; but rather to help them in healthy relationships with people, money, and their benefactors. This has to start with seminarians, showing them the danger of compromise and how it may affect their ministerial priesthood. Another way of addressing this issue is to accompany a seminarian’s family members and help them understand the goal of priesthood, but also explain to them what people should and/or should not expect from priests. In some dioceses, for instance, several bishops have tried this, especially on the day of ordination, but it worked with limited success. Such change, however, has to be a process which should start earlier, for instance from the moment people enter a seminary. Because most African societies are collectivist-oriented cultures, several people may find it difficult to understand, but it is the Church’s responsibility to accompany and help them understand that

---

<sup>47</sup>Jordan Nyenyembe, *African Catholic Priest*, 75.

“priesthood is not a privileged condition but a state of humble service to others.”<sup>48</sup> This process will take time and several steps, of course, but it seems that people have to start somewhere.

Finally, the priestly identity crisis manifests itself in different ways and at diverse levels. It is true that this crisis is fueled by the image that some priests portray of the priest-as-chief, but one has to acknowledge that this phenomenon is more complex than a superficial analysis would indicate. It requires a multifaceted and integrated approach, involving theologians, priests, and other lay people who help to make priestly formation more relevant. One way for the Church to overcome this crisis is to develop a greater awareness of the socio-cultural and political factors that influence priesthood in Africa, and see how to rethink the model of the priest-as-chief, especially its cultural and theological foundations.

#### **IV. Rethinking Priesthood in Africa: A Challenging Task**

It is important to acknowledge that nothing will be done about the priestly identity crisis as long as there is no radical rethinking and renewal of the African Catholic priesthood. This is more important than ever because the image of the priest-as-chief has brought more confusion than clarity in most African countries, especially on how African priests should live their priestly vocation and exercise their ministerial priesthood. The problem with this model of priesthood is that it has affected and continues to affect the Church in general and ministerial priesthood in particular. The most appropriate way to overcome this issue is to renew our understanding of our ministerial priesthood, especially how it fits into the life and mission of the Church.

The first reason why we have to rethink the African Catholic priesthood is because “a healthy church requires a healthy clergy.”<sup>49</sup> This is a critical issue in several countries across the

---

<sup>48</sup>John B. Kariuki wa Karega, “Priestly Formation: Challenges, Problems and Prospects,” 253-254.

continent. In many dioceses, for instance, the image of the priest-as-chief has affected and continues to affect the way people view the Church. This image of priesthood has created an environment whereby the laity often feel excluded from the Church leadership. Because of their position of authority, some priests hold all the power of initiative and the decision-making process. “What can be seen in many places is that priests themselves enforce their opinion and what should be executed. Elected members of the Parish Council may be removed by the parish priest at will, in some cases sad enough of personal grievances.”<sup>50</sup> Like customary chiefs, they assume that they have all the right and, the final word over the organization of the parish. Because of such attitudes, most people feel on the margins of the Christian community. Some even feel rejected because their voices are unheard and their contribution ignored.

The second reason why the Church needs to rethink the image of the priest-as-chief is because it reduces mutual accountability and transparency with respect to the parish’s financial affairs. One of the root causes of this issue is the kind of leadership that some African priests have inherited from customary chiefs. It is not without reason that Jordan Nyenyembe affirms that,

Leadership in (African context) does not tolerate any subordination. What the leaders say is what has to happen. Most pastors do not like any questions being about what goes on in a local church. The person who asks why something happened is automatically branded as having a rebellious spirit. After all, if someone is a pastor has he not been put there by the Lord? Then who are the people to question the will of God?<sup>51</sup>

This influence has created an environment ripe for an authoritative leadership style within the Church. It has built a culture of power among the clergy, resulting in a terrible confusion between the priest’s personal interests and the parish’s affairs. In some dioceses, for instance,

---

<sup>49</sup> Guy Fitch Lytle, “The Recovery of Priestly Identity and the Revival of the Church,” *Sewanee Theological Review* 38, no.3 (1995), 229.

<sup>50</sup>Jordan Nyenyembe, *African Catholic Priests*, 83.

<sup>51</sup>Jordan Nyenyembe, *African Catholic Priests*, 83.

some priests find it “normal” to use part of the parish’s finances in order to achieve some personal needs. This could, for instance, include purchasing a personal car or plot of land. This usually occurs when members of the parish council have either limited access to the parish’s financial accounts or have been silenced by the parish priest. It is necessary to overcome such issues because “the image of the priest as one with authority over the community has changed into the image of one who shares in and at the same time meets the needs of the community.”<sup>52</sup>In other words, there is a critical need for the Church to help African priests find a genuine way of being priest, grounded in an ecclesiology of communion.

The third reason for the Church to re-evaluate the African Catholic priesthood has to do with “syndrome title” and “personality cult.” In the model of the African priest-as-chief, titles carry a great deal of attention and interest. This is because titles play an important role in African leadership, which mainly revolves around the chief figure. For example, “in some places within the African cultural context the hierarchies of power are ordered vertically with the use of titles.”<sup>53</sup> This also applies to African priests because of their status and rank of chief. Following the hierarchical structure of the Church, they emphasize that they are above the laity and “are concerned with being properly addressed with honorary titles related to their ecclesiastical ranks.”<sup>54</sup> They will expect, for instance, titles such as “Reverend Father” for priests, and “Excellency” and Lordship” for Bishops. These titles are designed to evoke prestige and reverence. In order to reinforce their authority and show how powerful they are, some priests would even expect to occupy front seats during church meetings and civil ceremonies. It is true

---

<sup>52</sup>John B. Kariuki wa Karega, “Priestly Formation: Challenges, Problems and Prospects,” 249.

<sup>53</sup>Jordan Nyenyembe, *African Catholic Priests*, 78.

<sup>54</sup>Jordan Nyenyembe, “Stewards of God’s Mercy: Vocation and Priestly Ministry in Africa,” 81.

that clerics deserve respect as much as any person, but the problem with these reverential titles is that they establish and maintain a pyramidal style of relationships within the Church.

Another problem with “syndrome title” is the fact that it privileges personality cult, which “concentrates the power around the person. It is the figure of the person that draws the admiration around itself.”<sup>55</sup> This is true because in several dioceses, some priests are praised because of the clerical functions that they exercise. Like customary chiefs, they have a great influence not only on people but also on important decisions within the diocese. This could be the case, for example, with assignment of priests for new responsibilities or the admission of seminarians to priestly ordination. Similarly, some priests are highly respected because of their extensive educational background and academic titles. In order to expect more respect and increase their influence,

A number of priests have decided that it is not enough to be just a “Reverend Father.” They leave Nigeria to attend American or European universities to get their Ph.Ds, since foreign doctorates have more prestige than Nigerian degrees. In too many cases, however, it seems to various African parishioners that priests are not going abroad to better their educational fortune, but primarily to get more honor. Although the title of “Reverend Father” is one of the highest titles available in Nigeria, in fact the title of “Reverend Father” often disappears from their list of titles.<sup>56</sup>

As we can see here, those priests convey a misunderstanding of studies and academic titles. They study not to deepen and broaden their knowledge and skills, but rather to keep elevating themselves and, of course, extend their power and influence over people. They think that the more titles a priest has, the higher respect he deserves. This is a challenging issue for many priests because it forces them to seek for glory and honor at the expense of their priestly identity.

---

<sup>55</sup>Jordan Nyenyembe, *African Catholic Priests*, 81.

<sup>56</sup>Franck S. Salamone and Michael C. Mbanuiké, “The Plight of the Indigenous Catholic Priest in Africa: An Igbo Example,” 168.



Last but not least, the Church has to examine more deeply the model of the priest-as-chief because “a lot of influence on the priest-to-be about priesthood comes from the priesthood lived by those who are already priests.”<sup>57</sup> This influence can be either positive or negative, depending on whether it helps seminarians live their vocation faithfully and understand that ministerial priesthood is about service, not status and privileges. With this in mind, I would say that the image that some African priests portray of priesthood needs to be changed and renewed because it takes seminarians away from their primary mission, which is to be “enabled or empowered by the priestly formation to address the problems of those whom he [or they] will serve.”<sup>58</sup> Through their lifestyles, they often give the impression that priestly ordination is the climax of priesthood, and that priestly formation is just a series of steps to reach there.

One of the most challenging things about the African Catholic priesthood is that it conveys the idea that the clergy is more important and powerful than the laity, and that people should obey and comply with any decision taken by priests. In order to overcome this misunderstanding, the Church must encourage and help African priests find better ways to collaborate with the laity. This is critical for the functioning of the Church because priests do not have the monopoly of truth and good ideas. Their mission is to work hand in hand with other parishioners for the sake of the Church’s mission. The only way to overcome this problem is to remind priests that “the priesthood must be understood and rooted in the Church, which is the sacrament of Christ.”<sup>59</sup> In other words, priests should always remember that they are ordained in the Church and for her mission. Part of their mission is to make sure that the parish’s mission

---

<sup>57</sup>John B. Kariuki wa Karega, “Priestly Formation: Challenges, Problems and Prospects,” 249.

<sup>58</sup>John B. Kariuki wa Karega, “Priestly Formation: Challenges, Problems and Prospects,” 258.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas Corbett, “The Image of the Priest,” *The Furrow* 30, no. 7 (Jul., 1979): 452.

and vision follow the Tradition and Magisterium and that the parish leadership serves that purpose.

It is worth reemphasizing that it is the Church's mission and responsibility to rethink the model of the African priest-as-chief. This is necessary because "what affects the nature of the Church affects the nature of the priestly identity in a very profound way. It is not possible to separate the priesthood from Jesus Christ and the Church, His Body."<sup>60</sup>In other words, the future of the priesthood in Africa depends on how effectively priests will revisit the essence and goal of priestly vocation.

## **Conclusion**

The above discussion has highlighted the emergence, strengths, and limitations of the African Catholic priesthood. This model of priesthood portrays the priest-as-chief of the people and of the community as well. It is best understood within the context of inculturation because it was motivated by the desire and willingness to make ministerial priesthood more effective and relevant in the African context. Despite its relevance in the African ecclesial context, the model of the African priest-as-chief has brought more confusion than clarity within the African Church. It influences priests to focus more on their identity and privileges than on their prophetic mission. To overcome this issue, African priests should understand that a vocation to the priesthood is a call to serve rather than to be served.

Becoming a priest is neither a privilege nor a social promotion. Rather, it is a life of consecration and service that has to be rooted in Jesus, the priest *par excellence*. It is a lifelong process that requires humility, discernment, and self-sacrificial love. The African Church will

---

<sup>60</sup>Uche Nwobi, *Poor Formation as a Principal Factor to the Crisis in Priesthood Today*, 167.

best address the priestly identity crisis in two ways: first, she has to encourage priests to rediscover constantly the essence and goal of the priesthood throughout their life; and second, she has to improve priestly formation and help both priests and seminarians embody values that should help them become better pastors and prophetic servants. I will discuss these concerns respectively in the second and third chapters.

## Chapter II: Understanding the Theological Foundations of Priesthood

### Introduction

The principal concern before us in the present chapter will be to rediscover the essence and goal of the Catholic priesthood, and then see whether this can help the Church rethink the model of the priest-as-chief in a meaningful way. This rediscovery process, which is essential for the future of the priesthood in Africa, requires not only a basic understanding of Church documents on priesthood, but also the humility to learn from our failures and successes, as well as the courage to take action for positive change in the way several African priests perceive and live their priesthood. The question is not whether or not there should be an African Catholic theology of priesthood but rather how best the model of the priest-as-chief can help priests become better pastors and prophetic servants.

My argument in this chapter is that the African Church will best address this issue in two ways: first, she has to renew and deepen her understanding of priesthood, and second, she has to foster a vision of priesthood that gives witness to Christ not only in words but also in deeds. The reason why the priest has to follow and imitate Christ is because Christ is the model of priesthood *par excellence*. To achieve this goal, I find it important to discuss four major points. I will first start by exploring some theological foundations of Catholic priesthood, and then discuss some models of priesthood, especially how they can foster the renewal of the model of the priest-as-chief. In the third and fourth points, I will respectively analyze the relationship between the priestly office and the dynamics of power, and conclude by exploring some insights from Pope Francis' understanding of priesthood.

## **I. Understanding the Theology of Priesthood**

The purpose of this section is to demonstrate that there is no better way to rethink the African Catholic priesthood than to revisit the theological foundations of priesthood. It is important to remember that, because the African Catholic priesthood does not operate in isolation; rather, it is essentially linked to the universal Church, which is the Body of Christ. To better understand how this works, it is necessary to start by looking at the essence and goal of priesthood, and then explore the relationship between the common and ministerial priesthood.

### **I.1. The Essence and Goal of Priesthood**

The term “priest” or “priesthood” has had different meanings according to people and times. It derives from the two words: first, from the Greek work *heireus*, which is all about “a priestly figure without offering a sacrifice that reconciles God and humanity.”<sup>61</sup> It also refers to one who performed any cultic function at the temple. Second, the term “priest” also derives from the Latin word *sacerdos*, which refers to one who has been separated from others in order to be God’s very own. The titles *presbyteros* (“elder” without priestly connotation) and *episkopos* (supervisor) were used only in the New Testament to designate individual ministers. Thus, the priest can be defined as a mediator, as one who is located between God and humanity. It is precisely for this reason that John Baldovin argues that “in the history of religion it [priesthood] is normally applied to religious officials who take charge of the cult, offer sacrifices, and

---

<sup>61</sup> Hervé Legrand, “Ministerial Priesthood,” *Encyclopedia of Christian Theology*, ed. Jean-Yves Lacoste, Vol. 1. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 1285.

perform other sacred duties.”<sup>62</sup> In this regard, the priesthood can be considered as a bridge that allows the priest to establish communion between the Creator and its creature.

“In the Christian context it [priesthood] applies first of all to the priesthood of Jesus Christ, especially as described in Hebrew 4-10.”<sup>63</sup> Despite the fact Jesus never considered himself as a priest, it is important to mention that the Letter to the Hebrew is the only book that applies priestly terminology to Jesus. Hebrew 4:14-16 might be cited as a key text:

Since in Jesus, the Son of God, we have the supreme high priest who has gone through to the highest heaven, we must hold firm to our profession of faith. For the high priest we have is not incapable of feeling our weaknesses with us, but has been put to the test in exactly the same way as ourselves, apart from sin. Let us, then, have no fear in approaching the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace when we are in need of help.

As we can see here, Jesus is presented as the true, perfect, and eternal<sup>64</sup> high-priest. His priestly identity and ministry involve both the sacrifice of himself on the cross and his ongoing intercession for his people. “His priesthood is unlike that of the old covenant, or that of Aaron, and is a priesthood according to the order of Melchizedek, for it has not human origin but only divine.”<sup>65</sup> Jesus’ death on the cross is the ultimate sacrifice, for it is superior to all the animal sacrifices offered in the temple. His sacrifice on the cross is the foundation for the new covenant.

Actually, “the priesthood of Christ, in which all priests really share, is necessarily intended for all peoples and all times, and it knows no limits of blood, nationality or time, since it is already mysteriously prefigured in the person of Melchizedek.”<sup>66</sup> Christ’s priesthood is the essence and foundation of Christian priesthood, because he offered his life once and for all, and

---

<sup>62</sup> John F. Baldovin, “Priesthood,” *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology*, eds. Ian A. McFarland, David A. S. Fergusson, Karen Kilby, and Ian R. Torrance (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 480.

<sup>63</sup> John F. Baldovin, “Priesthood,” 480.

<sup>64</sup> Heb 5:7.

<sup>65</sup> David N. Power, “Priesthood in Christian Tradition,” *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Berard L. Marthaler, Vol. 11 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 691.

<sup>66</sup> *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 10.

his sacrifice was sufficient to cover the sins of all the world. During his earthly life and ministry, Jesus chose twelve men to be his disciples, and trained them in order to spread the Good News. “He called the Twelve together and gave them power and authority over all devils and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.”<sup>67</sup> He chose them so that they continue the redemptive work of the Triune God.

On Holy Thursday, just before his passion and death on the cross, Jesus celebrated the Last Supper with the twelve. And that celebration is marked by two major events: the washing of feet and the institution of the priesthood. Both events are linked intimately, for they are mutually supportive. As presented in the thirteenth chapter of the Gospel of John, Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. “If I, then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you must wash each other’s feet. I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you.”<sup>68</sup> This ritual is not merely an example of humble service that Jesus taught his disciples, but primarily a biblical account of the institution of the Christian priesthood. It is the biblical foundation of the sacrament of holy orders. With respect to this point, Pope John Paul II, in his Apostolic Letter on Reserving Priestly Ordination to Men Alone, argues that

these men did not only receive a function which could thereafter be exercised by any member of the Church; rather, they were specially and intimately associated in the mission of the Incarnate Word himself. The Apostles did the same when they chose fellow workers who would succeed them in their ministry. Also included in this choice were those who, throughout the time of the Church, would carry on the Apostles’ mission of representing Christ the Lord and Redeemer.<sup>69</sup>

What Pope John Paul II highlights here is that, through the washing of feet and the institution of the Eucharist, Jesus consecrated his disciples to the priesthood so they can continue and act in his name. Since they could not exercise that mission by themselves, the apostles in turn selected

---

<sup>67</sup> Luke 9:1-2.

<sup>68</sup> John 13:14-15.

<sup>69</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, no. 2.

other men to succeed them as bishops (*episkopoi*, which means “overseers”) of the Christian communities.

The priesthood as intended by Jesus has evolved over the centuries to the present day, but has also remained mostly the same. One way to understand the history of Catholic priesthood from the beginning until now is to consult the writings of scholars and historians such as Kenan B. Osborne,<sup>70</sup> Paul E. Dinter,<sup>71</sup> and David N. Power.<sup>72</sup> However, if Jesus trained the Twelve so that they can continue his mission, the Church has established seminaries for the formation of candidates to the priesthood. The establishment of seminaries is one of the most important achievements of the Council of Trent. With the modern Catholic understanding of the priesthood, the emphasis was now put on “the personal union between the ordained priest and Christ, especially in a life of self-sacrifice and in the celebration of the Eucharist. The priest thus came to be considered as ‘another Christ’ (*alter Christus*).”<sup>73</sup>

With respect to the priesthood, I would say that the major contribution of the Second Vatican Council revolves around three points. First, the council recognizes that the episcopacy is a distinct order in relation to the priest and deacon. “By the Episcopal consecration the fullness of the sacrament of Orders is conferred, that fullness of power, namely, which both in the Church’s liturgical practice and in the language of the Fathers of the Church is called the high priesthood, the supreme power of the sacred ministry.”<sup>74</sup> Second, the Church argues that the priests participate in the threefold office of Christ. “Priests by sacred ordination and mission

---

<sup>70</sup> Kenan B. Osborne, *Priesthood: A History of the Ordained Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988).

<sup>71</sup> Paul E. Dinter, *The Changing Priesthood: From the Bible to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Allen, TX: Thomas More Publishing, 1989).

<sup>72</sup> David P. Power, “Priesthood in Christian Tradition,” *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Berard L. Marthaler, Vol. 11 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003): 690-707.

<sup>73</sup> John F. Baldovin, “Priesthood,” 480.

<sup>74</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 21.



which they receive from the bishops are promoted to the service of Christ the Teacher, Priest, and King.”<sup>75</sup> I will develop the role and importance of these offices later in this chapter, but it is important to remember that they correspond respectively to the ministry of the Word, the administration of sacraments, and the pastoral care of the People of God. Third, “The Catholic Church has retained the discipline of celibacy for priests and has not seen itself able to ordain women to the priesthood. A number of other Christian Churches do ordain women to ministry.”<sup>76</sup> For further research on this point, one could, for instance, read *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, which is Pope John Paul II’s Apostolic Letter on Reserving Priestly Ordination to Men alone.

According to Thomas Corbett, “the power to ordain could be traced back to a direct act of Christ who ordained the first priests at the Last Supper.”<sup>77</sup> The sacramental ordination, which is reserved to the bishop, confers priestly character to the *ordinandi*. It “configures the priest to Jesus Christ the head and the spouse of the Church.”<sup>78</sup> This sacrament also enables the priest to minister to the people of God, without any distinction. For this reason, “the spiritual gift which priests received at their ordination prepares them not for any limited or narrow mission but for the widest scope of the universal mission of salvation to the end of the world.”<sup>79</sup> This comes with special urgency to the African Catholic priesthood because the model of the priest-as-chief tends to make some priests think that they are first ordained for their ethnic group, tribe, or for the chieftaincy to which they belong. Those who develop such an exclusive vision of priesthood are generally influenced by tribalism and/or ethnic conflicts. When this mentality comes to the Church and influences the African Catholic priesthood, the problem has to be addressed because

---

<sup>75</sup> *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 1.

<sup>76</sup> John F. Baldovin, “Priesthood,” 480.

<sup>77</sup> Thomas Corbett, “The Image of the Priest,” *The Furrow* 30, no. 7 (July 1979): 450.

<sup>78</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, no. 29.

<sup>79</sup> *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 32.

“the negative attitude and mentality to those of other cultures/tribes is not healthy nor is it conducive to the idea of the ‘Church-as-family’ model proposed by the African Synod.”<sup>80</sup>

Another critical aspect about the priesthood is to understand what it was intended for. The primary and most important purpose of the priesthood is to minister to the People of God and to administer the sacraments. These two aspects of the priesthood are interrelated and essentially based on Christ’s priesthood. The words of Pope John Paul II on the Formation of priests are significant here:

Brother priests, we want to express our appreciation to you, who are most important collaborators in the apostolate. Your priesthood is absolutely necessary. There is no substitute it. You carry the main burden of priestly ministry through your day-to-day service of the faithful. You are ministers of the Eucharist and ministers of God’s mercy in the sacrament of penance. It is you who bring comfort to people and guide them in difficult moments in their lives.<sup>81</sup>

As an ordained minister of the Church, the priest is first and foremost God’s servant. His mission is to serve God through the service of his people. He exercises his ministry for others, and shares the mission of Jesus as Priest, Prophet, and King. The goal of priestly ministry is to lead people to God and bring God’s love especially to the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized. Priests are called to achieve this goal in both words and deeds, for “they labor in word and doctrine, believing what they have read and meditated upon in the law of God, teaching what they have believed, and putting into practice in their own lives what they have taught.”<sup>82</sup>

It is worth reemphasizing that there is no other source of the priesthood than that of Jesus Christ. The essence and goal of priesthood can be understood only in reference to Christ, for the priest is “a derivation, specific participation in and continuation of Christ Himself, the one High

---

<sup>80</sup> John B. Kariuki wa Karega, “Priestly Formation: Challenges, Problems and Prospects,” *African Ecclesial Review*, Vol. 48, no. 4 (2006): 255.

<sup>81</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, no. 4.

<sup>82</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 28.

Priest of the new and eternal Covenant. The priest is a living and transparent image of Christ the priest.”<sup>83</sup> Becoming a priest is a call to configure oneself to Jesus, by imitating Him more closely and by ministering to the People of God more faithfully. This is a lifetime commitment which requires not only some discernment skills and a suitable formation, but also a sincere and real love for the people to whom the priest ministers, for the ministerial priesthood is at the service of the common priesthood of all the baptized. Finally, “the priesthood of Christ [...] constitutes the one source and essential model of the priesthood shared by all Christians and the priest in particular. Reference to Christ is thus the absolutely necessary key for understanding the reality of priesthood.”<sup>84</sup>

## **II.2. The Common Priesthood vs. the Ministerial Priesthood**

The Church can rethink the African Catholic priesthood by rediscovering the role and importance of the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood in the Church. This process is more important than ever because, in most parts of Africa, the word “priest” or “priesthood” is still exclusively linked in the minds of the faithful with the ordained. This vision of priesthood needs to be changed because it encourages clericalism, and makes the priestly identity crisis even more complex. This also applies to the model of the priest-as-chief, for it makes some African priests believe that they are more important than the laity. The Church needs to address such issues because those kinds of behavior portray a distorted image of priesthood, and create unnecessary conflicts within the Christian communities. Before we go any further, let us look at the main features of the common and ministerial priesthood.

---

<sup>83</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, no. 12.

<sup>84</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, no. 12.

It is important to remember that “though they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless interrelated: each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ.”<sup>85</sup> In other words, there is neither opposition nor conflict between the two “models” of priesthood; rather, they are complementary and all contribute toward achieving the mission of Christ. Both the laity and the clergy share in the same and unique priesthood of Christ. They are two ways of witnessing to Christ which are interrelated and mutually supportive. Because of that relationship, the Second Vatican Council’s ecclesiology identifies the Church as the People of God, a priestly community where both the ordained and non-ordained are equally necessary though each group of people has its mission according to its vocation.

Actually, the priesthood of the baptized is essentially linked to Christ’s priesthood. “The faithful, by virtue of the royal priesthood, join in the offering of the Eucharist. Likewise, they exercise that common priesthood in receiving the sacraments, in prayer and thanksgiving, in the witness of a holy life, self-denial and active charity.”<sup>86</sup> Through baptism, each Christian is configured to Christ and called to witness to Him through the example of his or her Christian life.<sup>87</sup> That call, which is critical component of Christian vocation, is a lifetime commitment that requires self-denial, self-sacrificial love, and a profound desire to become Christ-like. “The more the laity’s own sense of vocation is deepened, the more what is proper to the priest stands out.”<sup>88</sup> In other words, the more the faithful know what Christ is calling them for, the better they will

---

<sup>85</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 10.

<sup>86</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 10.

<sup>87</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1268.

<sup>88</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, no. 3.

fulfill their vocation. To achieve this goal, they need the help of the ministerial priesthood which is entrusted to ordained ministers. In connection with this point, it is important to note that

the ministerial priest, by the sacred power he enjoys, teaches and rules the priestly people; acting in the person of Christ, he makes present the Eucharistic sacrifice, and offers it to God in the name of all the people.<sup>89</sup>

By virtue of his ordination, the priest shares in the threefold office of Christ, namely the prophetic, priestly, and kingly offices. While being distinct in itself, each office is interconnected to the others. “Teaching (prophetic office), leadership (governing office), and prayer (sanctifying office), all involve faith and putting it into action.”<sup>90</sup> To better understand the importance of these offices in the Church, let us explore them briefly.

The prophetic office is related to the Church’s teaching authority, which is generally called *Magisterium*. The priest exercises this office whenever he proclaims the Good News, and speaks truthfully about God to believers and/or unbelievers. More concretely, the priest exercises the teaching office of Christ during the liturgy of the Word at Mass, but also when he participates in other Church activities that aim at spreading the Good News. This could, for instance, include teaching of catechism and organizing Bible study groups. The priest assumes the priestly office of Christ by worshiping God in daily life and especially through the celebration of the sacraments. It is a “sanctifying office because this office involves adoration of and thanksgiving to Christ, which are expressions of faith.”<sup>91</sup> The purpose of this office is to lead believers to holiness so that they can become witnesses of Christ in the world. The kingly office is linked to the governance of the ecclesial community. With respect to this office, the mission of the priest

---

<sup>89</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 10.

<sup>90</sup> Anthony Ekpo, “The Sensus Fidelium and the Threefold Office of Christ: A Reinterpretation of Lumen Gentium No. 12,” *Theological Studies* 2 (2015): 345.

<sup>91</sup> Anthony Ekpo, “The Sensus Fidelium and the Threefold Office of Christ,” 345.

to “govern the People of God,”<sup>92</sup> especially the parish or ecclesial community entrusted to him by the bishop of the diocese to which he belongs. The priest exercises this office with the authority of Christ and under the authority of the bishop. The purpose of this office is “to order the life of believers through pastoral service.”<sup>93</sup> This refers to pastoral leadership, which is of the ministry of the priest. Diocesan priests can exercise these offices only in hierarchical communion with their local bishop because he enjoys “the fullness of the priesthood.”<sup>94</sup> This is the reason why “bishops regard them as necessary helpers and counselors in the ministry and in their role of teaching, sanctifying and nourishing the People of God.”<sup>95</sup>

In other words, the priest is ordained neither for himself nor for the people of his chieftaincy. Rather, he is ordained for the sake of Christ’s mission, which is to proclaim the Good News and fulfill God’s plan of saving the lost. This is a critical point for priesthood because

Priests by the sacred ordination and mission which they receive from the bishops are promoted to the service of Christ the Teacher, Priest and King. They share in his ministry, a ministry whereby the Church here on earth is unceasingly built up into the People of God, the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit.<sup>96</sup>

In other words, ordination to the priesthood is a service rather than a privilege and/or personal achievement as some African priests would think. It is a sacrament though which priests are called to share in the priestly office of Christ. This sacrament should not be intended to achieve individual well-being and success. Rather it is essentially for the ministry of the Church, and for the glory of God. For this reason, priests should constantly remember that “the effectiveness of the Catholic priests as an instrument of Christ derives from the effectiveness of

---

<sup>92</sup> *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 7.

<sup>93</sup> Ormond Rush, *The Eyes of Faith: The Sense of the Faith and the Church’s Reception of the Revelation* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 175.

<sup>94</sup> *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 7.

<sup>95</sup> *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 7.

<sup>96</sup> *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 1.

Christ, which leads inevitably to the cross.”<sup>97</sup> This means that Christ as the unique and eternal mediator between God and humankind has to be at the heart of priestly ministry.

Another important point that needs to be clarified here is the phrase “acting *in persona Christi*.” Saying that the priest acts *in persona Christi* means that he stands in the place of Christ within the Church’s sacramental life. This component of the ministerial priesthood remains a critical point in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council in the Decree on the Ministry and Life of the Priests: “through that sacrament [ordination] priests, by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are signed with special character and so are configured to Christ the priest in such a way that they can act in the person of Christ the Head.”<sup>98</sup> The Church in Africa should constantly remind African priests about the right and proper meaning of acting *in persona Christi*, because the model of the priest-as-chief has brought more confusion than clarity, not only about priestly identity, but also with regard to priestly ministry in the African ecclesial context. While exercising the teaching, sanctifying, and governing office of Christ, the African priest should constantly remember that he does not and should not act on behalf of the chieftain to which he belongs, but rather in Christ’s place. Likewise, he does not and should not exercise these offices with the authority given to him by the traditional customary chiefs of the chieftaincy to which he belongs; rather, he should exercise his ministry in the name of Christ, and by virtue of his ordination.

It is also important to remind African priests that ordination does not make them more important than the laity; rather, it places them in a position of service for the non-ordained.

---

<sup>97</sup> Gisbert Geshake, *The Meaning of Christian Priesthood*, 145.

<sup>98</sup> *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 2.

Because of the model of the priest-as-chief, some of them still find it difficult to accept, but the truth is that

the ministerial priesthood does not of itself signify a greater degree of holiness with regard to the common priesthood of the faithful; through it Christ gives to priests, in the Spirit, a particular gift so that they can help the People of God to exercise faithfully and fully the common priesthood which it has received.<sup>99</sup>

In other words, the purpose of ministerial priesthood is to serve the faithful rather than to be served. It is a way of participating in Christ's priesthood and mission. This ministry was intended to allow priests to represent sacramentally the ecclesial community, by becoming somehow a corporate personality in which the community recognizes itself. In order to foster better relationships between the clergy and laity, AMECEA made some important recommendations in 1970, 1979, and 1992 during its general assemblies.<sup>100</sup> Here are some significant words: "the ordained priesthood and the general priesthood of the faithful are in collaboration, not in competition," and that there is "a close relationship between community and ministry." The plenary encourages both the priests and the laity to develop a true spirit of teamwork "not just for practical reasons, but also in order to express the community dimension of the Church."<sup>101</sup>

As a result, the clergy and the laity have a common vocation which is the vocation to holiness. Before any distinction occurs through ordination, both participate in the common priesthood of the baptized. "The ministerial priesthood is essentially at the service of the faithful,"<sup>102</sup> and priests exercise that ministry in the name of Christ. This vision of priesthood will foster a better relationship between the clergy and the laity only if African priests understand

---

<sup>99</sup> Pope Jean Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, no. 17.

<sup>100</sup> As mentioned in the Introduction, most of these documents are not easily accessible outside of Africa, but I will consider them for future revision of this work. However, here is an overview of the different plenary sessions, including the different themes. <https://amecea.org/development-of-amecea/#> (accessed March 21, 2019).

<sup>101</sup> Cf. Brian Hearne, "Priestly Ministry and Christian Community," *African Ecclesial Review* 24 (1982): 227-228.

<sup>102</sup> Thomas J. McGovern, *Priestly Identity* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2002), 7.



and acknowledge that “priestly ministry acquires its genuine meaning and attains its fullest truth in serving and in fostering the growth of the Christian community and the common priesthood of the faithful.”<sup>103</sup>

## **II. Models of Priesthood: The Cultic Model vs. the Servant-leader Model**

The study of the history of the Catholic priesthood reveals that there are different models of priesthood. These models have developed at different moments in the Church’s life and prevailed in one or another context. My task in this section will be to discuss mainly the cultic and servant-leader model, and then see how they can help some African priests become better ministers and shepherds as well.

The cultic model of priesthood is a way of living and exercising priesthood that revolves mainly around cultic functions and/or practices, namely, worship, liturgy, and sacraments. This model of priesthood has existed in the Church at least since the Council of Trent. It attaches considerable importance to the priest’s role as leader of the worship and administer of the sacraments. According to James J. Bacik,

the cultic priest’s main task was to provide the sacraments, most often Mass and confession. He led a distinctive lifestyle by remaining celibate, living in a rectory, and wearing clerical garb. Pastors worked as general practitioners, responsible for all aspects of parish life. Parishioners placed their pastors on a pedestal, as mediators between God and themselves. With the indelible character received at ordination, priests functioned as “other Christs,” ruling and sanctifying the faithful. Most understood this role, enjoyed the respect of society, and found general satisfaction in their work.<sup>104</sup>

In this model of priesthood, the priest was like a ritual specialist. He was considered as a leader of worship, dispenser of sacraments, and a custodian of sacred spaces and revealed truth. Thus, the priest’s life, identity, and mission were somehow reduced to the cultic sphere. Because

---

<sup>103</sup> Pope Jean Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, no. 37.

<sup>104</sup> James J. Bacik, “The Practice of Priesthood: Working Through Today’s Tension,” *Priesthood in the Modern World: A Reader*, Karen Sue Smith, ed. (Franklin, WI: Sheed and Ward, 1999), 51.

of this cultic influence, priests were somehow distant from their parishioners. The cultic model of priesthood lasted in the Church until about mid-twentieth century.

After the Second World War, the model of priesthood began to change – at least in European countries – especially because of the new pastoral concerns that the Church had to face. For instance, “priests found themselves serving Catholics who no longer considered the parish the center of their social life. And laity made new demands, expecting priestly guidance in relating their faith to life in the changing world.”<sup>105</sup> The issue was that several parishioners expected their parish priests to help them make sense of their faith after the loss and dramatic situations caused by the war in Europe. There was a profound need to rediscover the meaning and the importance of religious practices, and the role and mission of the priest not only in the Church but also in the society. Part of the solution was to suggest a new and genuine way in which priests could live their priesthood. The suggestion was made by the Second Vatican Council. “The Council departed away from an abstract and aesthetic perception of clerics to a more pastoral understanding of their ministry.”<sup>106</sup> There were two remarkable suggestions.

First, the Council inserted priests within the people of God, especially because of their baptism. “They are not separated from the people of God or from any person; but they are to be dedicated totally to the work for which the Lord has chosen them. They cannot be ministers of Christ unless they be witnesses and dispensers of a life other than an earthly life.”<sup>107</sup> In other words, this insertion was meant to demonstrate that priests as members of the unique Body of Christ are part of the local Church as they exercise their ministry. However, this does not prevent any exchange of ordained ministers between local churches.

---

<sup>105</sup> James J. Bacik, “The Practice of Priesthood: Working Through Today’s Tension,” 52.

<sup>106</sup> Jordan Nyenyembe, *African Catholic Priests: Confronting an Identity Problem* (Bamenda, Cameroon: Langaa Research & Publishing, 2011), 135.

<sup>107</sup> *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 3.

The second contribution of the Council was about the nature and purpose of priestly ministry. It was made clear that priests should understand and exercise their clerical apostolate as a pastoral service rather than as a specialist of rituals and/or religious administrator. Thus,

priests, as co-workers with their bishops, have the primary duty of proclaiming the Gospel of God to all. In this way they fulfill the command of the Lord: ‘Going therefore into the whole world preach the Gospel to every creature’ (Mt 16:15), and they establish and build up the People of God.<sup>108</sup>

As preachers of the Word of God, the priests have the mission to proclaim the mysteries of Christ. This duty is called “the ministry of the word.” Another duty for priests is to preside over liturgical celebrations because by “offering the Eucharistic Sacrifice and administering the other sacraments, or performing other works of the ministry for men, [they] devote all this energy to the increase of the glory of God and to man’s progress in the divine life.”<sup>109</sup>

Actually, the life, spirituality, and ministry of the priest can become meaningful and fruitful only if they are grounded in the service of the people of God. That service is an office of love that should not be limited to ritualistic or cultic functions. Rather, it is a service that includes and supports pastoral charity. “This pastoral charity flows out in a very special way from the Eucharistic sacrifice. This stands at the root and center of the whole life of the priest. What takes place at the altar of sacrifice, the priestly heart must make his own.”<sup>110</sup> In this sense, pastoral charity becomes the foundation and purpose of servant leadership in the Church.

The servant-leader model of priesthood emerged from the Second Vatican Council’s understanding of the priesthood. As mentioned above, this model of priesthood is based on pastoral charity and portrays the priest both as a servant and leader of the ecclesial community. It

---

<sup>108</sup> *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 4.

<sup>109</sup> *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 2.

<sup>110</sup> *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 14.

fosters unity between the identity and mission of the priest, and seeks to promote a vision of priesthood that encourages a better collaboration between the clergy and the laity. The words of Pope Jean Paul II are meaningful here:

The priest minister is the servant of Christ present in the Church as mystery, communion and mission. In virtue of his participation in the ‘anointing’ and ‘mission’ of Christ, the priest can continue Christ’s prayer, word, sacrifice and salvific action in the Church. In this way, the priest is a servant of the Church as mystery because he actualizes the Church’s sacramental signs of the presence of the risen Christ. He is a servant of the Church as communion because – in union with the bishop and closely related to the presbyterate – he builds up the unity of the Church community in the harmony of diverse vocations, charisms and services. Finally, the priest is a servant to the Church as mission because he makes the community a herald and witness of the Gospel.<sup>111</sup>

For the priest, being a servant is neither a profession nor a hobby; rather, it is a way of being and living that is enlightened by and grounded in the life and mission of Christ. It is a way of living that inspires other priests and Christians to follow and imitate Christ. The priest exercises that service in collaboration with the bishop and other priests of the diocese. More concretely, the priest is a servant of Christ and of the Church when the people of God become the primary and most important concern of his ministry.

As a leader, the priest is called to exercise his mission as a servant and a role model in the community. He is also called to help those being led to fulfill their vocation for better apostolic fruits. His mission is to exercise the leadership of the community with charity and humility. This is critical for all priests because there is no better way to serve the people of God than to be good shepherds. In connection with this matter, let us rediscover why the Church wants priests to become good pastoral leaders.

As leaders of the community they cultivate an asceticism becoming to a shepherd of souls, renouncing their personal convenience, seeking not what is useful to themselves but to many, for their salvation, always making further progress to do their pastoral work better and, where

---

<sup>111</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, no. 16.

needed, prepared to enter into new pastoral ways under the direction of the Spirit of Love, which breathers where it will.<sup>112</sup>

In other words, the role of the priest as leader is to minister to the people of God in view of their integral human development and of the glory of God. Part of his responsibility is to engage with the people in order to build together an authentic Christian community. This mission requires discernment because it is a critical tool for good pastoral leadership, but also for better understanding of oneself and those whom the priest serves.

The priest can best serve and lead people unless he becomes a man of discernment. The mission of the priest as leader also requires creativity and effective collaboration among priests and with the laity as well. Becoming a creative pastoral leader will help the priest explore, generate, and develop better ways for collaborating with others for the greater glory of God. This means that the priest as a servant-leader is called to shepherd the people of God and lead others toward integral conversion. By so doing, the priest becomes not only an instrument of God's mercy, but also a sign of unity and hope. The servant leadership model of priesthood does not occur in a vacuum. Rather, it requires concrete commitment and actions.

Any close examination of the African ecclesial context reveals that “the cultic model [of priesthood] inherited from the early missionaries, which presents the priest as a man of God in uniform with external symbols of sacredness such as the Roman-collar shirt, white cassock and cincture,”<sup>113</sup> has influenced the model of the priest-as-chief. That influence generally manifests itself in the way some understand priesthood, carry themselves, and relate to the people they minister to. It has made some African priests believe that priestly identity is first tied to their clerical dress. Others even use their clerical dress to create not only the difference between them

---

<sup>112</sup> *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 13.

<sup>113</sup> Jordan Nyenyembe, “Displacement and Conflicts: Plea for a Changed Image of an African Priest,” *African Ecclesial Review* 59, no. 3 (2017): 191.

and the laity, but also as a means to reinforce clericalism. In connection with this point, Jordan Nyenyembe argues that

clerical dress portrays a sense of uniformity. It is empowering, and distinguishes the priests to have access to privileged positions in society. In some places priests who appear always in a Roman collar are suspected of aspiring to higher offices. It is taken so because usually the bishops appear in this official dress. The wearing of a Roman collar can potentially depersonalize someone.<sup>114</sup>

What Nyenyembe highlights here is that some African priests, because they enjoy wearing a Roman collar and/or a cassock, have somehow reduced priestly identity to external signs. They think and tend to show that priestly identity is more about how the priest appears than about how he lives his priesthood. This tendency is a real challenge for seminarians because it conveys a distorted image of Catholic priesthood. It makes them believe that clerical dress is what first defines the priest rather than how best he exercises his ministry.

Another important point that requires attention is the relationship between the model of the priest-as-chief and the servant-leader model. In the light of the foregoing, I would say that there is a kind of tension between the two models. The issue is that the model of the priest-as-chief, at least the way it is structured and exercised, does not foster a good and effective pastoral leadership among the African clergy. Rather, it turns several African priests away from developing necessary qualities required to become servant-leaders. Part of the reason for this is “the image of a leader as given to us by African politicians.”<sup>115</sup> Those politicians convey a false leadership image, which mainly revolves around power, paternalism, and self-promotion. Because of such influence, the model of the priest-as-chief has become more and more oriented to power, function, and security.

---

<sup>114</sup> Jordan Nyenyembe, *African Catholic Priests: Confronting an Identity Problem*, 74.

<sup>115</sup> Jordan Nyenyembe, *African Catholic Priests: Confronting an Identity Problem*, 139.

As a result, the model of the priest-as-chief has made some priests believe that the mission of the priest is limited to the administration of sacraments. For instance, it is not surprising to see that

the priest in this model is not concerned with the responsibilities of his ministry, but is happy to be called a priest. The individual in this model is only available on Sunday and is never available at any other time and even on Sunday he never prepares well to feed his flock from the table of the Word of God [...]. This kind of priest spends most of his time in business oriented activities in search of material security for himself. The Christians entrusted to him in a given parish, school, hospital, etc. are not his concern.<sup>116</sup>

The model and lifestyle in which those priests operate affects not only the priestly identity, but also the quality of the pastoral ministry both within and outside the African ecclesial milieu. It conveys a distorted image of priesthood and makes seminarians and other people believe that priestly ministry is simply a secular function rather than a call of God, who calls all people to become ambassadors of love and healing in the world.

The solution is not to impose on African diocesan priests a lifestyle of one of the male religious congregations, but rather to help them develop a greater awareness and understanding of their vocation and mission as Christians and shepherds as well. This is necessary not only for the priest's integrity, but also for his personal and integral growth. On this point, John B. Kariuki wa Karega argues that

A priest requires knowledge of what the Church says about his vocation of priesthood and above all his opinion about himself whether his lifestyle and services are questionable or not. The issue is whether there is a conflict between this opinion and that of the Church, through constant formation and information which remains important in this life [...]. A priest must think and reflect upon his lived experience as a human being, a Christian and as one who represents Christ in the community of believers.<sup>117</sup>

---

<sup>116</sup> John B. Kariuki wa Karega, "Priestly Formation: Challenges, Problems and Prospects," *African Ecclesial Review* 48, no. 4 (2006): 251.

<sup>117</sup> John B. Kariuki wa Karega, "Priestly Formation: Challenges, Problems and Prospects," 248.

What Kariuki wa Karega highlights here is that the faith of the priest is meant to enlighten, shape, and transform his life and ministry as well. Both can be well integrated only if they are mutually supportive. “Failure to incorporate this integration into his life, interferes with his ability to minister as Christ did, to the community of believers and even to himself,”<sup>118</sup> thus giving rise to the priestly identity crisis we discussed in the previous chapter. This integration can best be done only if the life of the priest is centered on the mysteries of Christ.

One way to achieve this is through daily prayer and sacramental life, but also through personal commitment to other spiritual exercises. This is necessary because “in the fulfillment of their ministry with the fidelity of the daily colloquy with Christ, a visit to and veneration of the Most Holy Eucharist, spiritual retreats and spiritual direction are of great worth.”<sup>119</sup> Another way by which African priests can commit themselves to live a life that reflects priestly integrity and brings hope to the community is to help them learn and practice examination of conscience, which

helps keep the person open to the action of the Spirit. It facilitates the process of liberation, which must continue through life, from the things that obstruct this action. In general, it helps us to work the graces of the Exercises into the events and relationships and personal growth situations of daily life.<sup>120</sup>

Actually, the daily practice of examination of conscience can help them identity factors that generally influence their ministry, and may take them away from their primary mission. It is a critical resource and tool of discernment for spiritual growth and priestly ministry. It also helps priests appreciate the nature and impact of their interpersonal relations through God’s eyes.

---

<sup>118</sup> John B. Kariuki wa Karega, “Priestly Formation: Challenges, Problems and Prospects,” 248-249.

<sup>119</sup> *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 18.

<sup>120</sup> Michael Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises* (Trowbridge, UK: Cromwell Press, 1998), 33.



Finally, African priests will best witness to Christ by serving the people of God with humility and love, for priestly vocation is a call to serve rather than to be served. This is possible only if they constantly face the tension between the model of priesthood intended by Christ and the model of the priest-as-chief. This is a lifelong process and it requires the courage to undertake self-criticism, and the willingness to change not only their vision of priesthood, but also their lifestyles, especially by living a life that is worthy of disciples of Christ. In order to achieve this goal, African priests should place charity at the center of their life and ministry, for “charity is a synthesis which unifies the values and virtues contained in the Gospel and likewise a power which sustains their development toward Christian perfection.”<sup>121</sup>

### **III. The Priestly Office of Christ and the Dynamics of Power**

To better understand how the African Church can theologially rethink the model of the priest-as-chief, we need to look at the priestly office of Christ, mainly for two reasons: first, it clarifies the mission and role of the priest in relation to Christ; and second, it helps us understand more deeply how best priests can assume and exercise their pastoral leadership within the community. This reflection is a particularly significant issue considering how some African priests, because of their position of authority, hold all the power in pastoral ministry and tend “to take advantage of the vulnerability of those seeking pastoral service.”<sup>122</sup> My intention in addressing this issue is to show that, rather than being a means for individual performance and personal achievement, “the office of priests, since it is connected with the episcopal order, also, in its own degree, shares the authority by which Christ builds, sanctifies and rules his Body.”<sup>123</sup>

---

<sup>121</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, no. 27.

<sup>122</sup> Richard Gula, *Just Ministry: Professional Ethics for Pastoral Ministers* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2010), 119.

<sup>123</sup> *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 2.

Before we go any further, it is important to remember that we cannot understand the priestly office of Christ in isolation, but rather in relation to the threefold office.

The priestly office is part and parcel of the threefold office of Christ as priest, king, and prophet. According to Ian A. McFarland,

The concept of the threefold office (*munus triplex* in Latin) is a dimension of Christology to the effect that Jesus of Nazareth, as Messiah or Christ (literally, ‘anointed one’), unites and sums up in himself the three roles (or ‘offices’) for which one was anointed in Jewish tradition, namely, those of prophet (cf. 1 Kgs 19:16b), priest (cf. Ex 30:30), and king (cf. 2 Sam 5:3). Generally, Jesus’ anointing to these offices is identified with the descent of the Holy Spirit on him at his baptism (Matt. 3:13-30).<sup>124</sup>

As we can see here, the threefold office of Christ is a key concept that captures the major Christological images of Jesus and offers a comprehensive vision of his life, identity, and mission. This concept was first articulated in the fourth century by Eusebius of Caesarea who wanted to show that Jesus unites in himself the three great offices of the Old Testament. His intention was to illustrate that Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of the Old Testament, especially of the three major offices among the people of Israel.<sup>125</sup> Throughout the centuries, the theme of the threefold office was developed more systematically in Reformed theology. It was only explained more clearly by John Calvin who may have borrowed it from Martin Bucer.

Picking up M. Bucer’s development of the idea, J. Calvin gave a detailed account of the way in which Christ’s saving work incorporates the three offices: he is prophet as the definitive teacher of sacred Doctrine (Inst. 2.15.1; Heb. 1:1-2); he is king as the sole, eternal ruler of the church (Instr. 2.15.3; cf. John 18:36); and he is priest as the one whose death made expiation for human sin, and who continues to intercede with God on our behalf (Instr. 2.15.6; cf. Heb. 9:22).<sup>126</sup>

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, most Reformed theologians employed the threefold office in order to explain the mission of Christ as mediator between God and

---

<sup>124</sup> Ian A. McFarland, “Threefold Office,” *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 508.

<sup>125</sup> Geoffrey Wainwright, *For Our Salvation: Two Approaches to the Work of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 110.

<sup>126</sup> Ian A. McFarland, “Threefold Office,” 508.

humankind. Furthermore, the term “office of Christ” was employed for the first time by Pope Pius XII in 1943 in his encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi*, explaining how in the Eucharist Sacrifice “Christ, at once Priest and Victim, exercises in a special manner the office of Mediator.”<sup>127</sup> Later on, the threefold office was developed and clarified in *Presbyterorum Ordinis* and *Lumen Gentium* as well. In light of the foregoing, it is important to remember that “the threefold office is christocentric but it is not christomonist.”<sup>128</sup> Although they are distinct from one another, the three offices are interrelated and mutually supportive. They are centered on Christ’s identity and mission without confusion or ambiguity. Christ assumed and executed all three offices “both in his state of humiliation and exaltation.”<sup>129</sup>

The word “office” generally refers to a function or service. From a Christian perspective, it is a service in and for the Church. In his book entitled *The Meaning of Christian Priesthood*, Gisbert Geshake holds the view that

Office means service in two directions – for Christ and for the benefit of others. Regarded as service for Christ, it is essentially vicarious, as being merely a pointer, a transparent medium through which Christ can be seen [...] with regard to fellow Christians it can be exercised only through a life which is essentially lived for others.<sup>130</sup>

Actually, those who are ordained exercise their priestly office as a way of participating in the life and mission of Christ. That participation is neither magical nor an end in itself. Rather, it is a lifelong process that aims at fulfilling one’s particular vocation. It also requires humility, commitment, and compassion. These qualities are necessary to embody priestly vocation more effectively, because they enable the priest to imitate Christ in both words and deeds.

---

<sup>127</sup> Pope Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis Christi*, no. 90.

<sup>128</sup> Geoffrey Wainwright, *For Our Salvation: Two Approaches to the Work of Christ*, 118.

<sup>129</sup> Geoffrey Wainwright, *For Our Salvation: Two Approaches to the Work of Christ*, 119.

<sup>130</sup> Gisbert Geshake, *The Meaning of Christian Priesthood*, 143.

Another problem with priestly office has to do with the mismanagement and/or misuse of ecclesial goods and funds. This is a challenging issue in many dioceses across the continent, especially where there is very little or no mutual accountability at all. Because of their position of authority, some African priests find it “normal” to use part of the parish finances in order to achieve some personal needs. In most cases, this practice or tendency is influenced by a misunderstanding of priestly office. Rather than being a means for serving the people of God, the priestly function is considered as a means of climbing to a higher rung on the social ladder. This is inappropriate because

those goods which priests and bishops receive for the exercise of their ecclesial office should be used for adequate support and the fulfillment of their office and status, excepting those governed by particular laws. That which is in excess they should be willing to set aside for the good of the Church or for work of charity. Thus they are not to seek ecclesial office or the benefits of it for the increase of their own family wealth.<sup>131</sup>

Part of the reasons why this principle is not effective is because the model of the priest-as-chief produces “powerful priests” rather than servant-leaders. It produces priests who care more about their personal interests at the expense of their primary mission. This issue can be overcome only if priests accept to purify their vision of priesthood, and so rediscover the motives of their calling. “Priests can arrive at this only by following the example of Christ our Lord in their ministry. His food was to follow the will of him who had sent him to accomplish his work.”<sup>132</sup>

Because of their position of authority, several African priests also consider priestly office as a means for gaining more power over the people they minister to. Part of the reason why they hold such a view is because of the pyramidal style of relationships within the Church. In connection with this fact, Richard Gula observes that

---

<sup>131</sup> *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 17.

<sup>132</sup> *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 14.

The familiar hierarchical model stratifies the community in pyramidal fashion with the laity making up the base and having minimal power. Then in ascending order of power and status come the vowed religious, priests, and finally the bishops at the top.<sup>133</sup>

This model of the Church as hierarchy has created and continues to reinforce inequality of power not only between the clergy and the laity, but also among priests. That inequality generally manifests itself in the way some African priests relate to each other, and make friends within the diocese and/or across their country of origin. It is not surprising to notice that some of those who hold important church offices look down on other priests who have less important responsibilities. This could, for instance, include priests who work in the countryside and/or those who exercise their ministry in rural areas. Oftentimes, those priests are subject to elitism and/or an unhealthy clerical competition. It is necessary to overcome this attitude because

priests by virtue of their ordination to the priesthood are united among themselves in an intimate sacramental brotherhood. In individual dioceses, priests form one priesthood under their own bishop. Even though priests are assigned to different duties, nevertheless they carry on one priestly ministry for men. All priests are sent as co-workers in the same apostolate, whether they engage in parochial or extra-parochial ministry.<sup>134</sup>

In other words, there is a critical need for the Church to help African priests rediscover the meaning and importance of brotherhood and friendship in the Lord. One way to achieve this is to remind them that, despite the degree or importance of their clerical functions, they all share the same and unique priesthood of Christ. “Office in the Church can be exercised only as a humbling offer of oneself to service. It does not in any way justify any kind of personally privileged elite, any upper-class consciousness of rank and clerical black.”<sup>135</sup> This means that humility is at the heart of the priestly office, and that there is no better way to live priestly fraternity than to commit oneself to a simple lifestyle, a lifestyle that is shaped by and reflects compassion, mutual understanding, and forgiveness.

---

<sup>133</sup> Richard Gula, *Just Ministry*, 118.

<sup>134</sup> *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 8.

<sup>135</sup> Gisbert Geshake, *The Meaning of Christian Priesthood* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1982), 145.

It is worth reemphasizing that it is the Church's mission and responsibility to provide African priests with a new, dynamic, and prophetic vision of priesthood. This can be achieved only if they accept to change their image of the priest from that of a master to that of the servant-leader. Such change is necessary because "the priesthood [...] does not give entry to a special status, to an elite or super-caste. Instead it leads into unglamorous service [...]. Instead it frees from any 'ideology' the over-sacralised image of the priest which has come down from the past."<sup>136</sup> In other words, the special feature of priestly ordination and office is to imitate Christ in daily life, and so become a model of humility and integrity within the community and among other fellow priests. This is not given at ordination, but is a lifelong process that requires understanding, patience, transparency, and flexibility.

Finally, "the office of pastor is not confined to the care of the faithful as individuals, but also in a true sense is extended to the formation of a genuine Christian community."<sup>137</sup> To understand how best the African priest can exercise priestly office today, it is necessary to discuss some key points about Pope Francis' understanding of priesthood.

#### **IV. Pope Francis and the Catholic Priesthood Today**

Since his election in 2013 as Pope and the bishop of Rome, Pope Francis has made a remarkable contribution to fostering a new and dynamic vision of the priesthood among the clergy. He has encouraged and continues to encourage priests to serve the people of God most faithfully and fruitfully. His vision of priesthood emerges both from his spoken words and the witness of his priestly ministry. As we deepen our reflection of the theology of priesthood in the African context, my task in this section is to see how best Pope Francis' insights on priesthood

---

<sup>136</sup> Gisbert Geshake, *The Meaning of Christian Priesthood*, 145.

<sup>137</sup> *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 6.

can help us rethink the model of the priest-as-chief. In order to achieve this goal, I suggest that we discuss four ideas about Pope Francis' understanding of the foundations of priestly vocation, identity, and ministry: first, the encounter with Christ; second, the simplicity of life; third, the priest as a model of integrity, and fourth, the care and protection of the poor.

I will start with the encounter with Christ because this is one of the foundational pillars of priestly vocation. In his first apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis invites everyone, including priests, to develop and maintain a personal relationship with Jesus. Here is what he wrote:

I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ [...]. I ask all of you to do this unflinching each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her.... The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk; whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realize that he is already there, waiting for us with open arms.<sup>138</sup>

Through this invitation, the Holy Father reminds priests that Christianity is neither a philosophy nor an ideology. Rather, it is a relationship to a person called Jesus. Christianity is based on and rooted in a personal friendship with Christ. This reminder also concerns African priests not only because they share the one and unique priesthood of Christ, but also because of the priestly identity crisis in Africa.

In fact, inviting African priests to constantly renew and deepen their relationship with Christ is necessary to re-evaluate and rethink the model of the priest-as-chief. It is an effective way of reminding them that their intimacy with Christ is a condition prior to how and where they live their priesthood. Their encounter with Christ comes before any other consideration, especially any socio-cultural factor that could influence and shape their priestly identity. This is a critical issue for Pope Francis because he believes that a personal and daily relationship with

---

<sup>138</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 3.

Jesus is what nourishes and strengthens priestly vocation. For him, the encounter with the risen Lord is at the heart of the call to priesthood. It is precisely at this point that he affirms: “Each of us is very dear to God, who loves us, chooses us and calls us to serve [...]. We would do well each day to pray trustingly for this, asking to be healed by Jesus, to grow more like him who ‘no longer calls us servants but friends’ (Jn 15:15)”<sup>139</sup>

In other words, the African Church will best rethink the model of the priest-as-chief by encouraging and helping priests rediscover the source and foundation of their vocation. The reason for this is that

We cannot live without a vital, personal, authentic and solid relationship with Christ [...]. Daily prayer, assiduous reception of the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist and Reconciliation, daily contact with the Word of God and a spirituality which translates into lived charity—these are vital nourishment for each of us. Let it be clear to all of us that apart from Him we can do nothing (cf. Jn 15:8).<sup>140</sup>

What Pope Francis highlights here is that at the heart of any priestly vocation there should be a living relationship with Christ. This is not given at ordination. Rather, it is lifelong process that requires personal commitment, self-dedication, and self-discipline. This commitment has to start from the time a candidate to the priesthood enters into the seminary because the seminary is the place where the future priests can and should learn who Jesus is and how to imitate him. The truth is that it takes time and practice to build a deep and meaningful relationship with Christ. While they focus on the major aspects of priestly formation, formators in African seminaries should pay more attention to the spiritual training of seminarians. Part of their mission is to provide candidates to the priesthood with the necessary spiritual resources that

---

<sup>139</sup> Pope Francis’ Homily at Jubilee for Deacons May 29, 2016. <https://zenit.org/articles/popes-homily-at-jubilee-for-deacons/> (accessed March 8, 2019).

<sup>140</sup> Pope Francis’ Address to the Roman Curia on December 22, 2014. <https://zenit.org/articles/pope-s-address-to-roman-curia/> (accessed March 8, 2019).



will help them fulfill their calling. This is necessary because the strength and spiritual depth of a priest depends on his relationship with Christ.

The second element of Pope Francis' insight into priesthood has to do with simplicity of life. This is a critical issue for him because he believes that the model and lifestyle in which a priest operates should be exemplary and give testimony of their mission as servants. This is the reason why he argues:

In the Church we have, and have always had, our sins and failings [...]. Our people forgive us priests many failings, except for that of attachment to money. This does not have so much to do with money itself, but the fact that money makes us lose the treasure of mercy. Our people can sniff out which sins are truly grave for the priest, the sins that kill his ministry [...]. Being merciful is not only "a way of life," but "the way of life." There is no other way of being a priest.<sup>141</sup>

Despite the fact that diocesan priests do not take the vow of poverty like religious, Pope Francis invites all priests to commit themselves to living a simple lifestyle. He believes that simplicity of life goes hand in hand with a life led by the Spirit, a life that promotes humility, sharing, and solidarity with the poor, the marginalized, and the most vulnerable people. During his years in Buenos Aires, Cardinal Bergoglio's lifestyle was a clear challenge to his fellow priests. He lived in a small apartment rather than an Episcopal palace. He also decided to take public transportations rather than a car with a driver, and he chose to cook for himself rather than having a cook. Most of these elements are mirrored in his new life as Pope.

Actually, Pope Francis' invitation to priests to live a simple lifestyle is a great challenge for several African priests, especially those who consider priesthood as an investment and as a social promotion. The problem is that their lifestyle is incompatible, not only with the expectations Christians have of them, but also with the evangelical counsels that are to enlighten

---

<sup>141</sup> Pope Francis' Third Meditation at Jubilee for Priests on June 2, 2016. <https://zenit.org/articles/popes-3rd-meditation-at-jubilee-for-priests-the-good-odor-of-christ-and-the-light-of-his-mercy/> (accessed March 10, 2019).

their priestly identity and mission. In some parts of Africa, for instance, it is not surprising to see some priests who give in to worldly activities such as personal and/or group business and affairs. By so doing, those priests intend to get some benefits that will allow them to improve and maintain a lifestyle which is a little higher than that of the average African priest. This is a critical issue for many African bishops because the fact of having a different lifestyle has become an important source of conflicts among priests.

The third important aspect about Pope Francis' vision of priesthood refers to the priest as a model of integrity. For him, the authority of the priest does not derive from worldly power and his cultural identity, but rather from his integrity and humility in imitation of Christ. In connection with this point, he argues that

A good priest, therefore, is first of all a man with his own humanity, who knows his own history, with its riches and its wounds, who has learned to make peace with this, achieving the fundamental serenity proper to one of the Lord's disciples [...]. Our humanity is the "earthen vessel" in which we conserve God's treasure, a vessel we must take care of, so as to transmit well its precious contents [...]. He is the "high priest," at the same time close to God and close to man; he is the "servant," who washes the feet and makes himself close to the weakest; he is the "good shepherd," who always cares for his flock.<sup>142</sup>

In other words, integrity is one of the most important components of priestly identity. It is not given at ordination; rather, it is a lifetime commitment which has to be considered as an integral part of the education process. The integrity of the priest concerns both his personal life and his priestly ministry. It is based on human and Christian values, and the priest is to become a model of growth both within and outside the ecclesial community. It is one of the most important principles of pastoral care, for it allows the priest to become a trustworthy person.

---

<sup>142</sup> Pope Francis' Speech to a Conference on the "Priesthood" Documents of Vatican II on November 20, 2015. <https://sedosmission.org/article/pope-francis-dynamic-vision-of-priesthood/> (accessed March 10, 2019).

Pope's Francis's invitation to priests to become models of integrity also applies to African priests and seminarians. The reason for this is that the model of the priest-as-chief generally affects their ability as pastors of souls to become more accountable and transparent in their lives and ministry. Because it is power and security oriented, this model of priesthood can influence some to compromise their integrity for the sake of gifts, rewards, and any form of privilege that could allow them to increase their authority and realize their personal projects. In order to safeguard that integrity, it is necessary that the African priest observe two things: first, to develop a greater awareness of their strengths and limitations and how this may influence their choices, aspirations, and attitudes; second, to avoid any behavior that could reasonably be interpreted as lack of moral and spiritual integrity. This could, for instance, include clericalism, authoritarian leadership, abuse of power, and a lack of accountability. Third, despite their human efforts and personal commitment to live their priestly promises and the evangelical counsels, African priest should constantly rely on God's grace, and ask for his help especially in times of crisis, distress, and any other challenges that might affect their identity and ministry. This is a critical point for the life of the priest because

priests should remember that in performing their office they are never alone, but strengthened by the power of Almighty God, and believing in Christ who called them to share in his Priesthood, they should devote themselves to their ministry with complete trust, knowing that God can cause charity to grow in them.<sup>143</sup>

In others words, priests do not exercise their ministry by themselves but rather with the strength of Jesus and the power of God who called them to follow and imitate his beloved Son. The Pope's invitation to priests to become models of integrity requires not only personal commitment but also humility to recognize that no one can adequately respond to the call to the priesthood by himself.

---

<sup>143</sup> *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 22.

The last point about Pope Francis' understanding of priesthood has to do with the priest's responsibility to care for the poor. This is a critical component for priesthood because Francis believes that the priest's authority should constantly be linked to service, especially to the poorest, weakest, the least important, and most easily forgotten. He argues that

As priests, we identify with people who are excluded, people the Lord saves. We remind ourselves that there are countless masses of people who are poor, uneducated, prisoners, who find themselves in such situations because others oppress them. But, we too remember that each of us knows the extent to which we too are often blind.... Jesus comes to redeem us, to send us out, to transform us from being poor and blind, imprisoned and oppressed, to become ministers of mercy and consolation."<sup>144</sup>

In other words, the call to the priesthood is intimately linked to the service of the poor, for Jesus identifies himself with the poor. For Pope Francis, priests can engage themselves in such ministry only if they become "shepherds living with 'the smell of the sheep.'"<sup>145</sup> Arguing about how the Pope matched words with deeds, John Baumann states that "as a bishop, Bergoglio spent much of his time attending to people in poor neighborhoods in Buenos Aires, deploying priests to work in these barrios."<sup>146</sup>

The example set by Pope Francis can also inspire and should even challenge African priests to commit themselves more to the service of the poor and the most vulnerable people of their ecclesial communities. For him, this is possible only if those priests accept to leave their comfort zone and office, and be with the people, not just those in the pews, but also those at the margins of African society. This could, for instance, include refugees, immigrants, and all those who are involuntary displaced because of civil wars and natural resources extraction. It is only

---

<sup>144</sup> Pope Francis' Chrism Mass Homily in Saint Peter's Basilica on March 24, 2016. <https://zenit.org/articles/pope-francis-homily-at-chrism-mass-2/> (accessed March 11, 2019).

<sup>145</sup> Pope Francis' Address to the world's priests at the Chrism Mass on Holy Thursday March 28, 2013. [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2016/documents/papa-francesco\\_20160324\\_omelia-crisma.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20160324_omelia-crisma.html) (accessed March 12, 2019).

<sup>146</sup> John Baumann, "Confronting the Economy of Exclusion from the Ground Up," *The Lane Center Series* 3, (Fall 2015): 39.

by addressing such issues that the African Catholic priesthood will become more and more authentic, because it connects the Word of God with the daily life of people. Working with and for the poor can become a great opportunity for African priests to know better the people to whom they minister and so accompany in their Christian journey. For priests, paying greater attention to the poor in their ministry is an act of love for God and for humanity, because “the poor are at the center of the Gospel, are at the heart of the Gospel; if we take away the poor from the Gospel we cannot understand the whole message of Jesus Christ.”<sup>147</sup>

It is worth emphasizing that Pope Francis’ understanding of priesthood is necessary for the renewal of the African Catholic priesthood. It reminds us who the priest ought to be, but also what gives meaning and value to his priesthood. His vision of Christian priesthood provides African priests with important resources for self-examination and action in favor of human dignity and integral development of the human person, especially the poor. In the light of the above, the main challenge of Pope Francis to the Church in Africa is to redefine the identity of the African priest, and enable him to live his priestly vocation as a self-dedication to God for the service of his people rather than a personal and family achievement.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout this second chapter, my task was to discuss some key theological foundations of the Catholic priesthood. I have observed that the Roman Catholic priesthood began with Jesus, and it is rooted in Him because he is the unique, true, and eternal priest. Because the African Catholic priesthood does not operate in isolation, the only way for the Church in Africa to rethink the model of the priest-as-chief is to revisit its theological and cultural foundations, and

---

<sup>147</sup> Pope Francis’ Homily to the Clergy in the Manila Cathedral on January 16, 2015. <https://www.rappler.com/specials/pope-francis-ph/81004-full-text-pope-francis-homily-manila-cathedral> (accessed March 15, 2019).

develop a genuine theology of priesthood that not just informs the priest, but also transforms him in his imitation of Jesus. This rethinking project is not and should not be the responsibility of bishops and theologians alone; rather, it should become a concern for both the clergy and the faithful, because the common priesthood of the baptized and the ministerial priesthood of the ordained are interrelated.

Priesthood is neither a part time job nor a cultural/social promotion; rather, it is a lifetime commitment that is based a genuine service of God through the service of his People. There is no other way for the priest to fulfill this mission than to develop a profound friendship and intimacy with Jesus especially through prayer and daily participation in the Eucharist celebration. Despite the influence of cultural titles on their identity, African priests should constantly remember that they are ordained in the Church, not through the principle of inculturation, but by virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders. They are configured only to Christ rather than to any kind of earthly chief. The African Catholic priesthood will be relevant and meaningful as long as the image that African priests portray of the priesthood does not contradict Christ's priesthood, and affect the Church.

## **Chapter III: Pathways toward Renewal of the African Catholic Priesthood**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this third chapter is to discuss ways in which the Church can foster the renewal of the African Catholic priesthood. This project is more important than ever because the future of the priesthood in Africa depends on the Church's ability to find creative ways to address issues related to the model of the priest-as-chief. This model of the priesthood has certainly helped people establish and maintain a genuine relationship with the priest and the Church in the African ecclesial context, but the truth is that it implies a theology of priesthood that generally turns priests away from their vocation and primary mission as well. This issue requires careful consideration; otherwise the model of the priest-as-chief may cause even more problems and confusion about priestly identity than before.

This chapter argues that the Church in Africa does not need ready-made solutions to overcome the limitations posed by the model of the priest-as-chief. Rather, she needs to accompany African priests and help them rediscover the source and meaning of their vocation, and the importance of some cultural and Christian values that constitute the foundation of priestly identity. This is necessary because the formation of priestly identity is a lifelong process which constantly requires the integration of the teaching of the Church, religious principles and cultural values. This chapter has four sections. The first discusses the relationship between Christian discipleship and priesthood. The second looks at the importance of African hospitality and clergy self-care. In the third chapter, I will explore some ways in which the Church can enhance and improve seminary formation in Africa, and then conclude with a reflection on the future of the African Catholic priesthood.

## I. Discipleship and the African Catholic Priesthood

Because of the many limitations posed by the model of the priest-as-chief, the Church has the mission and the responsibility to help African priests and even seminarians develop a greater understanding of what priesthood really means and requires of them. This is necessary because what affects priestly identity and ministry also affects the mission of the Church, for both are interrelated. In my opinion, there is no better way to foster that understanding than to look at priesthood as a call to discipleship, a call to follow Jesus more closely and effectively. To better understand how this applies to the African Catholic priesthood, I will start by discussing some key features of Christian discipleship, and then see how and why they play a pivotal role in the formation and development of priestly identity and ministry as well.

The term “discipleship” generally evokes the relationship between a learner and a master. In that relationship, disciples learn the art of their master’s life and teaching. They also devote themselves to a way of life taught and exemplified by the master. For centuries, discipleship has been used as a way of understanding and speaking about the nature of Christian life. For example,

In the Old Testament, discipleship usually involved the commitment of oneself to a particular sage or prophet [...]. The commitment of the disciples was based on his or her conviction that the prophet had a revelation or word from God [...]. In the New Testament, the concept of discipleship is focused on those who acknowledge Jesus as master and Lord. Originally, the term was primarily the twelve (see Mat. 10:1). Later, it was also applied to the seventy (-two) sent out by Jesus to further his mission (see Lk 10:1) and ultimately it was used to designate all believers (Acts 6:1; 9:10-26).<sup>148</sup>

In other words, Christian discipleship begins with Jesus, who chooses and forms his disciples both by means of teaching discourses and the testimony of his own life. This model of

---

<sup>148</sup> John S. Grabowski, *Sex and Virtue: An Introduction to Sexual Ethics* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 51.



discipleship revolves essentially around the life, identity, and mission of Christ. It is all about following and imitating Jesus. It is based on a personal encounter with Christ, and its main purpose is to learn about the Father and become Christ-like.

According to John S. Grabowski, Christian discipleship is characterized by three major components. “First, a disciple is one who is personally called by Jesus (eg. Mk 1:7-20; Jn 1:38-50) and ultimately by the Father who gives disciples to the Son (cf. Jn 6:39; 10:29; 17:6, 12). Especially as presented by Mark, this call is not based on aptitude or ability.”<sup>149</sup> The call to discipleship is neither a privilege nor a reward; rather, it is a free gift of God and an invitation to share in the life and mission of Christ. This call, which is an invitation to self-dedication, requires of those who are called to commit themselves to a way of life that exemplifies the values of the Kingdom of God.

“Second, a disciple is one who is personally and unconditionally attached to Jesus. A disciple must sever all ties with his or her old life in order to imitate him in his conduct, and listen to and accept his words (cf. Mk 8:34ff., 10:21; Jn 12:26).”<sup>150</sup> Becoming a true disciple of Christ is to live in a state of ongoing conversion. This conversion is a lifelong process which requires a personal commitment to change of behavior and attitude. Living a life of discipleship is a daily process which involves dying to oneself in order to live in and with Christ. This requires not only personal efforts but also divine grace because one needs God’s help to accomplish his mission.

“Third, disciples are those who share Jesus’ suffering (see Mk 8:34 and par.) in order to share his glory (cf. Mt 19:28ff.; Lk 22:28ff.; Jn 14:3). Even in the absence of persecution there is

---

<sup>149</sup> John S. Grabowski, *Sex and Virtue*, 51.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

always a cost to be paid for genuine discipleship.”<sup>151</sup> After being called by God to follow and imitate Christ, the disciple should not just speak about discipleship, but also embody the cost of discipleship in a significant way. This could, for instance, include suffering, persecution, and even martyrdom. This means that dying as a martyr is the radical form of discipleship because it requires total obedience, self-sacrificial love, and self-disposal of oneself to God.

In fact, the call to Christian discipleship is based on and emerges from the flourishing of the baptismal vocation. “It is this baptismal reality that lays the foundation for a life of discipleship lived in faith, hope, and love over the course of a Christian’s life.”<sup>152</sup> Though those baptized people are called to a life of discipleship, one has to know that that call comes with special urgency to the priest, especially because “priesthood is, in addition to other qualities, a genuine form of discipleship in Christ. The priest has been called personally by the Lord to follow him, to become his disciple and apostle (Mk 1:16-16; 1:19-20; 2:13-14).”<sup>153</sup> When applied to the African Catholic priesthood, discipleship can be used as a valuable resource for dealing with the priestly identity crisis caused by the model of the priest-as-chief. It can help African priests rediscover their identity first as Christians and as disciples called by God to imitate Christ and serve the people of God.

It is important to remember that “discipleship precedes ministry which precedes priesthood.”<sup>154</sup> The call of discipleship is the foundation of priesthood and ministry. There is no vocation which is separated from the call of discipleship. Every Christian vocation is profoundly and essentially an invitation to follow and imitate Christ who is the source and model of

---

<sup>151</sup>John S. Grabowski, *Sex and Virtue*, 51.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 66-67.

<sup>153</sup> Bishop Demetrios Trakatellis, “Ακολουθεῖτε με/Follow me’ (Mk 2:14) Discipleship and Priesthood,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 30, no. 3 (1985): 283-284.

<sup>154</sup>Enda McDonagh, “The Risk of Priesthood,” *The Furrow*, Vol. 51, no. 11 (Nov. 2000): 594-595.

discipleship *par excellence*. In order to make their ministry relevant to people, African priests should exercise their pastoral leadership with humility, respect, and love because “discipleship is a life of generosity and service, where the true disciple delights in justice, gives generously and cares for the weak.”<sup>155</sup> There is no better way for priests to embody both discipleship and leadership than to serve people and pay attention to their needs and concerns.

In other words, “the call to discipleship depends absolutely on Jesus and originates in him, but necessitates in turn a series of radical decisions on the part of the would-be disciple.”<sup>156</sup> This means that the willingness to follow and imitate Christ is not self-sufficient; it does not depend on the priest alone. Rather, it is deeply inspired by God, but requires the response of the one who is called. “The people called to become the disciples *par excellence*, have as their assignment to be with Jesus, to be with him wherever he goes and stays.”<sup>157</sup> Like the first disciples, priests also need to be with Jesus, to develop a greater intimacy with him so that they can know him personally. That relationship is the foundation of priestly identity, for “taking on discipleship involves the fortunes and the life of the master [...]. It means first of all taking part in the poverty of his life.”<sup>158</sup> I would say this is a good challenge for some African priests who accept to follow Jesus but seem to reject his poverty. This can be an invitation for them to rediscover the meaning of their priestly promises, especially that of poverty, and see how it affects their lives. The truth is that “everything that a man has around him can be in league

---

<sup>155</sup> Nelus Niemandt, “Rediscovering Joy in Costly and Radical Discipleship in Mission,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* Vol. 72, no. 4 (2016), [http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S0259-94222016000400096](http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0259-94222016000400096) (accessed March 20, 2019).

<sup>156</sup> Bishop Demetrios Trakatellis, “Ἀκολουθεῖτε μου/Follow me’ (Mk 2:14) Discipleship and Priesthood,” 273.

<sup>157</sup> Bishop Demetrios Trakatellis, “Ἀκολουθεῖτε μου/Follow me’ (Mk 2:14) Discipleship and Priesthood,” 275.

<sup>158</sup> Karl Hermann Schelkle, *Discipleship and Priesthood* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1965), 20.

against the Following of Jesus, not merely the petty and bad, but also the great and good; not merely what is outside a man, but also what is within.”<sup>159</sup>

It would also be important to remind African priests that they are called not for self-enjoyment but rather for a mission. “The call by Jesus to an advanced stage and form of discipleship is at the same time an appointment, a fundamental assignment, a mission.”<sup>160</sup> The Church in Africa should constantly emphasize this point, throughout priestly formation and even after, because the model of the priest-as-chief has made and continues to make some priests believe that mission is more for religious priests than diocesan priests. They often think of mission as the fact of working outside his or her country of origin. Though he exercises his ministry within the diocese to which he belongs, the African diocesan priest is called to understand himself as missionary by virtue of his Christian vocation. “His ministry is thus never autonomous and independent, but shared and a part of the ministry of Christ.”<sup>161</sup> For this reason, priestly ministry is never a personal initiative and/or a family project, but always a mission that is received from God.

Furthermore, “the call of discipleship is not a call to a static position of honor, power and glory, but a call to a dynamic work of *diakonia*, of care for other people.”<sup>162</sup> It is an invitation to move from being a spectator to an actor, from indifference and creativity through simple but meaningful words and gestures as well. This vision of discipleship is a good challenge to African priests who consider priesthood as a means to gain power over the laity, including women and the poor. It reminds them that the purpose of priestly vocation is all about service of God through

---

<sup>159</sup> Karl Hermann Schelkle, *Discipleship and Priesthood*, 20-21.

<sup>160</sup> Bishop Demetrios Trakatellis, “Ἀκολουθεῖτε μου/Follow me’ (Mk 2:14) Discipleship and Priesthood,” 274.

<sup>161</sup> Karl Hermann Schelkle, *Discipleship and Priesthood*, 114.

<sup>162</sup> Bishop Demetrios Trakatellis, “Ἀκολουθεῖτε μου/Follow me’ (Mk 2:14) Discipleship and Priesthood,” 277.

the service of his people. This means that leadership positions in Church are not for personal glory, but are a means to care for others, for the ecclesial community which forms the Body of Christ. The truth is that African priests are called to exercise that servant-leadership with courage and commitment, because

the risk of discipleship is never far away. To be ordained is not a summons to grandeur, but an invitation to live with the tension between the precious and the impure. Besides proclaiming the word and celebrating mysteries the ordained are called to be leaders as well. This community which is holy, is also in need of renewal, because its common life is precious and something which we cherish, is sometimes common in that other sense, cheap and nasty, sinful and in need of redemption. Its leaders cannot hold themselves aloof. They must be ‘immersed in the impure.’<sup>163</sup>

In other words, the call to discipleship is not without challenges because it can force the priest to embrace the cross by injustice, conflicts, and divisions. This could also include action against tribalism, ethnic exclusion, and autocratic regimes. This means that “the Christian life could not be an easygoing one; discipleship could not be combined with self-indulgence. Christian discipleship involves conflict with principalities and powers.”<sup>164</sup> It is an action for social justice, and an invitation to stand for and with the most exploited groups in society.

Last but not least, “discipleship as service constitutes the highest human state of existence, a state in which anthropology and Christology merge into an inseparable unity.”<sup>165</sup> It enables all the baptized as well as the priest to center their lives on Christ as they learn how to become better human beings. Most importantly, discipleship offers African priests a unique opportunity to embody their priestly promises and the evangelical counsels as well. It is a way of living and thinking which excludes selfishness and self-indulgence, for it is rooted in a set on values that is predicated on serving people in a simple but effective way. This could, for

---

<sup>163</sup> Roderick Strange, *The Risk of Discipleship: The Catholic Priest Today* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2004), 133.

<sup>164</sup> Andrew F. Walls “The Cost of Discipleship: The Witness of the African Church,” *Word & World*, Vol. 25, no. 4 (Fall 2005): 438.

<sup>165</sup> Bishop Demetrios Trakatellis, “Ἀκολουθεῖτε μου/Follow me’ (Mk 2:14) Discipleship and Priesthood,” 278.

instance, include compassion love, hospitality, and generosity. By accepting this invitation and responding to it more effectively, the African priest will discover and learn that “the criterion for discipleship is to be able to make room in one’s heart for everyone, and especially to be ready to stand on the side of those who are the weakest and lowliest in society.”<sup>166</sup>

## **II. Priestly ministry and the Uniqueness of African Hospitality**

Besides the call to discipleship, it is important to remember that priestly ministry in an African context will be relevant and meaningful only if African priests embody values that shape and influence people’s lives, but also develop genuine patterns of behaviors that are necessary to stay healthy and in good shape as they minister in and even outside their faith communities. Finding a balance between those two poles is necessary not only for the individual but also for the community of faith. To better understand how this can promote a genuine theology of priesthood in Africa, my task will be to discuss two points: first, the importance of African hospitality in priestly ministry, and second, the role of clergy self-care in the African ecclesial context.

### **II.1. Burdens imposed on Priests by African traditions of Hospitality**

The word “hospitality” comes from the Greek word *philoxenia*, which means one who loves strangers. African hospitality can be defined as “an unconditional readiness to share”<sup>167</sup> with the strangers. It is an extension of generosity, which is driven by the willingness to give freely without strings attached. This kind of hospitality is one of the most important foundational values of African culture. “African hospitality is grounded on the fact that no one is an island of

---

<sup>166</sup> Richard Gula, *Just Ministry: Professional Ethics for Pastoral Ministers* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2010), 9.

<sup>167</sup> A. Echema, *Corporate personality in Igbo Society and the Sacramental Reconciliation* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lan, 1995), 35.

himself or herself; rather, each and everyone is part of the whole community.”<sup>168</sup> This aspect of African culture is well spread and expressed in popular songs and stories, but also in the customs and traditions that regulate people’s lives. African hospitality defines and expresses the African sense of communality. This means that, instead of, “I think, therefore, I am” (*cogito ergo sum*) of the French Philosopher René Descartes, the African asserts “I am because we are,” or “I am related, therefore, I am” (*cognatus ergo sum*).<sup>169</sup>

In fact, African hospitality is primarily a way of life because it shapes people’s worldview. It can be understood as “the willingness to give, to help, to assist, to love and to carry one another’s burden without necessary profit or reward as the driving force.”<sup>170</sup> Because African hospitality permeates most aspects of people’s lives, namely religious, social and economic life, my goal in this section will be to discuss how this value can shape and inform the identity of the African priest. The truth is that the priest’s presence and ministry among the people will be meaningless unless it is based on hospitality. The reason behind this is that the model of the priest-as-chief generally limits and even prevents the priest from being really hospitable because some African people think that as chief the priest is there to be served rather than to serve. There are several reasons why African priests need to embody hospitality, but I limit myself to three.

First, it is necessary for the priest to practice hospitality because “in Africa, an ideal person is primarily hospitable. This hospitality is ideally extended to all people: friends, foes

---

<sup>168</sup> Julius Mutugi Gathogo, “Some Expression of African Hospitality Today,” *Scriptura* 99 (2008): 276.

<sup>169</sup> Julius Mutugi Gathogo, *The Truth About African Hospitality: Is There Hope for Africa?* (Mombasa, Kenya: The Salt, 2001), 21.

<sup>170</sup> Julius Mutugi Gathogo, “African Hospitality: Is it Compatible with the Ideal of Christ’s Hospitality? Part 2.,” *Churchman* 120 (2006): 147.

or/and strangers. It is also extended to all departments of life.”<sup>171</sup> This also applies to the African Catholic priesthood because the African priest does not live in isolation, but rather in a social and cultural context that influences his worldview. This means that for the African priest, being hospitable is not simply a matter of personal choice; rather, it is a way of life that should shape and define his being as an individual and a pastor. In this sense, the priest is expected to be a hospitable shepherd, a person who is able, ready, and happy to welcome different people, especially unexpected visitors and those who are vulnerable and seek for a better place for support and care. His office should be a place where people feel welcome, safe, and find comfort. This is fundamental to priestly ministry because the priest who is inhospitable might be rejected by people.

Because hospitality goes together with availability, the African priest should also be available to the people to whom he ministers. This is very important because in most African countries Christian believers think that priests should always be available in their parishes in order to meet people’s expectations and demands. This could, for instance, include confessions, request for a funeral mass, blessing of houses, prayers for the sick and dying in hospitals, and even financial assistance, especially from those in need. In fact, priests are expected to be available whenever needed, especially for the sake of their faith communities and other people who might need their help and assistance. That assistance, which is an aspect of African hospitality, expresses itself in a way in social life.

In the social domain, African hospitality has a lot to do with material support on auspicious occasions such as betrothals, marriages, initiations, fundraising for medical bills, mourning for the dead, burials, education of children and social gatherings. In such situations, villagers pour in without waiting invitation cards and any formal invitation. This is to do with the African

---

<sup>171</sup> Julius Mutugi Gathogo, “African Philosophy as Expressed in the Concepts of Hospitality and Ubuntu,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* Vol. 130 (March 2008): 40.



communality where one person's happiness is happiness for all and one person's sorrow is sorrow for all.<sup>172</sup>

Most African people learn this as part of their cultural heritage, and are expected to behave accordingly.

Second, "African hospitality is a powerful tool for gluing the community [which can also refer to the whole world as a global village] together as well as the community with ancestors and God."<sup>173</sup> This is essential not only for communities of non-believers, but also for Christian communities because the way people understand religious beliefs and practice their faith is highly influenced by African hospitality. This is because their daily life and religious practices are interrelated and mutually supportive. In such a context, the priest's role and responsibility is to use African hospitality as a means for strengthening the bonds of unity and friendship among people. As a good shepherd, part of his mission is to encourage parishioners and other people to practice more hospitality, counting on each other both in joyful and sorrowful moments. Surprisingly, this would work well if the priest shows signs of someone who is hospitable, because people will definitely look at him as a role model and so expect him to live what he preaches. Oftentimes, this is a challenging task for some African priests who see priesthood as a source of security. "This kind of priest chases after his present and future comfort and prosperity and has no time for the flock entrusted to him."<sup>174</sup> Because they are not available for people, those priests find it difficult to become hospitable. They attach greater importance to their social and financial security than to their ministry.

---

<sup>172</sup> Julius Mutugi Gathogo, "Some Expression of African Hospitality Today," *Scriptura* 99 (2008): 283.

<sup>173</sup> Moyahabo Phillip Moila, *Challenging Issues in African Christianity* (Pretoria, South African: CB Powel Biblical Center, 2002), 1.

<sup>174</sup> John B. Kariuki wa Karega, "Priestly Formation: Challenges, Problems and Prospects," *African Ecclesial Review* 48, no. 4 (2006): 251.

It is also important to remember that interdependence, which is one of the foundational principles of African hospitality, is necessary for building and strengthening a community of faith. There is no way to build a prayerful, flourishing, and successful Christian community as long as people do not get closer and bond together as one Body of Christ. Arguing for the value of interdependence, the retired Archbishop Desmond Tutu claims that

In our African language we say, ‘a person is a person through other persons.’ I would not know how to be a human being at all except (that) I learned this from other human beings. We are made for a delicate network of relationship, of interdependence. We are meant to complete each other. All kinds of things go horribly wrong when we break that fundamental Law of our being. Not even the most powerful nation can be completely self-sufficient.<sup>175</sup>

What Archbishop Desmond Tutu highlights here is that most African people recognize that each person’s contribution to the life of the community is vital for the survival of the entire community. This means that no one can live in isolation. This is a great challenge to the African Catholic priesthood because some priests think that they are self-sufficient enough to run a parish alone. For instance, they tend to take critical decisions about the life and/or the future of the parish without any consultation and sometimes even against the recommendation of the members of the parish council. Part of the reason is the influence of the model of the priest-as-chief, which makes them believe that the priest is like the boss, and that people should obey and comply with any decision taken by priests.

Third, it is essential for the African priest to place his ministry under the auspices of hospitality because I have noticed that African hospitality and biblical hospitality are interrelated and somehow mutually supportive. Part of the reason is that Jesus himself attached great importance to hospitality in his life, teaching, and ministry. This is true because “Christ put

---

<sup>175</sup> Naomi Tutu, *The Words of Desmond Tutu* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989), 71.

hospitality at the very center of his message and mission,”<sup>176</sup> and recommended that his disciples do the same as they fulfill their mission. In Jesus’ life, hospitality is not just one cultural value among others; rather, it is a way of being and living with others, but also a means through which he intends to communicate the Good News. This means that Jesus uses hospitality as a means for evangelization, conversion, and reconciliation. “In making hospitality central to his teachings, Christ makes it universal: not a practice that circulates among the Jewish people alone, as in the Old Testament, but a form of welcome that must be made to cross all borders, ethnic, religious, social, and economic.”<sup>177</sup>

There are several passages in the gospels where one could see how Jesus calls people to practice hospitality, but I will briefly mention only three. The first example is in Matthew 25:34-40. While talking about the Last Judgment, Jesus exhorts people to show their hospitality to everyone, especially the most vulnerable in our society such as the hungry, the prisoners, the sick, but also the strangers because of their vulnerability to attack and all sorts of dangers. The second example, which is from the Luke 14:12-14, is about Jesus encouraging people to invite and welcome at lunch or dinner those who are not their friends, brothers, or other rich people; rather, they should invite “the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind [...]. They have no means to repay you and so you will be repaid when the upright rise again.”<sup>178</sup> Far from encouraging discrimination, Jesus’ intention here is to show that hospitality is unconditional and extended to all people. The last example is related to the Last Supper in Luke 22:7-38. In this gospel passage, Jesus does not just talk only about hospitality; rather, he matches his words with his deeds by hosting his disciples. “In commemorating the Last Supper, the liturgy of the Eucharist recalls an

---

<sup>176</sup> James A. W. Heffernan, *Hospitality and Treachery in Western Literature* (London: Yale University Press, 2014), 78.

<sup>177</sup> James A. W. Heffernan, *Hospitality and Treachery in Western Literature*, 64.

<sup>178</sup> Luke 14:13-14.

evening of hospitality at which Christ was the host, dispensing bread and wine to his disciples.”<sup>179</sup>

What Jesus reminds us through the above gospel passages is that hospitality is both a call and challenge to all Christians. It is a call to show love in a concrete way to everyone without distinction of any kind, including distinction between men and women. Hospitality is also a challenge because it forces us to get out of our comfort zones and open up ourselves in order to serve others. In this regard, hospitality comes with special urgency to the African Catholic priesthood because

priests should extend hospitality, cultivate kindness and share their goods in common. They should be particularly solicitous for the sick, the afflicted, those overburdened with work, the lonely, those exiled from their homeland, and those who suffer persecution.<sup>180</sup>

Like Christ, African priests are called to place hospitality at the center of their ministry because part of their mission is to be ready and joyful to welcome everyone without any distinction. This is a great challenge to some African priests especially those who, because of some ethnic conflicts among chiefdoms, limit their hospitality to a certain group of people. One way to help those priests address and face that inhospitality is to encourage them to rediscover the depth of Christ’s vision of hospitality because it is “a hospitality that razes all barriers between insiders and outsiders, Jew and Gentile, hosts and guests, rich and poor.”<sup>181</sup>

In other words, African priests will become more and more hospitable shepherds by imitating Jesus because “Christ’s vision of hospitality calls for the greatest possible generosity to all.”<sup>182</sup> One way to achieve this is through a prayer life and daily meditation of the mysteries of

---

<sup>179</sup> James A. W. Heffernan, *Hospitality and Treachery in Western Literature*, 78.

<sup>180</sup> *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 8.

<sup>181</sup> James A. W. Heffernan, *Hospitality and Treachery in Western Literature*, 70.

<sup>182</sup> James A. W. Heffernan, *Hospitality and Treachery in Western Literature*, 70.

Christ's life. The truth is that African priests can become really hospitable, at least from an African perspective, only if they accept that they depend on other people both in their personal life and ministry, and that everyone's contribution is necessary to build a better Christian community. This African vision of interdependence goes in the same direction as Pauline theology on the need to recognize other's gifts and talents in order to edify the Church which is the Body of Christ.<sup>183</sup>

This could be considered as a good reminder to several African priests who, because of the model of the priest-as-chief, do not recognize and acknowledge the talents, competences, and contributions of their parishioners and other collaborators such as the elected members of the Parish Council. That African vision of interdependence is none other than an invitation to develop a more collaborative approach in ministry, knowing that part of the mission of the priest is to foster communion among people, and encourage them to use their talents for the greater glory of God. That interdependence is based on hospitality, and allows the priest to learn how to rely on God. Christ also does the same with his disciples, especially when he sends them to bring the Good News of the Kingdom of God to the poor and downtrodden. "To maximize their dependence on hospitality, he bade them to take with them nothing at all – no money, bag, or extra clothes – and to stay with 'some suitable person' in each town or village they visited, blessing each house that receives them."<sup>184</sup> However, African priests should not consider that hospitality as a source of material and financial security, but rather as a means to achieve their ministry.

---

<sup>183</sup> See Eph. 4:10-12; 1 Cor. 12.

<sup>184</sup> James A. W. Heffernan, *Hospitality and Treachery in Western Literature*, 51.

## II.2. The Role and Importance of Priestly Self-care

The term “self-care” generally evokes a pattern of behaviors and/or practices that people can learn, develop, and maintain in order to take care of their physical, mental, emotional, and even spiritual health. Good self-care is key to reduce stress and anxiety. It is necessary to stay healthy and in good shape. Clergy self-care can be defined as a “commitment to your optimal health and well-being for your own sake, for those who love and care about you, and in the service of God’s kingdom.”<sup>185</sup> It usually refers to activities and/or rituals that strengthen, nourish, or develop who we are both as individuals or as a group. It is all about psychological, emotional, and physical health.

In fact, clergy self-care is neither a selfish act nor self-indulgence; rather it is about knowing what we need to do in order to live a balanced and meaningful priestly life. It is precisely for this reason that Barnett, Johnson, and Hillard state, “self-care is not an indulgence. It is an essential component of prevention of distress, burnout, and impairment. It should not be considered as something ‘extra’ or ‘nice to do if you have time’ but as an essential part of our professional identities.”<sup>186</sup> The purpose of self-care is not only to prevent and/or avoid stress, anxiety, and burnout, but also to find a balance between personal life and ministry, and find suitable ways to develop and maintain a good and healthy relationship with oneself, the world around us, and of course, others.

A close analysis of the African Catholic priesthood reveals that the model of the priest-as-chief does not really help African priests develop and maintain patterns of behaviors that are

---

<sup>185</sup> Jaco Hamman, “Self-Care and Community,” in *Welcome to the Theological Field Education!*, Matthew Floding, ed. (Herdon, VA: Alban Institute, 2011), 102.

<sup>186</sup> J. E. Barnett, L. C. Johnson, & D. Hillard, “Psychotherapist Wellness as an Ethical Imperative,” in *Innovations in Clinical Practice: Focus on Health and Wellness*, L. VandeCreek & J. B. Allen, eds. (Sarasota, FL: Professional Resources Press, 2006), 263.

conducive to foster a good and genuine self-care. The problem is that some usually confuse self-care with self-centeredness or self-indulgence. In fact, they attach greater importance to personal comfort and individual needs than to their primary mission, which is to serve the people of God. One reason for this confusion is because they understand the priesthood as a destination, an investment, and as a social promotion. Because of this image of priesthood, others find their fulfillment more in all kinds of benefits, privileges, and honors they get from friends and benefactors than in serving the people of God.

This is a challenging issue for the African Catholic priesthood because “a priest with a confused sense of self is a danger not only to himself but more so to people in his life and leadership.”<sup>187</sup> Part of the reason is that such a priest will build his priestly identity and sense of self-care on narcissism, which refers to a very fragile and unstable sense of self. “It denotes a personality disturbance characterized by an exaggerated investment in one’s image at the expense of the self.”<sup>188</sup> Another danger is that the priest, because of narcissism, could develop unhealthy relationships with the people to whom he ministers. Before we explore better ways to address this issue, let us discuss briefly how a misconception of self-care among African priests can become a stumbling block to fostering a genuine theology of priesthood in Africa.

It is first important to remember that the model of the priest-as-chief has brought more confusion than clarity in most African countries, especially in how African priests should live their priestly vocation and exercise their ministerial priesthood. That confusion is generally about how they perceive themselves and how this affects their identity, ministry, and other aspects of their lives. Because of their authority, some think that one of the best ways to care about

---

<sup>187</sup> Paul Uche Nwobi, *Poor Formation as a Principal Factor to the Crisis in Priesthood Today* (Bloomington, IN: Author House, 2012), 82.

<sup>188</sup> Alexander Lowen, *Narcissism: Denial of the True Self* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985), ix.

themselves, at least mentally, is to develop and maintain “a grandiose sense of self, with an inflated sense of self-importance and an elevated need for attention, status, and recognition.”<sup>189</sup> This also includes “syndrome title” and “personality cult” because they use it in order to increase their self-esteem and sense of confidence. The problem with those priests is that “they become so absorbed with themselves [their identity, happiness, and authority] that they fail to see life as a gift, relationships as Grace, and meaningful work as a privilege.”<sup>190</sup> They also fail to understand that their priestly identity is grounded in Christ rather than in their authority. In this sense, self-care becomes destructive because it displays an excessive need for attention, and makes African priests believe that others should accommodate to their personal needs and desires.

The second important point is about priestly self-indulgence. The problem is that the model of the priest-as-chief has influenced and continues to influence several African priests to seek after self-indulgence. Those priests serve God for self-benefit rather than for God’s glory. That tendency generally manifests itself in different ways, especially when the clerics become too concerned with maintaining power at all costs, but also with their own material and financial security. This is a critical issue for the African Catholic priesthood because “if ministers are not careful, their attempts at caring for themselves will lead them down a path of self-centeredness or self-indulgence that could result in damage to their relationships and/or their ministries.”<sup>191</sup> The damage can be moral, emotional, psychological, and even physical in some cases. This means that “self-care can become destructive self-indulgence”<sup>192</sup> especially when it forces priests to seek for comfort at any cost, and display a pervasive sense of grandiosity. It is necessary for African priests to avoid such situations, because “when we accept the call to be an agent of

---

<sup>189</sup> Lisa J. Cohen, *The Handy Psychology Answer Book* (Canton, MI: Visible Ink Press, 2011), 333.

<sup>190</sup> Lisa J. Cohen, *The Handy Psychology Answer Book*, 5.

<sup>191</sup> Leanna K. Fuller, “In Defense of Self-Care,” *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 28, no. 1 (2018): 8.

<sup>192</sup> Roy M. Oswald, *Finding a Balance for Effective Ministry*, 5.



Grace, we simultaneously promise to forgo the easy life of self-indulgence, which can be a stumbling block to God's agents."<sup>193</sup> This issue is generally a source of tension for many clerics, for it affects not only the African priest as an individual, but also the universal Church because all the priests throughout the world share the one and only priesthood of Christ who is the head of the Church. "There is no easy solution to such tension for only Christ perfectly united role and person in his life and ministry. But the tension can be lessened by more adequate structures and more reasonable expectations."<sup>194</sup>

The solution is not to encourage African priests to undermine their efforts and responsibility in taking care of their various needs; but rather to help them differentiate between a healthy self-care and a destructive self-indulgence. It is necessary to do that because

priests, too, involved and constrained by so many obligations of their office, certainly have reason to wonder how they can coordinate and balance their interior life with feverish outward activity. Neither the mere external performance of the works of the ministry, nor the exclusive engagement in pious devotion, although very helpful, can bring about this necessary coordination.<sup>195</sup>

The best way to learn about that coordination is to start with seminarians, showing them the danger of narcissism, compromise, and unrestrained gratification, and how these may affect their overall health and wellness, on the one hand, and their ministerial priesthood, on the other hand. Sometimes that process can be challenging and even confusing, but seminarians and "priests can arrive at this only by following the example of Christ our Lord in their ministry. His food was to follow the will of him who has sent him to accomplish his work."<sup>196</sup> This is because Christ is the model of priesthood *par excellence*. In connection with this point, Roy M. Oswald argues that

---

<sup>193</sup> Roy M. Oswald, *Finding a Balance for Effective Ministry*, 5-6.

<sup>194</sup> Thomas Corbett, "The Image of the Priest," *The Furrow* 30, no. 7 (July 1979): 456.

<sup>195</sup> *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 14.

<sup>196</sup> *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 14.

Jesus Christ is an excellent example of how to do ministry while taking care of oneself. Jesus didn't allow his caring to completely overextend him so that he had no energy for primary things. He offered himself for the sake of a broken world, yet in spite of the magnitude of his mission, he did not allow himself to get so strung out that he lost his center and his relationship with God.<sup>197</sup>

What Roy M. Oswald highlights here is that priests will best learn what good self-care is by following Christ more closely, and by imitating him in his sincere and real love for the mission. The example of his life and ministry should be the primary and most important criterion for clergy self-care, especially because “by virtue of their consecration, priests are configured to Jesus the good shepherd and are called to imitate and live out his own pastoral charity.”<sup>198</sup>

Another way of helping African priests develop and maintain good clergy self-care practices, at least with respect to their human and spiritual growth, is to help them rediscover the importance of spiritual direction in priestly life and ministry. According to William A. Barry and William J. Connolly, “Christian spiritual direction” can be defined

as help given by one believer to another that enables the latter to pay attention to God's personal communication to him or her, to respond to this personal communicating God, to grow in intimacy with this God, and to live out the consequences of the relationship. The focus of this type of spiritual direction is on experience, not ideas, and specifically on the religious dimension of experience, i.e., that dimension of any experience that evokes the presence of the mysterious Other whom we call God. Moreover, this experience is viewed, not as an isolated event, but as an experience of the ongoing personal relationship God has established with each one of us.<sup>199</sup>

Through the help of a spiritual director, African priests can improve their discernment skills, and thus become more and more aware of God's presence in their lives. It can also help them understand themselves better, and identify some of the cultural and social factors that could influence their personal judgment when dealing with church affairs. This applies especially to the model of the priest-as-chief because there is no way to become a better shepherd without greater

---

<sup>197</sup> Roy M. Oswald, *Finding a Balance for Effective Ministry*, 17.

<sup>198</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, no. 22.

<sup>199</sup> William A. Barry & William J. Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 2000), 8-9.

awareness of how this model of priesthood influences the whole person. That awareness is necessary because “healthy ministry requires a commitment to self-awareness or mindfulness. Mindfulness involves looking at your life as a prelude to attitudinal and behavioral transformation.”<sup>200</sup> For spiritual direction to be fruitful, it has to be done quite frequently, and with a trusted spiritual friend with whom the priest can share his challenges without judgment. Most importantly, African priests should also bear in mind that the help they can receive during spiritual direction sessions is not instructive but rather supportive. They still bear personal responsibility for their motivations and actions in ministry, particularly how they live their lives.

It worth reemphasizing that the problem is not so much that some African priests do not take care of themselves, but rather that they tend to do so at the expense of their priestly identity and of the people to whom they minister. A genuine “self-care moves beyond simply being a ‘good thing’ for individual caregivers to do, and instead becomes a vital practice that can help counteract destructive social and cultural dynamics while also contributing to relational and communal health.”<sup>201</sup> It is a key component of healthy priestly life and ministry. It is based on daily personal commitment, and can include different behaviors, such as establishing a balance between personal life and pastoral demands and engaging in healthy lifestyle practices.

It is, however, important to highlight the fact that the struggle to develop and maintain a healthy clergy self-care should not prevent people from supporting African priests in their daily efforts to live a balanced and meaningful life. Rather, it should help people find better ways to make them accountable for their actions, for “the faithful themselves [...] are truly obliged to see

---

<sup>200</sup> Bruce Epperly, *A Center in the Cyclone: Twenty-First Century Clergy Self-Care* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 60.

<sup>201</sup> Leanna K. Fuller, “In Defense of Self-Care,” *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 28, no. 1 (2018): 17.

to it that they can provide what help is necessary for the honorable and worthy life of priests.”<sup>202</sup> That help is particularly important for priests who work in rural parishes and/or remote areas, for it can be challenging for them to get all the support they need to maintain a healthy and balanced priestly life.

### **III. Revisiting Priestly Formation in Africa**

Besides the importance of African hospitality and clergy self-care for the African Catholic priesthood, it is important to remember that “the whole work of priestly formation would be deprived of its necessary foundation if it lacked a suitable human formation.”<sup>203</sup> That formation, which is based on human and Christian values, has to inform and transform the life, identity, and ministry of the priest. To achieve this goal, the Church needs to train and educate priests in such a way that they become “men for and with others,” and champions of the Church’s preferential option for the poor.

#### **III.1. Training African Priests to become Men for and with Others**

Before we discuss why it is necessary for African priests to become “men for and with others,” I find it important to look briefly at the importance and goal of priestly formation in the Catholic Church. The primary goal of formation in Catholic seminaries is to help men discern God’s call and respond to it accordingly. The purpose of that formation is also to accompany them in their journey toward priesthood, and provide them with the necessary resources so that they can become effective instruments of evangelization after their ordination. The words of Pope John Paul II on the goal of priestly formation are meaningful here:

---

<sup>202</sup> *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 20.

<sup>203</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, no. 43.

The whole formation imparted to candidates for the priesthood aims at preparing them to enter into a communion with the charity of Christ the good shepherd [...]. It is a question of a type of formation meant not only to ensure scientific, pastoral competence and practical skill, but also and especially a way of being in communion with the very sentiments and behaviour of Christ the good shepherd.<sup>204</sup>

Priestly formation goes beyond simply acquiring particular skills and/or playing external roles. Rather, it consists of a profound identification with the person of Jesus Christ. That formation is based on four foundational pillars, that is: human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral. These four areas of formation form the comprehensive structure of priestly formation and guide the development of the candidates toward priesthood. While being distinct in itself, each area is interconnected to the others.

The Church in Africa can also train African priests and even seminarians to become “men for [and with] others,” because the priest is called to work both among and with different people. He is ordained first and foremost for the service of God through the service of his people. In fact, the phrase “men for others” was first employed in 1973 by Father Pedro Arrupe, Superior General of the Society of Jesus, in his address at the 10<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Jesuit Alumni of Europe gathered in Valencia, Spain. He used that term to remind Jesuit alumni what Jesuit education expects of them. For him, “the paramount objective of Jesuit education” could be reached – at least the formation of his graduate – only if it aims at training “man for others,” a man who would “give himself to others in love – love, which is his definitive and all-embracing dimension, that which gives meaning to all his other dimensions.”<sup>205</sup> By using this objective for the renewal of the African Catholic priesthood, my intention is neither to undermine nor replace the primary goal of formation in Catholic seminaries; rather, I intend to see whether it can

---

<sup>204</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, no. 57.

<sup>205</sup> Pedro Arrupe, “The Promotion of Justice and Education for Justice,” § 14. Translated by Horacio de la Costa. Society of Jesus, August 1, 1973. [http://www.sjweb.info/documents/education/arr\\_men\\_en.pdf](http://www.sjweb.info/documents/education/arr_men_en.pdf). (accessed March 15, 2019).

provide the Church in Africa with resources that will enable her to broaden the scope of priestly formation, and help African priests develop a greater awareness of their vocation and mission during and after their formation.

In fact, training African priests to become “men for and with others” is a simple but effective way of reminding them that the priest is ordained neither for himself nor for the people of his ethnic group, but rather for the entire ecclesial community without any distinction of gender, language, or tribe. The priest is called by God for the service of the universal Church. It is important for the Church to highlight this point because, in some parishes and ecclesial communities, some priests limit their ministry to the celebration of the sacraments at the parish, without wishing to know their parishioners better. They feel more concerned with the spiritual life than the whole person. Though it is necessary to maintain healthy boundaries of persons in ministry, such behavior can compromise the ministry of the priest, because it does not allow him to share the joys and pains of the people. It reduces the mission of the priest to a custodian of sacraments.

Part of the reason for that excessive distance is that some African priests consider themselves to be above the laity. Like traditional customary chiefs, they hold all the power and think they are more important than the faithful. Since they consider priesthood as an investment, they live for themselves and their families. This is an obstacle for the priest to become a “man for and with others” because his primary motivation in doing ministry is to make more personal profit, and gain more power. The Church needs to address this issue because

The man who lives only for his own interests not only provides nothing for others. He does worse. He tends to accumulate in exclusive fashion more and more knowledge, more and more

power, more and more wealth; thus denying, inevitably to those weaker than himself their proper share of the God-given means for human development.<sup>206</sup>

For the priest, to be a “man for and with others” means not just showing a concern for the spiritual growth of the parishioners, but also for their integral development, including their physical, emotional, and social welfare. This is possible only if the priest builds his ministry on compassionate service, and accepts to be driven by a sincere and personal love for Christ and our neighbor.

For that training to be more effective, it has to start among African priests themselves, because the model of the priest-as-chief has brought more division than unity, not only between the clergy and the laity, but also among the clergy themselves. The problem is that this model of priesthood has been a source of division and tribalism among some priests. It has influenced and continues to influence them to make friends only with priests and/or seminarians of their own tribe and/or ethnic group. This generally occurs in dioceses where those who are in leadership positions are mostly from the same tribe or ethnic background. The Church needs to address this issue because tribalism and misunderstanding of ethnicity prevent some African priests from developing good and healthy relationships among the clergy. It is precisely for this reason that John B. Kariuki wa Karega argues:

priests must be trained to be promoters of positive ethnicity that goes beyond cultural segregation to embrace all. The negative attitude and mentality to those of other cultures/tribes is not healthy nor is it conducive to the idea of the “Church-as-family” model proposed by the African Synod. Positive ethnicity must be advocated and promoted to avoid marginalization of some people and ensure that all feel at home in the Church and society.<sup>207</sup>

The purpose of that training is to encourage priests to consider cultural diversity as a gift rather than an obstacle to priestly life and ministry. Priests have no option but to acknowledge

---

<sup>206</sup> Pedro Arrupe, “The Promotion of Justice and Education for Justice.” § 14.

<sup>207</sup> John B. Kariuki wa Karega, “Priestly Formation: Challenges, Problems and Prospects,” 255.

their cultural differences, and accept to build their relationship on common values. This has to start with seminarians, showing them the danger of tribalism and ethnic exclusion both among the clergy and within the whole Church. The formators can achieve that goal by making the seminary a home and by treating everyone with dignity and respect.

Actually, the formation given in African Catholic seminaries should help and encourage priests establish and maintain good, healthy, and sincere relationships with other fellow priests, and accept them as friends in the Lord and collaborators in the vineyard of the Lord. It should also help them grow both in knowledge and value such as love, compassion, and hospitality. This is necessary because the purpose of priestly formation is to transform the whole person of the priest, and enable him to serve God's people more faithfully. That transformation is mandatory to become a "man for and with others." The priest will best achieve this by following and imitating Christ because "He is a man filled with the Spirit; and we know whose Spirit that is: the Spirit of Christ, who gave his life for the salvation of the world; the God who, by becoming Man, became, beyond all others, a Man-for-others."<sup>208</sup> This means that priesthood is not a means for gaining more power and authority over other fellow priests, but a state of humble service among the clergy and among other people as well.

In other words, encouraging priests to become "men for and with others" is essential for the renewal of the African Catholic priesthood. It helps them become more and more concerned for social, cultural, and political challenges that affect the integral development and well-being of the people to whom they minister. This could, for instance, include social injustice, gender inequality, domestic violence, and environmental issues. By paying attention to such issues, the priest makes his ministry relevant and meaningful. "He is no longer identified simply by the

---

<sup>208</sup> Pedro Arrupe, "The Promotion of Justice and Education for Justice," § 20.



sacred actions he performs, but rather can understand himself as at once of the people and for them. He is freed from seeing himself in a caste apart from people; rather shoulder to shoulder with them he works with them so that all may see God.”<sup>209</sup> In other words, becoming a “man for and with others” requires of the priest to be compassionate and open-minded toward other people’s feelings, values, culture, and opinion. It is also an invitation to treat them with respect, integrity, fairness, and trust.

As a result, the vocation to the priesthood is a call to work both for and with people, leading the entire ecclesial community toward a better collaboration between the clergy and the laity. It is a constant invitation to stand not only with the people of God, but also for social justice, for “the condemnation of evils and injustices is also part of that ministry of evangelization in the social field which is an aspect of the Church’s prophetic role.”<sup>210</sup> This is a critical question for the African Catholic priesthood because the promotion of justice and liberation of the poor are interrelated, and form a critical component of the mission of the Church.

### **III.2. The African Priest and the Church’s Preferential Option for the Poor**

The term “the Church of the poor” was first employed in 1962 by Pope John XXIII in one of his opening remarks one month before the Second Vatican Council. He was convinced that “faced with the developing countries, the Church presents herself as she is and she wishes to be, as the Church of all and especially the Church of the poor.”<sup>211</sup> The phrase “preferential option for the poor” was used officially for the first time in 1968 by Father Pedro Arrupe, Superior

---

<sup>209</sup> Thomas Corbett, “The Image of the Priest,” 455.

<sup>210</sup> John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, no. 41.

<sup>211</sup> Pope John XXIII, “Radio Message to all the Christian one month before the opening of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council,” September 11, 1962, Cited by Peter Hebblethwaite, *John XXIII: Pope of the Century* (New York: Continuum, 2000), 238.

General of the Society of Jesus, in a letter to the Jesuits of Latin America. It was later employed and articulated by the Catholic Bishops of Latin America, as well as by Pope John Paul II in his social encyclicals *Centesimus Annus* and *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*. In spite of some controversial debates among theologians, the “preferential option for the poor” is one of seven principles of Catholic Social Teaching. Most importantly, “to speak of an ‘option’ for the poor is to recognize that the Church must take a deliberate choice about the form of its ministry when confronted with systemic poverty.”<sup>212</sup> This principle is based on the belief that God has a plan for creation, a plan to build a kingdom of love, peace, and justice. He wants everyone to live a full, healthy, and meaningful life.

According to Pope John Paul II, “the preferential option for the poor” can be defined as

an option, or a special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity, to which the whole tradition of the Church bears witness. It affects the life of each Christian inasmuch as he or she seeks to imitate the life of Christ, but it applies equally to our social responsibility and hence to our manner of living, and to the logical decisions to be made concerning our ownership and the use of goods.<sup>213</sup>

In other words, the option or love for the poor is not meant to favor the poor to the detriment of the rich; but rather it is a call to special care for and solidarity with the marginalized in society, vulnerable people, especially “the hungry, the needy, the homeless, those who are without care and, above all, those without hope for a better future.”<sup>214</sup> Through solidarity and the care for the poor, the Church accomplishes her prophetic mission and helps human beings to fully realize their own dignity as human persons and children of God.

---

<sup>212</sup> Ian A. McFarland, “Preferential Option for the Poor,” *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology*, eds. Ian A. McFarland, David A. S. Fergusson, Karen Kilby, and Ian R. Torrance (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 406.

<sup>213</sup> John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, no. 42.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*

The “preferential option for the poor” can also be considered as a valuable resource for renewing the African Catholic priesthood because the priest as a disciple is called to follow and imitate Christ who identifies himself with the poor and “has been sent to preach the good news to the poor.”<sup>215</sup> This call is a lifelong process and should be considered as an integral part of seminary education, and of the life and ministry of the priest. “In this sense preparation for the priesthood must necessarily involve a proper training in charity and particularly in the preferential love for the poor in whom our faith discovers Jesus and a merciful love for sinners.”<sup>216</sup> The Church in African should constantly emphasize this point in the seminaries as well as in the ongoing formation of African priests, because the model of the priest-as-chief hinders the priest’s desire and ability to develop greater concern for the poor and most vulnerable people of their parishes. This model of priesthood makes some priests believe that their mission is simply limited to providing spiritual care to people without paying much attention to their social issues.

The problem is that the African priest, and even other priests around the world, cannot and should not separate spiritual conversion from other areas and/or aspects of human life such as human dignity, social condition, vulnerability, poverty, marginalization, suffering, and injustice. Since these aspects are interrelated, it is necessary for the priest to consider the human person as a whole, for the “integral human development – the development of every person and of the whole person, especially the poorest and most neglected in the community – is at the very heart of the evangelization.”<sup>217</sup> As a disciple of Christ and minister of the Church, the African priest has the mission and the responsibility to welcome the poor, care for them, and fight for the

---

<sup>215</sup> Luke 4:18.

<sup>216</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, no. 49.

<sup>217</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 68.

respect of their human dignity. He can achieve this goal only if he identifies himself with the poor as Jesus did.

Standing for and with the poor is a critical component of priestly identity and ministry, because “without the preferential option for the poor, the proclamation of the Gospel, which is itself the prime form of charity, risks being misunderstood or submerged by the ocean of words which daily engulfs us in today’s society of mass communication.”<sup>218</sup> In other words, the priest should not simply talk about the poor and how they deserve to be treated. Most importantly, he should take actions against any forms of injustice, discrimination, and social exclusion. This has to start within parishes or any form of structures where African priests do their ministry. This means that “the motivating concern for the poor – who are in the very meaning of the term of ‘the Lord’s poor’ – must be translated at all levels into concrete actions, until it decisively attains a series of necessary reforms.”<sup>219</sup>

Part of the reason why some African priests seem to pay less attention to the poor or feel less moved by concern for them because the kind of formation they receive in some seminaries does not impact the different areas of priestly formation. According to Jordan Nyenyembe, “the African seminary has had more success thus far in educating the minds of seminarians; it has not been as successful in educating their hearts. Seminarians [and even priests] do become very knowledgeable about many things a good priest has to know,”<sup>220</sup> but not deeply moved to take any action in favor of those who live on the margins of the society.

---

<sup>218</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 199.

<sup>219</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 44.

<sup>220</sup> Jordan Nyenyembe, *African Catholic Priests: Confronting an Identity Problem* (Bamenda, Cameroon: Langaa Research & Publishing, 2011), 47.

This is a challenging situation for the Church because it makes African priests insensitive and even blind to human suffering, poverty, and injustice. It also makes their ministry irrelevant because their priestly “ministry is not going to work if it refuses to engage with people who are struggling. Preaching at people in an antiseptic place of safety just won’t cut it.”<sup>221</sup> This will continue unless the priests let themselves be challenged and transformed by the gospel, and driven especially by the Holy Spirit rather than by their personal interests. One way of addressing this issue is to provide African priests with a suitable priestly formation. “The formation must challenge the priests to adopt the practice of Jesus who did not limit His mission to an inner conversion only but also to the liberation of the poor and oppressed.”<sup>222</sup> It should provide them with necessary resources for reflection and self-examination as they exercise their ministry.

The Church should also encourage African priests to commit themselves to a simple lifestyle, not only for the sake of integrity, but also for reasons of evangelization. This is necessary because it is impossible for priests to preach the good news to the poor and at the same time live in luxury and/or squander wealth. This would be contradictory because their words and deeds do not match. The reason why the Church should highlight this issue is because the lifestyles of some African priests keep them far away from the poor and the most vulnerable. This tendency generally manifests itself in different ways and at different levels, especially in the way some African diocesan priests and bishops carry themselves, and relate to the people to whom they minister. In order to overcome this issue, the Second Vatican Council argues that

Priests, therefore, and also bishops, should avoid everything which in any way could turn the poor away. Before the other followers of Christ, let priests set aside every appearance of vanity in their

---

<sup>221</sup> Roy M. Oswald, *Finding a Balance for Effective Ministry*, 5.

<sup>222</sup> John B. Kariuki wa Karega, “Priestly Formation: Challenges, Problems and Prospects,” *African Ecclesial Review*, 48, no. 4 (Dec. 2006): 256-257.

possessions. Let them arrange their homes so that they might not appear unapproachable to any, lest anyone, even the most humble, fear to visit them.<sup>223</sup>

In other words, African priests should adopt a simple lifestyle as a way of living in solidarity with the poor, the powerless, and the outcasts of African society. They should stand with and for the poor, and live a life worthy of imitators of Christ, because God loves the poor. It is necessary for priests to make that choice because they are ministers of “a Church which is poor and for the poor.”<sup>224</sup> It is a way for them to serve God and the poor more effectively.

That service has to start in parishes and other Church structures, especially where there is discrimination and social inequality based on gender and ethnic background. This applies especially in the African context where patriarchy and masculinity are particularly used as a means to oppress women, children, and all those who cannot provide for themselves because of cultural, social, and economic injustice. Since patriarchy and masculinity also influence the model of the priest-as-chief, the African Catholic priesthood will become relevant and meaningful only if African priests pay greater attention to women’s issues such as unemployment, female genital mutilation, and domestic violence. The truth is that “the Church of the Poor is a church in which women’s voices must be heard and women’s issues addressed.”<sup>225</sup>

In other words, the renewal of the African Catholic will be possible only if the “preferential option for the poor” becomes a critical component of formation in African seminaries. In this sense, “an in-depth formation of priests as agents of evangelization cannot escape the option for the poor or the rethinking of mission from below.”<sup>226</sup> Failing to do so will

---

<sup>223</sup> *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 17.

<sup>224</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 189.

<sup>225</sup> Lisa Fullam, “Pope Francis, Women, and the Church of the Poor,” *The Lane Center Series* 3, (Fall 2015): 55.

<sup>226</sup> John B. Kariuki wa Karega, “Priestly Formation: Challenges, Problems and Prospects,” 257.

make priestly ministry irrelevant and meaningless, because the mission of the priest is not merely to prepare souls for heaven, but also to give fight for respect of human dignity and the common good, and give hope to the hopeless, the poor, and those who are oppressed. “It is when we begin to treat the poor as people that we start to be evangelized by them and strip away the ideological element in the a priori idea we may have of them.”<sup>227</sup>

Finally, the “preferential option for the poor” gives meaning and value to the priesthood. The priest will best understand his identity only in relation with the poor, the vulnerable, and the marginalized. This option should lead priests to become more and more aware of their identity and mission as well. African priests will not rediscover their identity unless they humbly accept to be taught by the poor, for “they have much to teach us. Not only do they share in the *sensus fidei*, but in their difficulties they know the suffering of Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them.”<sup>228</sup>

#### **IV. The African Priest as a Healer: A Way Forward**

After having explored some key ways through which the Church can promote a genuine theology of priesthood in Africa, my task in the last section is to reflect upon the future of the African Catholic priesthood. This reflection will revolve around the following question: besides the servant-leader model, which model of priesthood would be more suitable to the identity of the African priest as well as the African ecclesial context? There is no easy answer to such a question, but one can think of the African priest as a healer. Part of the reason for this is the fact that “Christians, besides seeking recovery by means of medical care, have always believed in the

---

<sup>227</sup> Rafael Luciani, “The Centrality of the People in Pope Francis’ Socio-cultural Theology,” *Concilium* 3, (2018): 63.

<sup>228</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 189.

help of prayer or religious blessings, or in Christian healing.”<sup>229</sup> This kind of healing conveys the healing power of Christ which is the manifestation of God’s creative and redeeming actions. As a result, the African priest has the mission and responsibility to assume his identity and exercise his ministry as healer in the footsteps of Jesus especially because “Jesus inaugurated the restoration of individuals and societies to wholeness and he invited the disciples to participate in this re-establishment.”<sup>230</sup>

Actually, the model of the priest as a healer is a call to exercise priestly ministry in the light of Jesus’ healing ministry. As a healer, the mission of Jesus is to restore life where it has been diminished, broken, and/or destroyed. Because he is convinced that there is a profound connection between healing and life in Jesus’ ministry, Bénézet Bujo argues that “even the healing that Jesus performed must not only be seen as the revelation of his divinity, but also Christ wants to stress that in his role as the Messiah, he comes to give fullness of life at all levels.”<sup>231</sup> In Jesus’ ministry, healing concerns the whole person, and takes different forms. To better understand Jesus’ healing works, it is important to look briefly at the seven signs of Jesus as developed by John.<sup>232</sup> These seven can be divided into two categories: life-giving works and meaning restorative works. Throughout his life and ministry, “these seven signs will demonstrate that Jesus has the complete and full ability to save us and to grant us eternal life.”<sup>233</sup> The purpose

---

<sup>229</sup> P. De Letter and J. Hill, “Christian Healing,” *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Berard L. Marthaler, Vol. 6 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 678.

<sup>230</sup> Ann Nasimiyu Wasike, “Christology and an African Woman’s Experience,” in *Jesus in African Christianity: Experimentation and Diversity in African Christology*, eds. J. N. K. Mugambi and Laurenti Magesa (Nairobi, Kenya: Initiatives Ltd, 1989), 133.

<sup>231</sup> Bénézet Bujo, “Pour une éthique africano-christocentrique,” in *Combats pour un christianisme africain : Mélanges en l’honneur du Professeur V. Mulago*, ed. A. Ngindu Mushete (Kinshasa, DRC: Faculté de Théologie Catholique), 27, my translation.

<sup>232</sup> Forest Chaffee, *More Alive than Ever: Signs in the Miracles of John’s Gospel* (Lima, OH: CSS Publishing Company, 2005), 10.

<sup>233</sup> Michael T. Nelson, *The Seven Signs – Volume 2: A Spirit-Filled Look at the Gospel According to John* (Mustang, OK : Tate Publishing & Enterprises, 2010), 22.



of these signs is to restore meaning to people's life, and so manifest the kingdom of God. The same can be said for Jesus' mighty deeds as presented in the Synoptic gospels.

By virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders, the priest participates in Jesus' healing ministry through prayer and the celebration of the sacraments. "Through a personal encounter with the Savior in his Christ, the sacraments can make a decisive contribution toward the healing of individuals in a less and less whole and wholesome world."<sup>234</sup> They are means through which the faithful experience God's love and blessing, for Jesus became flesh in order to bring salvation to humankind, but also to heal body, mind, and spirit.

Despite the important of other sacraments especially Masses for healing, it is important to mention that the Church affirms that there are two important channels for healing, namely the Sacraments of Reconciliation and of Anointing.

In administering the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the priest has new opportunities to spend time with the penitent, discovering with the help of the Holy Spirit the root causes of sin. He is thus able to encourage the penitents to realize the spiritual and emotional healing available to them as they enter into the forgiving love of Jesus and the Father.<sup>235</sup>

As we can see here, the priest stands as a witness of God's love and mercy. His mission is to make the gift of forgiveness a reality in the life of the penitent. In this sense, the sacrament of reconciliation restores the relationship with God, and brings spiritual healing through the cleansing of sins. Arguing for the importance of this sacrament, Pope John Paul II says that "the church feels an obligation to go to the roots of that original wound of sin in order to bring healing and to re-establish, so to speak, an equally original reconciliation which will be the

---

<sup>234</sup> Michael Marsch, *Healing Through the Sacraments* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1989), 23.

<sup>235</sup> P. De Letter and J. Hill, "Christian Healing," 680.

effective principle of all true reconciliation.”<sup>236</sup> What Pope John Paul II highlights here is that reconciliation is more effective when it enables the penitent to identify the root causes of sin, and leads him/her toward a better Christian life.

The second sacrament of healing is that of Anointing of the sick. It is a prayer of healing, for it brings spiritual and even physical strength. It unites the person with the suffering of Christ on the cross.

The sacrament of Anointing in its new format places more emphasis on the building of faith for direct physical healing in the sick person, as is clear from its ritual formula: “May the Lord, who frees you from sin, save you and raise you up.” By making this Sacrament available to persons other than those in imminent danger of death, the Church reaffirms its belief in the restorative power of anointing, in accordance with Js. 5:14-16.<sup>237</sup>

This sacrament conveys God’s grace to the sick person, and imparts the gift of strength especially against anxiety, temptation, and discouragement. It provides for the restoration of physical, emotional, and mental health. It is based on the belief that “this assistance from the Lord by the power of his Spirit is meant to lead the sick person to healing of the soul, but also of the body if such is God’s will.”<sup>238</sup> The anointing of the sick is a tangible expression of that promise, giving us courage in difficult and challenging times. Altogether, Christian healing finds its roots and fulfillment in “the Eucharistic sacrifice” because it is “the fount and apex of the Christian life.”<sup>239</sup>

Beside the importance of the different means used in the Church to sustain Christian healing, the African Catholic priest will best exercise his mission as a healer by deepening his understanding of the African healing system. This is necessary because the people to whom he

---

<sup>236</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Reconciliation and Penance*, no. 4. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_02121984\\_reconciliatio-et-paenitentia.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_02121984_reconciliatio-et-paenitentia.html) (accessed April 15, 2019).

<sup>237</sup> P. De Letter and J. Hill, “Christian Healing,” 680.

<sup>238</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1520.

<sup>239</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 11.

ministers are for the most part influenced by the African healing system. By knowing more about how this healing system functions, the African priest will be able to understand not only his cultural heritage, but also their worldview and/or their value system. One way to achieve this is to look briefly at some key terms, namely healing, healer, and health. These terms are interrelated, and should be considered as a whole.

In most African societies, “health is associated with good, blessing and beauty – all that is positively valued in life.”<sup>240</sup> It refers to any other ritual or practice that is life-giving both for the individual and the community. It also refers to the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual well-being of a person or a group. Because it is also influenced by supernatural forces,

Health is not an isolated phenomenon but part of the entire magico-religious fabric; it is more than the absence of disease. Since disease is viewed as one of the most important social sanctions, peaceful living with one’s neighbors, abstention from adultery, keeping the laws of the gods and people are all essential in order to protect oneself and one’s family from disease.<sup>241</sup>

What Koffi Appiah-Kubi highlights here is that health is more than an absence of a disease or an illness. It encompasses other aspects of the person and life in general. For this reason, several African people understand a lack of health as a personal and/or social imbalance. That is why “traditional healers address the illness while attempting to cure the disease. In all Africa, an imbalance in the body, or between the body and the social or natural environment, is caused by sorcery and witchcraft, which operate in the religio-magical field.”<sup>242</sup> The role of these healers, who are also called African priest-healers, is to prevent or treat a disease.

---

<sup>240</sup> Kofi Appiah-Kubi, “The Church’s Healing Ministry in Africa,” *The Ecumenical Review*, Vol. 27, no. 3 (July 1975): 232.

<sup>241</sup> Kofi Appiah-Kubi, “The Church’s Healing Ministry in Africa,” 232.

<sup>242</sup> Brian M. Du Toit, “Healing and Medicine: Healing and Medicine in Africa,” *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Lyndsay Jones, Vol. 9. (Farmington, MI: Thomson Gale, 2005), 3817.

Generally speaking, the healing process starts with two critical questions: “How did the illness or traumatic accident happen? And did it happen (to me or to my family?).”<sup>243</sup> This duality reveals that most African priests focus both on the ill person and the entire community, searching for the root causes of that imbalance and why it has happened. The healing process usually occurs through different ritual practices, depending on different factors such as the kind of disease and the gender of the person involved. Despite those differences, “treatment requires the restoration of order and balance. Good health flows from the internal and external harmony of a person’s life with the social as well as the physical universe.”<sup>244</sup> A good number of those healers operate with the supernatural powers they claim to have received either through an initiation process or from their ancestors, passing that healing gift from one generation to another. Because they play a critical role, healers

are expected to be sincere, honest, forgiving, and pure of heart. They give advice, warnings or orders which help to maintain the moral and social order of the community. Through their help the anxious and the innocent are encouraged. They symbolize the hopes of the society – hopes for good health, protection from evil forces, security, prosperity and good fortune, and ritual cleansing when impurities have been contracted through a possible breaking of a taboo.<sup>245</sup>

As we can see here, the healing process in most parts of Africa is based on a holistic approach to health and disease. It is a process through which the healer takes into consideration the whole person, from a physical, emotional, spiritual, and social standpoint.

According to Kofi Appiah-Kubi,

the holistic approach to health and disease observed by the priests and faith-healers of the indigenous African churches can help to renew the whole approach of the Church’s healing ministry to the problem of health and disease, at both practical and theoretical levels.<sup>246</sup>

---

<sup>243</sup> Brian M. Du Toit, “Healing and Medicine: Healing and Medicine in Africa,” 3817.

<sup>244</sup> Brian M. Du Toit, “Healing and Medicine: Healing and Medicine in Africa,” 3817.

<sup>245</sup> Kofi Appiah-Kubi, “The Church’s Healing Ministry in Africa,” 234.

<sup>246</sup> Kofi Appiah-Kubi, “The Church’s Healing Ministry in Africa,” 238.

Actually, I find Appiah-Kubi's suggestion very compelling because it highlights the fact that the human person is a unity which is characterized by different dimensions. While being distinct in itself, each dimension is interconnected to the others. The African priest can use this holistic approach to help people respect the dignity of the ill person despite his or her physical condition. This is necessary because in some parts of Africa, "the mission hospitals have tended until now to treat the patient as a physical object: a case, a number and a candidate."<sup>247</sup> This is particularly the case for poor people who cannot afford better treatments.

As he exercises his healing ministry in hospitals and homes, the priest can help people understand that "most healing is a process involving time and known only by God. It calls for a community of persons, professional and lay, willing to spend time with those who suffer and love them into wholeness, using the best medical and spiritual means available."<sup>248</sup> This is a way of encouraging interdisciplinary collaborative, showing that there is neither contradiction nor competition between science and religion, but rather mutual support. The purpose of that relationship is to help people live a meaningful life. To achieve this goal, the priest needs to recognize his own brokenness because "to be a healer, you must be healed, and must know the wound – must be able to relate to sickness."<sup>249</sup> This is a lifetime process, but it has to start in seminary so candidates to the priesthood can develop a greater awareness of their strengths and limitations. This process is also part of clergy self-care, because it allows the priest to become a wounded healer. "For a deep understanding of his own pain makes it possible for him to convert

---

<sup>247</sup> Kofi Appiah-Kubi, "The Church's Healing Ministry in Africa," 238.

<sup>248</sup> P. De Letter and J. Hill, "Christian Healing," 679.

<sup>249</sup> Dorene Day, "The Wisdom of Indigenous Healers," *Creative Nursing* 20, no. 1 (2014): 38.

his weakness into strength and to offer his own experience as a source of healing to those who are often lost in the darkness of their own misunderstanding and sufferings.”<sup>250</sup>

It is worth emphasizing that understanding Jesus as the healer *par excellence* in Africa is not without danger and/or challenges,<sup>251</sup> especially in areas where the influence of the Prosperity Gospel prosperity has brought more harm than good. The same can be said for those African Catholic priests who exercise Christian healing ministry. One way for them to avoid any confusion is to remember that their role is to participate in Jesus’ healing ministry rather than to replace Jesus. This is necessary to know because “no minister can save anyone. He can only offer himself as a guide to fearful people. It is precisely in this guidance that the first signs of hope become visible. This is so because shared pain is no longer paralyzing but mobilizing, when understood as a way of liberation.”<sup>252</sup>

Besides the contribution of the priest in healing ministry, people should remember that the belief in Christian healing should not prevent them from seeking medical care and treatment. The truth is that “religious care does not replace medical care, it helps for recovery, not (as medicine does) by directly acting on the level of biological or chemical or physiological realities, but by strengthening the grace life of the sick person or by a miracle.”<sup>253</sup>

---

<sup>250</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (New York: Doubleday, 1972), 87.

<sup>251</sup> Diane B. Stinton, *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology* (New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 75.

<sup>252</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society*, 93.

<sup>253</sup> P. De Letter and J. Hill, “Christian Healing,” 680.

## **Conclusion**

What has emerged in this analysis is that the renewal of the African Catholic priesthood will be possible and more relevant only if the African priest takes responsibility for his priestly formation, and turns challenges into opportunities for growth and positive change. This process, which is a lifetime commitment, requires ongoing formation, self-assessment, and the willingness to be challenged constructively. Without this renewed understanding of the priestly vocation and identity, the African priest will continue to serve God for his own benefit, and convey a distorted image of Catholic priesthood.

Becoming a priest is a constant invitation to embody the call of discipleship as a way of life that is grounded in and shaped by the Paschal Mystery. This vocation requires not only the willingness to imitate Christ, but also the capacity to unveil forces of injustice and oppression that dehumanize African people. The key to the renewal of the African Catholic priesthood is not so much about what priests learn in the seminary, but rather it is more about how much that seminary education affects their lives and ministry, and helps them grow in their faith, their love for one another, and in their generosity to serve God's people. The painful awareness of the current priestly identity crisis in Africa can be an invitation to priests to transcend their limitations and shortcomings, and to look more deeply into the interaction between African values and priestly formation.

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

In the final analysis, the purpose of this thesis was to see whether the Church in Africa can promote a genuine theology of priesthood despite contravening customs that favor treating priests as traditional customary chiefs. This theological research project has helped us understand that the African Catholic priesthood revolves around the model of the priest-as-chief. Despite the fact that it has helped the Church make the ministerial priesthood more effective by reflecting African values and customs relevant in African, this model of priesthood has created more confusion than clarity within the African Church, leading priests to consider the priesthood more as a personal and family achievement than a vocation from God, a call to follow and imitate Christ in his sincere love and service for the poor, the marginalized, and the most vulnerable people. The problem with such a vision of priesthood is that it portrays a distorted image of priesthood, and makes the priestly identity crisis even more complex. The Church needs to address this crisis not only in the African ecclesial milieu, but also in the universal Church because all the priests throughout the world share the one and only priesthood of Christ who is the head of the Church.

There is no easy solution to the limitations of the model of the priest-as-chief. It is constantly a challenging task to establish a balance between the priesthood as intended by Jesus and African cultural values. African priests have no option but to follow and imitate Christ because he is the priest *par excellence*. Only Christ perfectly united the redemptive work of the Triune God and human nature, especially the values that support our integral development and well-being. There is no perfect model of priesthood except that of Jesus. Since Jesus offered himself as the true and perfect sacrifice for all our sins, the ministerial priesthood has to be at the service of the common priesthood of the baptized. For this reason, the priest is a “bridge-builder”



between God and humanity. He exercises this mission not by achieving his personal projects and interests, but rather by participating faithfully in the one priesthood of Christ. He also exercises this mission through the proclamation of the Good News, by presiding at the divine worship, and by leading the people of God toward holiness and perfection. By virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders, African priests should understand these functions not as those of a traditional customary chief, an African traditional priest, the leader of a political party; rather, they should consider and exercise them as the several functions of the one office of Christ.

The renewal of the African Catholic priesthood will not be possible unless the African priest rediscovers the essence, meaning, and purpose of the priesthood. Though it is a lifetime process, one way for the priest to achieve this goal is to understand and live out his priestly vocation as a call to discipleship, as an invitation to follow and imitate Christ. Ordination is not intended just for the priest and the joy of his family members, but for the service of God's people. It is all about hospitality, and compassionate love for the people to whom the priest ministers. Being ordained a priest requires generosity of heart, but also a willingness to develop and maintain a good and healthy life style, because the more balanced the priest is, the better he will serve God's people. To achieve this, it is necessary to help African priests understand themselves better, especially their profound needs and priorities, and enable them to answer the most critical questions that challenge their daily life. The model of the priest as a healer can help the Church face and even overcome the current priestly identity crisis, but it is necessary for her to examine more deeply the theological and cultural foundations of this model of priesthood in order to avoid more confusion and even syncretism in ministry. The future and strength of the Church in Africa is partly based on the priests' capacity to inspire others and make true disciples who can witness to Christ both in words and deeds.

It is worth reemphasizing that the current priestly identity crisis in Africa is not due to the shortage of priestly vocations; rather, it is caused by the distorted image that some African priests portray of the priesthood. This crisis is nothing less than the consequence of misunderstanding of the inculturation of priesthood. The inculturation of the ministerial priesthood is an important element for the life of the Church in Africa. However, African priests should constantly remember that it is not an end in itself, but rather it is a means to make priesthood reflect African values. The Church will best address this issue by exploring new ways of training African priests, so that they can visualize, interiorize, and practice values which can be a basis for imitating Jesus, the Formator of formators.

Priests and candidates to the priesthood do not learn how to become a better priest, how to assume service roles and pastoral leadership by chance or coincidence. Rather, they can learn values only if they receive a suitable formation in seminaries, and accept to consider and make them the foundation of their priestly identity. That is the only manner in which seminary education can be relevant and train priests who are “men for and with others.” Despite the importance of seminary education, African priests should be aware of the fact that they still bear personal responsibility for their motivations and actions in ministry, particularly how they live their lives as disciples. Ordination to the priesthood is not the end of personal commitment to priestly formation; rather, it is the beginning of the journey toward even greater commitment to integrity, responsibility, and accountability.

The call to the priesthood is neither an end in itself nor a means of self-realization; rather, it is a call to live a life of consecration and service that has to be rooted in Jesus. Priesthood is a daily response to God’s call, but also a call to follow and imitate Jesus, the true, perfect, and eternal priest. It is a lifetime commitment that requires not only human qualities such as

humility, discernment, and self-sacrificial love, but also the help of God's grace, under the shelter of the Christ's love and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. That commitment is confirmed on ordination day. It is a daily response that needs to be constantly renewed and enlightened by the life, identity, and ministry of Christ. Every priest is called by Christ in order to continue the redemptive work of the Triune God, and so become an instrument and a sign of Christ's presence in the word. The priest can fulfill this mission only if his life and ministry are rooted in prayer, nourished by the Eucharist, and transformed by the theological virtues, namely faith, hope, and charity.

Despite some limitations, my intention in reflecting upon the African Catholic priesthood was to widen the road for anyone interested in understanding more deeply the complexity of the identity of the priest in the African ecclesial context. The more this issue becomes a concern for both the clergy and laity, the better the Church will understand the complexity of the priestly identity crisis in Africa. There is a need for African theologians to put more energy into the study of the identity of the African priest, just as they have done with respect to inculturation and/or African Christian theology. Despite the many challenges and problems ahead, the renewal of the African Catholic priesthood is necessary to make the Church more and more relevant in Africa, because "people today put more trust in witness than in teachers, in experience than in teaching, and in life and action than in theories."<sup>254</sup> The African priest will become an icon of Christ and a prophetic shepherd only if he places Christ at the center of his life and ministry, and develops a loving concern for God's people, especially those who live at the margins of African society.

---

<sup>254</sup> Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 41.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Church Documents

Pope Benedict XV, *Maximum Illud*, <https://www.svdcuria.org/public/mission/docs/encycl/mi-en.htm> (access February 15, 2019)

Pope Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis Christi*, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-xii\\_enc\\_29061943\\_mystici-corporis-christi.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_29061943_mystici-corporis-christi.html) (access February 15, 2019)

*Presbyterorum Ordinis*,

[http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19651207\\_presbyterorum-ordinis\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_presbyterorum-ordinis_en.html) (accessed March 5, 2019)

Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_exh\\_19751208\\_evangelii-nuntiandi.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html) (accessed April 13, 2019)

Pope John Paul II, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_letters/1994/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_19940522\\_ordinatio-sacerdotalis.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1994/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19940522_ordinatio-sacerdotalis.html) (accessed March 2, 2019)

Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_30121987\\_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html) (accessed April 12, 2019)

Pope John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_25031992\\_pastores-dabo-vobis.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_25031992_pastores-dabo-vobis.html)

Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_14091995\\_ecclesia-in-africa.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_14091995_ecclesia-in-africa.html) (accessed February 20, 2019).

Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html) (accessed April 2, 2019)

*Catechism of the Catholic Church*. London: Burns and Oates, 1998.

## Books

- Asamoah-Gyadu, J. Kwabena. "Spirit and Spirits in African Religious Traditions," *Interdisciplinary and Religio-Cultural Discourse on a Spirit-Filled World: Loosing the Spirits*, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, Kristeen Kim, and Amos Yong, eds. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013): 41-54.
- Barry, William, A. & Connolly, William, J. *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*. San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 2000.
- Burke, Peter J. and Stets, Jan E. *Identity Theory*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Chaffee, Forest. *More Alive than Ever: Signs in the Miracles of John's Gospel*. Lima, OH: CSS Publishing Company, 2005.
- Cohen, Lisa, J. *The Handy Psychology Answer Book*. Canton, MI: Visible Ink Press, 2011.
- Dinter, Paul, E. *The Changing Priesthood: From the Bible to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Allen, TX: Thomas More Publishing, 1989.
- Echema, A. *Corporate personality in Igbo Society and the Sacramental Reconciliation*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lan, 1995.
- Epperly, Bruce. *A Center in the Cyclone: Twenty-First Century Clergy Self-Care*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014.
- Gathogo, Julius, Mutugi. *The Truth About African Hospitality: Is There Hope for Africa?*. Mombasa, Kenya: The Salt, 2001.
- Geshake, Gisbert. *The Meaning of Christian Priesthood*. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1982.
- Grabowski, John, S. *Sex and Virtue: An Introduction to Sexual Ethics*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2003.
- Gula, Richard. *Just Ministry: Professional Ethics for Pastoral Ministers*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2010.
- Heffernan, James, A. W. *Hospitality and Treachery in Western Literature*. London: Yale University Press, 2014.
- Gula, Richard. *Just Ministry: Professional Ethics for Pastoral Ministers*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2010.
- Ivens, Michael. *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*. Trowbridge, UK: Cromwell Press, 1998.
- Lowen, Alexander. *Narcissism: Denial of the True Self*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985.

- McGovern, Thomas, J. *Priestly Identity*. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2002.
- Marsch, Michael. *Healing Through the Sacraments*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1989.
- Moila, Moyahabo, Phillip. *Challenging Issues in African Christianity*. Pretoria, South African: CB Powel Biblical Center, 2002.
- Nelson, Michael T. *The Seven Signs – Volume 2: A Spirit-Filled Look at the Gospel According to John*. Mustang, OK : Tate Publishing & Enterprises, 2010.
- Nyenyembe, Jordan. *African Catholic Priests: Confronting an Identity Problem*. Bamenda, Cameroon: Langaa Research & Publishing CIG, 2011.
- Nouwen, Henri, J. M. *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society*. New York: Doubleday, 1972.
- Nwobi, Paul, Uche. *Poor Formation as a Principal Factor to the Crisis in Priesthood Today*. Bloomington, IN: Author House, 2012.
- Osborne, Kenan, B. *Priesthood: A History of the Ordained Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church*. New York: Paulist Press, 1988.
- Rush, Ormond. *The Eyes of Faith: The Sense of the Faith and the Church's Reception of the Revelation*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2009.
- Schelkle, Karl, Hermann. *Discipleship and Priesthood*. New York: Herder & Herder, 1965.
- Stinton, Diane, B. *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology*. New York: Orbis Books, 2004.
- Strange, Roderick. *The Risk of Discipleship: The Catholic Priest Today*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2004.
- Sundkler, Bengt and Steed, Christopher. *The History of the Church in Africa*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Tutu, Naomi. *The Words of Desmond Tutu*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989.
- Uche Nwobi, Paul. *Poor Formation as a Principal Factor to the Crisis in Priesthood Today*. Bloomington, IN: Author House, 2012.
- Uchenna Aba, *The Reception of the Second Vatican Council's Liturgical Reform in Nigeria (Nsukka Diocese)*. Zürich, GER: Deutsche Nationalbibliothek, 2015.

Uzukwu, Elochukwu, E. *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches*. New York: Orbis Books, 1996.

Wainwright, Geoffrey. *For Our Salvation: Two Approaches to the Work of Christ*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997.

## Articles

Appiah-Kubi, Kofi. "The Church's Healing Ministry in Africa," *The Ecumenical Review*, Vol. 27, no. 3 (July 1975): 230-.239.

Arrupe, Pedro. "The Promotion of Justice and Education for Justice," § 14. Translated by Horacio de la Costa. Society of Jesus, August 1, 1973. [http://www.sjweb.info/documents/education/arr\\_men\\_en.pdf](http://www.sjweb.info/documents/education/arr_men_en.pdf). (accessed March 15, 2019).

Baldovin, John F. "Priesthood," *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology*, eds. Ian A. McFarland, David A. S. Fergusson, Karen Kilby, and Ian R. Torrance (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011): 480.

Bacik, James, J. "The Practice of Priesthood: Working Through Today's Tension," *Priesthood in the Modern World: A Reader*, Karen Sue Smith, ed. (Franklin, WI: Sheed and Ward, 1999): 51-65.

Baumann, John. "Confronting the Economy of Exclusion from the Ground Up," *The Lane Center Series* 3, (Fall 2015): 37-42.

Bishop K. Sarpong, "Inculturation (The Asante Model)," *Studia Missionalia* 44. (1995): 287-304.

Bujo, Bénézet. "Pour une éthique africano-christocentrique," in *Combats pour un christianisme africain : Mélanges en l'honneur du Professeur V. Mulago*, ed. A. Ngindu Mushete (Kinshasa, DRC: Faculté de Théologie Catholique): 21-31.

Chase, Nathan. "A History and Analysis of the *Missel Romain pour les Dioceses du Zaire*," *Obsculta* 6, no. 1 (2013): 28-36.

Corbett, Thomas. "The Image of the Priest," *The Furrow* 30, no. 7 (Jul., 1979): 450-456.

De Letter, P. and Hill, J. "Christian Healing," *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Berard L. Marthaler, Vol. 6 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 678-680.

- Dragiewicz, Molly. "Patriarchy," *Encyclopedia of Interpersonal Violence* Vol. 1 (California, LA: Sage Publication, 2008), 505-507.
- Ekpo, Anthony. "The Sensus Fidelium and the Threefold Office of Christ: A Reinterpretation of Lumen Gentium No. 12," *Theological Studies* 2 (2015): 330-346.
- Erlank, Natasha. "Southern Africa: Ethnicity, Language, Identity," *Encyclopedia of African History*, ed. Kevin Shillington, Vol. 1-3 (New York: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2005): 706-707.
- Fullam, Lisa. "Pope Francis, Women, and the Church of the Poor," *The Lane Center Series* 3, (Fall 2015): 55-63.
- Fuller, Leanna, K. "In Defense of Self-Care," *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 28, no. 1 (2018): 5-21.
- Gathogo, Julius, Mutugi. "African Hospitality: Is it Compatible with the Ideal of Christ's Hospitality? Part 2.," *Churchman* 120 (2006): 145-157.
- . "Some Expression of African Hospitality Today," *Scriptura* 99 (2008): 275-287.
- . "African Hospitality: Is it Compatible with the Ideal of Christ's Hospitality? Part 2.," *Churchman* 120 (2006): 145-157.
- . "African Philosophy as Expressed in the Concepts of Hospitality and Ubuntu," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* Vol. 130 (March 2008): 39-53.
- Hearne, Brian. "Priestly Ministry and Christian Community," *African Ecclesial Review* 24 (1982): 221-233.
- Kariuki wa Karega, John B. "Priestly Formation: Challenges, Problems and Prospects," *African Ecclesial Review* 48, no. 4 (2006): 243-266.
- Legrand, Hervé. "Ministerial Priesthood," *Encyclopedia of Christian Theology*, ed. Jean-Yves Lacoste, Vol. 1. (New York: Routledge, 2005): 1284-1287.
- Lytle, Guy Fitch. "The Recovery of Priestly Identity and the Revival of the Church," *Sewanee Theological Review* 38, no. 3 (1995): 227-240.
- McDonagh, Enda. "The Risk of Priesthood," *The Furrow*, Vol. 51, no. 11 (Nov. 2000): 592-601.



McFarland, Ian A. "Preferential Option for the Poor," *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology*, eds. Ian A. McFarland, David A. S. Fergusson, Karen Kilby, and Ian R. Torrance (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 406.

McFarland, Ian, A. "Threefold Office," *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology* eds. Ian A. McFarland, David A. S. Fergusson, Karen Kilby, and Ian R. Torrance (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011): 508.

Nasimiyyu Wasike, Anne "Christology and an African Woman's Experience," in *Jesus in African Christianity: Experimentation and Diversity in African Christology*, eds. J. N. K. Mugambi and Laurenti Magesa (Nairobi, Kenya: Initiatives Ltd, 1989):70-81.

Niemandt, Nelus. "Rediscovering Joy in Costly and Radical Discipleship in Mission," *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* Vol. 72, no. 4 (2016), [http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S0259-94222016000400096](http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0259-94222016000400096) (accessed March 20, 2019).

Nyenyembe, Jordan. "Displacement and Conflicts: Plea for a Changed Image of an African Priest," *African Ecclesial Review* 59, no. 3 (2017): 191-211.

Nyenyembe, Jordan. "Stewards of God's Mercy: Vocation and Priestly Ministry in Africa," *Journal of Global Catholicism*, Vol. 1 no. 2 (July 2017): 73-95.

Pope John XXIII, "Radio Message to all the Christian one month before the opening of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council," September 11, 1962, Cited by Peter Hebblethwaite, *John XXIII: Pope of the Century* (New York: Continuum, 2000).

Pope Francis' Homily at Jubilee for Deacons May 29, 2016. <https://zenit.org/articles/popes-homily-at-jubilee-for-deacons/> (accessed March 8, 2019).

Pope Francis' Address to the Roman Curia on December 22, 2014. <https://zenit.org/articles/pope-s-address-to-roman-curia/> (accessed March 8, 2019).

Pope Francis' Third Meditation at Jubilee for Priests on June 2, 2016. <https://zenit.org/articles/popes-3rd-meditation-at-jubilee-for-priests-the-good-odor-of-christ-and-the-light-of-his-mercy/> (accessed March 10, 2019).

Pope Francis' Speech to a Conference on the "Priesthood" Documents of Vatican II on November 20, 2015. <https://sedosmission.org/article/pope-francis-dynamic-vision-of-priesthood/> (accessed March 10, 2019).

Pope Francis' Chrism Mass Homily in Saint Peter's Basilica on March 24, 2016. <https://zenit.org/articles/pope-francis-homily-at-chrism-mass-2/> (accessed March 11, 2019).

Pope Francis' Address to the world's priests at the Chrism Mass on Holy Thursday March 28, 2013. [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2016/documents/papa-francesco\\_20160324\\_omelia-crisma.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20160324_omelia-crisma.html) (accessed March 12, 2019).

Pope Francis' Homily to the Clergy in the Manila Cathedral on January 16, 2015. <https://www.rappler.com/specials/pope-francis-ph/81004-full-text-pope-francis-homily-manila-cathedral> (accessed March 15, 2019).

Power, David N. "Priesthood in Christian Tradition," *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Berard L. Marthaler, Vol. 11 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003): 690-707.

Salamone, Franck S. and Mbanuiké, Michael C. "The Plight of the Indigenous Catholic Priest in Africa: An Igbo Example," *Missiology: An International Review* XXIII, no. 2 (April 1995): 165-177.

Walls, Andrew, F. "The Cost of Discipleship: The Witness of the African Church," *Word & World*, Vol. 25, no. 4 (Fall 2005): 433-443.

Shorter, A. E. "Theology of Inculturation," *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 7 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America, 2002) 388-389.

Swidler, Ann. "The Return of the Sacred: What African Chiefs Teach Us about Secularization," *Sociology of Religion* 71, no. 2 (July 2010): 157-171.

Trakatellis, Bishop, Demetrios. "Ἀκολουθεῖτε μοι/Follow me' (Mk 2:14) Discipleship and Priesthood," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 30, no. 3 (1985): 271-285.