

## THE EVANGELICAL COUNSEL OF CHASTITY AS A MEANS OF LIVING AFFECTIVE LOVE IN COMMUNITY AMONG RELIGIOUS WOMEN LIVING ALONG LANG'ATA SOUTH ROAD IN NAIROBI, KENYA

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### ABSTRACT

*This study examined ways in which the Evangelical Counsel of Chastity enhances living of affective love in communities among religious women. The objectives of the study were: to examine the Evangelical Counsel of Chastity as a means of promoting mutual trust and openness in living affective love in the community; to evaluate the Evangelical Counsel of Chastity as a way of enhancing mutual respect and acceptance; to assess how the Evangelical Counsel of Chastity could reinforce companionship and sharing; to determine how the Evangelical Counsel of Chastity could facilitate teamwork and effective communication; and to establish intervention strategies for facing the challenges of the Evangelical Counsel of Chastity as a means of living affective love in the community. The study was guided by the Stages in the Development of the Community Model by Hammett and Sofield (1981). The research used a convergent parallel mixed method design, which involved the use of questionnaires and interviews. Quantitative data from the questionnaires was coded, tabulated and presented in frequencies and percentages. Qualitative data was summarized according to the emerging themes and presented in narrative form and precise quotes. The findings of the study revealed that faithfulness to the values of the Evangelical Counsel of Chastity enhances mutual trust and openness; mutual respect and acceptance; companionship, sharing, teamwork and effective communication among the sisters. However, the results of the study also showed some inconsistencies in the understanding of the values of the vow and its practical living in communities. The study recommends that formators must engage in continual update of the values of the vow of Chastity as well as incorporating current theological, psychological and sociological advancements for more effective life*

*of chastity. The study also recommends that major superiors and formators must intensify formation for Chastity in both initial and on-going formation. Particularly, they must pay attention to the uniqueness of each individual, impart practical ways of living affective love in community as well as provide mentorship for consecrated persons in the living of affective love.*

### **Keywords**

Evangelical Counsel of Chastity, Affective Love, Community, Continence, Consecrated Women, Mutual trust, Openness, Mutual Respect, Acceptance, Companionship, Sharing, Teamwork, Effective Communication

### **Introduction**

Perfect Chastity for the love of God, as enunciated by Pope Paul VI (1964) in *Lumen Gentium*, is a stimulus to charity and is unquestionably an exacting source of spiritual richness in the world. The Pontifical Council for the Family 1995, asserts that chastity intensifies the human person's dignity and allows him to love truly, disinterestedly, unselfishly and with respect for others. Chastity is the spiritual power which frees love from selfishness and aggression (Pontifical Council for the Family, 1995, 16 p. 13).

According to the Council of Major Superiors for Women Religious in the United States (2017), shared community life is an essential component of the consecrated life and it is the place where the evangelical counsels are principally lived as a witness to the loving communion with Christ, the Church and one another. The Code of Canon Law n. 602, states that life in communities of consecrated persons must be of mutual assistance among the members in order to enable them realize their vocation (Coriden, Green, Heintschel, Canon Law Society of America and Catholic Church, 1985).

Many consecrated persons are inspired by the idea of an authentic community (where affective love of neighbour thrives and is fostered) yet, they are discouraged by their failure to enact it (Billy 2014). Pope Francis repeatedly exhorts consecrated persons to walk the path of charity which leaves not room for ‘..criticism, gossip, envy, jealousy, hostility as ways of acting..’ (Francis, 2013, 3). Rego (2015), superior general of the Passionist Congregation, in listening to his brothers’ experiences of community life highlights a longing for companionship, acceptance, respect, harmony and working together on one hand; but also observes loneliness, isolation, individualism, independence and excessive privacy on the other hand.

In view of all the above the researcher found it important to examine and rediscover the Evangelical Counsel of Chastity a means of living affective love in religious community. Loving in community is evident in but not limited to affective sentiments expressed in: mutual trust and openness to each other, mutual respect and acceptance of one another, companionship and sharing, teamwork and effective communication.

## **Literature Review on the Evangelical Counsel of Chastity as a means of living affective love in community**

Chastity is in reality, a spirit of detachment with regard to our emotional life whereby we move from self-centeredness to deeper union with God and with His people (Goudling, 2012). Those who embrace the evangelical counsel of chastity, do not only practice continence. They are essentially dedicated to a life of witness in but not limited to their community, to the kind of love described in the first letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 13:3-8). The Evangelical Counsel of Chastity, is meant to root one's affective centre in Jesus Christ whereby one becomes free to care for others in a personal way, with tenderness, mercy and love (McGlinchey (2014).

Chastity, as such, allows one to put in an exclusive way their human affectivity at the service of love for God and for others, (Gnada, 2012), a love which Benedict XVI in *Deus Caritas Est*, describes as “the love which God lavishes upon us, and which we, in turn, must share with others” (Benedict XVI, 2005, n. 1). A conspicuous research gap noted in the literature reviewed in this section is that it does not address the concrete and practical experiential aspects of consecrated persons' life of the vow of chastity as an authentic commitment to love and the extent to which they embrace this understanding of the vow.

On chastity as augmenting mutual trust and openness, literature reviewed revealed that openness and trust go hand in hand, in the sense that openness is a necessary quality for the development of trust. (Sofield et al 1998). Hammett & Sofield (1981), assert that trust is crucial in relationships and that growth happens only when persons have a capacity to receive and give trust. Serrao (2014), attests to openness as being a ‘must’ attitude for those living in religious community. The Pontifical Council for the Family recognizes that, formation for chastity cannot be separated from the striving to nurture virtues like openness and respect (Pontifical Council for the Family 1995, n. 55). The extent to which trust and openness are lived in religious communities today is subject to inquiry.

With reference to chastity as enhancing mutual respect and acceptance, Inigo 2015, notes that in today's multi-cultural world, authentic religious communities are marked by an acceptance of other cultures, respect for cultural differences and the commitment to building healthy interactions between persons and cultures. Respect and acceptance of other cultures begins with mutual respect and acceptance of one another in community.

The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (1994) in *Fraternal life in Community*, invites religious communities to cultivate mutual respect that accommodates both weak and strong personalities (n. 40 b). It affirms that such a respect prompts creativity while reaching out with responsibility to others;

reinforcing harmony. John Paul II in his description of ‘the spirituality of communion’ contends that acceptance implicates seeing our fellow brethren as ‘part of us’ within the mystical body of Christ (John Paul II, 2001).

On Chastity as reinforcing companionship and sharing, Pope Francis highlights the importance of companionship and sharing to every Christian, an invitation that runs even deeper for consecrated persons in community (Francis, 2013, n. 88). The love of Christ has been poured into their hearts (Catholic Church, 1995, n. 733), and therefore they are empowered to love as prescribed by St. Paul in his hymn to love (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13). Our being created in God’s image is seen in our inclination to communion (Catholic Church 1995, n. 1702), relatedness and companionship. Pope Francis reminds contemplative women that communion and unity in community are nurtured through sharing (Francis, 2016, n.26).

Gomba (2010), notes that celibacy involves sharing in community which in her view means allowing “others, in the deepest part of one’s life, stories and relationships.” She continues to note that sharing means moving “beyond the surface, to deal with feelings of anger, fear, losses and disappointments” as well as to take part in each other’s joyful and successful moments (p. 45, 46). Fernandez (2002), notes that sharing is at the heart of community living since God reveals Himself both to individuals and to the community.

With regard to chastity as facilitating teamwork and communication, Paul in his first letter to the church in Corinth, urges the members to put aside their differences and work together (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 1: 10 – 17). Later in his analogy of the body (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12: 12 – 27), he views the faithful as unique persons who make up the one body of Christ. Both passages underscore, the importance of working together towards a common goal; this is what teamwork entails. According to Lencioni (2014), “Teamwork remains the one sustainable opportunity for transformational improvement that has been largely untapped.”

Pope Francis’ message for the 49<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day (2015), draws us to reflect on the mystery of the visitation (Luke 1: 39 – 45), pointing to the encounter of the two women, as a model for true communication. Communication entails listening with respect to what the other is saying as well as respectful self-expression and sharing of one’s desires and visions (Gomez, 2006). Schneiders (2011), maintains that consecrated persons can only settle the pressures of relationships by centring their love on God alone even as they strive to love their fellow brethren. The Evangelical Counsel of Chastity is at the heart of this centring. Inigo 2015 in addressing the challenges of the consecrated life sadly observes an erosion of both teamwork and effective communication in religious communities.

The vast documentation on chastity is worth acknowledging. That chastity supports affective love in community is indisputable and quite clear in the literature reviewed. However, the elements of affective love in religious communities have received little attention. This observation was insightful and informed this study.

### Research Design and Methodology

The study adopted a convergent parallel mixed method research design, combining both the qualitative and quantitative research techniques. The study focused on the views of consecrated women on the Evangelical Counsel of Chastity as a means of Living Affective Love in Community.

The target population for this study consisted of religious women from 10 religious congregations living along Lang'ata South Road, Nairobi. The participants included 2 major superiors, 5 formators, 51 perpetually professed religious women and 26 temporary professed religious women.

The data collection instruments included: questionnaires and an interview guide. A total of 77 questionnaires were distributed to both perpetually and temporary professed sisters. 7 interviews were conducted by the researcher on the major superiors and formators. The questionnaires yielded a 98.7% response rate while the interviews obtained a 100% response rate. The results of the study are in line with the guiding research questions.

### Results

This section presents the results of the study in line with the guiding research questions.

#### On the Evangelical Counsel of Chastity as a means of Living Affective Love

With reference to the understanding of Chastity, the respondents in the study expressed the view that the vow is a gift which enables persons to reach out to all in love. As to how this understanding translates into the actual living of the vow the study revealed that there are contradictions. Examining the vow of Chastity from the perspective of focusing more on prohibition and perfect control of sexual desires, the findings of the study revealed that prohibition and perfect control is not the main focus of the vow. A smaller number of participants of this study saw the vow as restrictive and centring on the control of sexual desires. This finding is illustrated in table 1.

**Table 1: The Focus of Chastity**

<b>Respondents</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>U</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Total</b>
Temporary Professed	3	5	2	5	11	26
Perpetually Professed	8	8	3	14	17	50

Having explored the vow of Chastity as a gift which frees persons to love unconditionally, the findings of this study revealed that the majority of the respondents were convinced that the vow frees persons to love. Whether this understanding denotes that the actual loving of others is fostered in the community or not, is subject to further study, for as revealed in the interviews, some discrepancies exist in communities.

The investigation into the vow of Chastity as a confining aspect of the religious life, which is hard to keep, revealed that the majority of the respondents were of the opinion that the vow is not confining or hard to keep. It is however worrying to note that a few of the participants expressed that the vow is confining and difficult to observe. This finding is showed in table 2:

**Table 2: On Chastity as Confining**

<b>Respondents</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>U</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Total</b>
Temporary	2	8	1	4	11	26
Professed						
Perpetually	6	11	3	11	19	50
Professed						

Concerning the description of the vow of Chastity, the findings of the study established that the vow is a gift from God, which enables one to love self, God and others, and that it concerns loving relationships expressed in affectivity. Nevertheless, as expressed by the interviewees, the description does not always fit into the lived reality in religious communities.

### **Chastity as Enhancing Mutual Trust and Openness**

The results of this study established that the vow of chastity enables one to feel loved and not bound exclusively to anyone. Regarding chastity as enhancing belonging and free sharing of affectivity with all, the findings of this study affirmed that the vow supports a sense of belonging and sharing of affectivity in the community. Nonetheless some inconsistencies were articulated by the interviewees, pointing to a lack trust and openness in communities.

With reference to chastity as promoting freedom in sharing one's talents, the study asserted that the vow indeed enhances one's freedom to developing and sharing their endowments. Still, some contradictions voiced by the interviewees in the expression of trust and openness in community. About ways in which chastity augments mutual trust and openness, the study found out that chastity does so for the reason that it frees the heart from egoistic tendencies.

### **Chastity as Promoting Mutual Respect and Acceptance**

The investigation into the vow of chastity as respect for other people's uniqueness and unconditional love for them, established that the vow promotes mutual respect and acceptance. Some interviewees however reported that, respectful relationships often lack in communities thus pointing to the need to intensify formation for chastity. On the subject of chastity as facilitating self-respect in interpersonal relationships, the study's findings affirm that the vow promotes self-respect. With reference to ways in which



chastity reinforces mutual respect and acceptance, the findings of this study revealed that the vow helps one to appreciate self and others as created in God's image and likeness. The majority of the respondents also expressed the view that the vow brings about the acceptance of one's limitations and those of others, enables one to appreciate and have reverence towards other people's ideas, views and talents, and enhances the observance of confidentiality and keeping of healthy boundaries in interpersonal relationships.

### **Chastity as Reinforcing Companionship and Sharing**

The findings of the exploration of the vow of chastity as facilitating sharing of companionship in a non-exploitative manner, show that the vow supports companionship in a non-exploitative manner. However, misgivings raised by some of the interviewees on how this understanding lacks in real practice. About chastity as fostering listening and sharing of joys and sorrows, the results of this study stated fittingly that the vow encourages listening and sharing.

Regarding ways in which chastity fosters companionship and sharing, the findings of this study affirmed that the vow does so by: building a genuine community, where there is listening, support, empathy and presence, as well as opening persons to give themselves to others in love and receive others in love.

### **Chastity as Facilitating Teamwork and Effective Communication**

On chastity as enabling persons to work together towards a common goal, the results of this study highly affirmed the vow as fostering a longing to work together. Similarly, the findings of the study indicate that the Evangelical Counsel of chastity facilitates teamwork and enhances effective communication. Notwithstanding, there were some reservations expressed by some of the participants who were interviewed, as they questioned the extent to which this understanding is translated into actual living.

The results of this study affirmed that the vow opens up persons to dialogue, enabling them to share their ideas and giftedness as well as welcome those of others, fosters giving of support and encouragement to one another when working together and brings about unity of minds and hearts for a common goal. The study went further to indicate concrete ways in which the vow promotes teamwork and effective communication.

### **Proposals for Chastity as a means of Living Affective Love in the Community**

The results of the study articulated that the vow helps one to give and receive fraternal correction in the spirit of charity; facilitates forgiveness and compassion towards self and others as well as love for enemies; aids the resolution of conflicts; fosters healthy self-identity and self-understanding, thus enabling one to understand others and destroys cliques, gossip and slander. From the interviews, it was clear that the vow of chastity is a means of living affective love in the community is supported by Prayer, Discernment, Community life, Spiritual Accompaniment and Sacraments.

### **Conclusions**

The study discovered that majority of consecrated women have an adequate understanding of the Evangelical Counsel of chastity as a means of living affective love in community. The findings revealed the participants understood that the vow of chastity is at the service of the affective components of love such as: mutual trust, openness, mutual respect, acceptance, companionship, sharing, teamwork and effective

communication. It was however evident from the interviews that there are discrepancies as to how this understanding is translated to actual living of the counsel of chastity in community. It was clear that a gap exists between the understanding of the vow and how it is actually lived in community.

## **Recommendations**

This study recommends that in on-going formation programmes, formators must place emphasis on the Evangelical Counsel of Chastity as a means of living affective love. It also suggests that Institutions engaged in the training of formators should include strategies that help formators deal with taboo issues, which may prevent them from processing issues of sexuality with openness and freedom.

The study also proposes that for effective formation in the ideals of chastity in initial formation, formators must highlight the vow as a gift and grace given. In addition, the study recommends for both initial and on-going formation programmes, the immediate and continual updating in the area of formation in chastity as a way of incorporating and staying up-to-date with theological, psychological and sociological on-going developments on the vow.

On chastity as enhancing Mutual Trust and Openness, the study recommends that actions and guidelines be formulated in initial formation by formators to complement what is taught theoretically. Furthermore, the study proposes provision of professional counselling to individuals in both initial and on-going formation who may be having undealt with issues of trust and openness.

Additionally, the study also advocates that at all times, and most especially in initial formation, formators should endeavour to create and uphold conducive environments which nurture trust and openness. Also, the study advises that motivational programmes for religious persons in on-going formation be put in place so as to support commitment to the vowed life.

On chastity as promoting Mutual Respect and Acceptance the study recommends for both initial and on-going formation, a consistent emphasis on the value of the Eucharist, prayer, spiritual reading, reconciliation and spiritual accompaniment by formators, in the tapping of Chastity's true essence as perfect love. A provision of concrete opportunities for consecrated persons to access the Sacrament of Reconciliation and spiritual accompaniment should be made available by formators. The study also proposes that formators in initial formation should foster self-formation in the candidates.

On chastity as Reinforcing Companionship and Sharing, the study recommends that formators should reinforce theoretical formation for chastity with practical ways of building companionship and sharing. In addition to this, the study proposes that



formators and formative communities should strive to be role models in companionship and sharing.

Moreover, the study also suggests that formators and all those who facilitate formation keep themselves updated on current developments on the vow of chastity to avoid inculcating in candidates what was the traditional approach. In addition, the study calls for the use of psychology in both initial and on-going formation to help augment formation for chastity. For instance, skills like listening could be taught and practiced to enhance companionship and sharing. It also recommends the cautious immersion of candidates into the modern world followed by reflective accompaniment with formators as a way of helping them develop creative ways of living the vow of chastity amidst challenges.

On chastity as Facilitating Teamwork and Effective Communication, the study recommends that formators should be open to maximizing the use of psychology in imparting the values of teamwork and effective communication in the formation for chastity. Additionally, the study also proposes that religious communities constantly revisit their founding charism to draw the vigour of their founders in facing the challenges of a modern world while remaining true to their particular spirit.

On Proposals for chastity as a means of Living Affective Love in the Community, the study recommends that formators should be thorough in the formation for chastity, whereby theoretical formation is augmented by some practical ways of imparting the concepts taught. Besides this, the study proposes that formators should use the strategy of close and personal accompaniment of candidates for the reason that growth in chastity is a progressive journey, which is unique for each person.

Additionally, the study suggests that young professed religious be provided with mentors to help them navigate the path of chastity wisely and fruitfully. Moreover, the study advocates that formators and formative communities should seek earnestly to motivate the young on nurturing an enduring longing for God who is indwelling and allow themselves to be moved by Him; the ultimate source of Perfect Love.

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