

**Institute of Spirituality and religious Formation**  
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**AUTHENTIC WITNESS IN RELIGIOUS LIFE: A CASE  
STUDY OF THE SISTERS OF THE SACRED HEART OF  
JESUS**

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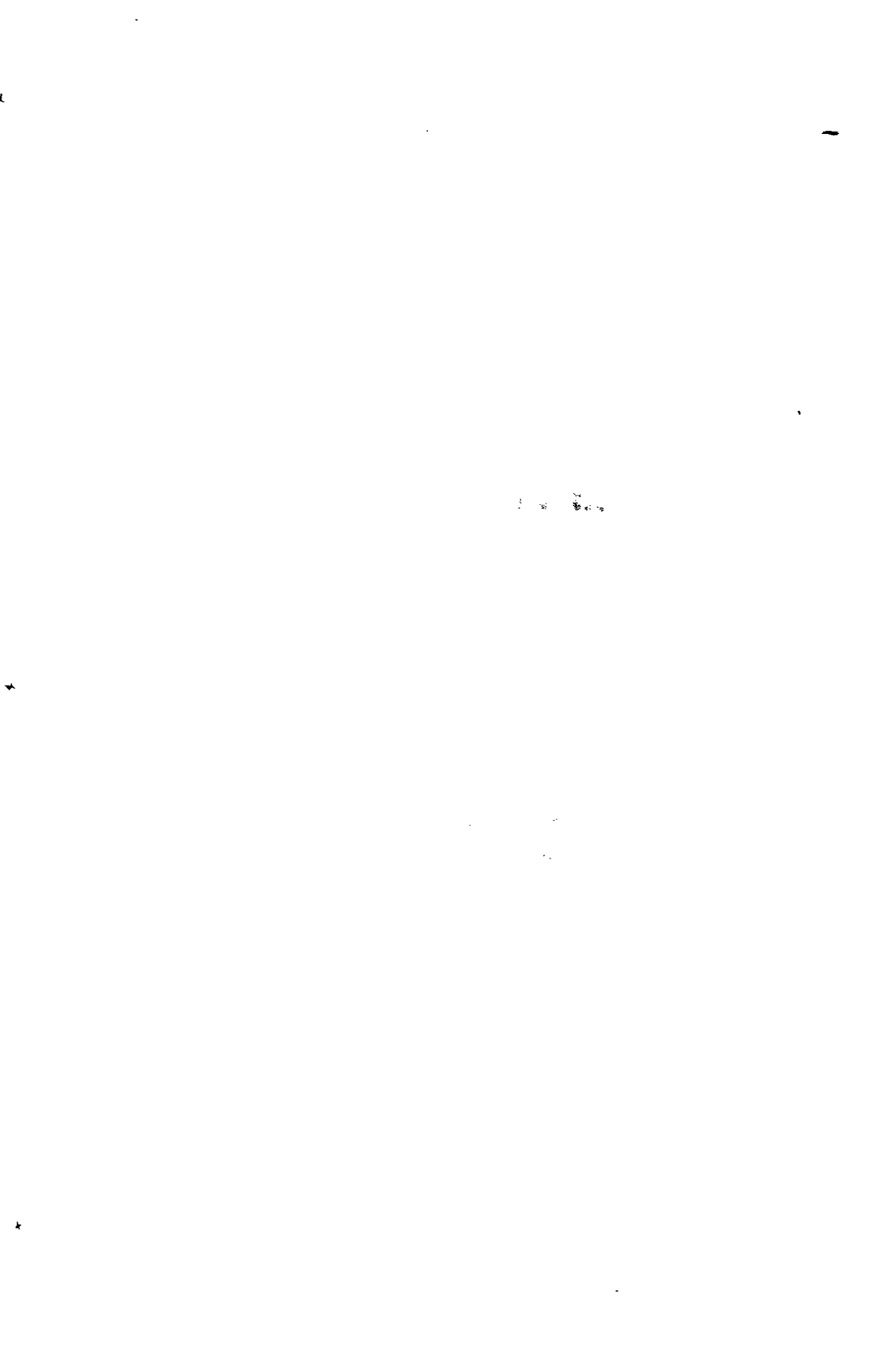
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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to my parents, the congregation of the Sisters of the sacred Heart of Jesus and Religious all over the world who are striving to be authentic witnesses.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Filled with joy I thank the Almighty God for his countless blessings upon me for leading me through this my period of studies. I sincerely express my deep gratitude and appreciation to my congregation who gave me the opportunity.

My sincere thanks goes to my Tutor, Rev. Fr. Quirine Ong'om, AJ whose patience and guidance and insight brought this work to completion. My gratitude also goes to Sr. Loretta Brennan who has been a wonderful Directress and a mentor. Without forgetting my gratitude goes to Br. John Carrig, CM and Fr. Sean Barry who proof read this work to make sure that the grammatical standard is confirmed.

My thanks also goes to all my friends and classmates whose support and encouragement enabled me to come to the completion of this work. May God bless you all.

## STUDENT' DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this long essay is my original work achieved through my personal reading, scientific research method and critical reflections. It is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Diploma in Religious Formation. It has never been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit. All sources have been cited in full and acknowledged.

Signed:

  
\_\_\_\_\_

Name of Student:

SR. JUSTINE NWANKWO

Date:

12/4/2005

*This project has been submitted for examination with my approval as the college supervisor.*

Signed:

  
\_\_\_\_\_

Name of Supervisor:

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12/4/2005

## General Introduction

It is a common saying that the people of today are in search of witnesses rather than teachers, and if teachers are sought, they are not only teachers but witnesses too. Hence, in the midst of men and women of this generation, so immersed in the absolute, we are called to be witnesses, not just witnesses but authentic witnesses, witnesses to the invisible in a secularized society, which too often excludes every transcendental Dimension. We must be constant reminders of that destiny, which takes place in time but has eternity as its goal; witnessing by our lives the necessary direction of our existential course. Our vocation as religious which places us as chosen forerunners of humankind must be able to find the model and anticipation of that which it is also called to be in spite of its burdens and its compromises. For an effective and eloquent movement to be an authentic Witness, it is good to search and know what it means and entails to be one

The purpose of this work is to describe some of these aspects. This long essay comprises of three chapters. Chapter one deals with the meaning of authentic witness. It covers the understanding of authentic witness in the Old Testament as walking with God, keeping the Law, and doing God's will. Then in the New Testament it treats authentic under Jesus and ST. Paul and also as living the Gospel values. The chapter also covers the understanding of authentic witness in traditional Africa as a matured person with integrity and living the cultural values. All these subheadings reflect on the meaning of authentic witness as a person with integrity of life, who practices justice, honesty, goodness, uprightness etc.

Chapter two deals with the meaning of religious life in the light of authentic witness, as a call to holiness, a life of prayer, a life lived in community, a vowed life, bringing out how religious life can be a way of witnessing authentically and the major challenges facing

religious life in the process of witnessing authentically. While chapter three describes how the lifestyle of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus as an indigenous congregation has been striving to witness authentically to its congregational Charism.

# CHAPTER ONE

## AUTHENTIC WITNESS

### 1.0 Introduction

The key terms of the topic are the two key words “authentic” and “witness” and this chapter will be based on them. My intention is to investigate in this chapter the meaning of authentic witness, beginning by defining and mentioning briefly on the separate words in order to come to a concrete meaning of authentic. To deepen and support this meaning I will also look into the Biblical and African understanding of authentic witness. This is in attempt to answer the question What is an authentic witness? In this section I will like to give a brief explanation of the meaning of authentic witness. Then at the end I will come with a definition of authentic witness.

### 1.1 The Meaning of Authentic Witness

In this section I will like to give a brief explanation of the meaning of authentic and witness. Then at the end I will come up with a definition of authentic witness.

#### 1.1.1 Authentic:

“Authentic” is an English word derived from Greek *authentikos*. Primarily or in origin it refers to a correspondence to the factual situation, a not being false or merely an appearance. Authentic reality without sham. A person is authentic to the extent that he or she lives the truth, conforms his or her mind, words, actions to what is the mind reflects reality

and his or her speech reflects the mind. Synonyms therefore are honesty, fidelity, reliability, trustworthiness, genuine, actual.”<sup>1</sup> Webster’s New International Dictionary defines the word authentic as the “representation of facts. Accurately, reliably, credible, true based on original facts or substantial tradition as opposed to purely imaginative representative.”<sup>2</sup>

An authentic man or woman therefore is one who measures up to real or factual situation, he or she knows and professes him or herself to be neither more or less than he or she actually is. He or she is single minded in his or her pursuits, for he or she operates with the pure motivation of eating and drinking and doing all else for the glory of God (1 Cor.10: 31), a thing easy to say but impossible to do without its being a divine gift. He or she accepts the gospel whole, not simply the popular, pleasant part of it. He or she welcomes correction because he knows himself to be ignorant of many things and a sinner besides (Prov.9: 7-9). He is patient under rejection for he knows that those who do live fully in conformity to Christ Jesus are sure to be persecuted (2 Tim 3:12). He or she is unafraid to speak out the truth, the unpopular truth (2 Cor 4:2). Especially is he authentic because he is a total lover of God and love brings all the other ingredients to authenticity (I cor.13: 4-7).<sup>3</sup>

### **1.1.2 Witness**

“Witness”- complex (verb, person, thing) comes from a root meaning, “to be in mind” A martyr is one who remembers and can tell about some thing. In non-biblical Greek, the proper share of the term is the legal one, that is trial or legal transactions. The witness gives personal testimony to events relations, persons and so on. In a more general use,

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<sup>1</sup> T. TUBAY, *A Biblical Theology of Discernment*, 15.

<sup>2</sup> Webster New International Dictionary

witnessing may refer to truths or views that are proclaimed with conviction but cannot be verified empirically.<sup>4</sup> The expression “witness” to bear witness, testimony is a household word in the New Testament. The basic word for witness in Greek is *martus*, which is derived from the Law courts and is already found in classic Greek as a designation for one who has observed an event and can give proof and to establish where liability does or does not lie. Already in classical antiquity, however, the word means not only a witness to facts but also a witness to truth, that is, one who proclaim truths, stands up for his convictions, expresses his opinion and gives reasons for them.<sup>5</sup> John A Hardon in *Modern Catholic Dictionary* means the same thing when he says:

Witness is the one who can give evidence based on personal and immediate knowledge of fact, event or experience he also mentioned that the Christian concept adds to the popular notion the idea of religious experience to which a believer testifies by his life, words and actions and thus gives inspirations and example to others by his testimony. Implicit in Christian witness is also the element of courage in giving testimony either because they are not favorably disposed or because they are openly hostile to the message of faith being proposed.<sup>6</sup>

A witness is a person who calls attention to something other than him or herself, one who is called upon to give or to be an evidence of something. All true religious witness is an exteriorization of inner commitment; it transmits truth to others in a living way. A witness is a person totally given to God and his fellow men. There are three elements in this Christian witness: message, and signs to convince, divine help to awaken and draw others to God. Snyder Gehman agreed with this by saying:

“A witness is one who is faithful and firm in proclaiming the truth in his or her daily life without fear or doubt because of his or her

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<sup>3</sup> T. TUBAY, *A Biblical Theology of Discernment*, 10.

<sup>4</sup> B. M. METZGER - M. D. COGAN, *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*.

<sup>5</sup> B. WOLFANG – F. SCHISSLER. *Handbook of Catholic Theology*, 100.

<sup>6</sup> J.A.HARDON, *Modern Catholic Dictionary*.

conviction of the truth. A translator of truth to others in a living way without fear or doubt but in humility and convincing faithfulness. He is as the Letter to the Hebrews puts it the one who in the face of danger testifies to the truth of God (Heb.10: 11-12). Witness is the communication of a directly perceived reality to another person so that the later may likewise have access to it. The truth of this witness or testimony shown by the fact that “the one witnessing stands up for it in his or her person.”<sup>7</sup>

From the above brief explanation of the two key terms or words authentic and witness we can say that authentic witness is a trustworthy person or a person of integrity. Synonyms therefore are honesty, goodness, uprightness, principle, purity, incorruptibility, trustworthiness, genuineness, legitimate, authoritative, justice, courageous, rectitude, honor, sincere. This goes with the virtue: soundness, coherence, cohesion, completeness, unity and wholeness.

## **1.2 Old Testament and Authentic Witness**

In the above section we had defined an authentic witness as a trustworthy person or a person with integrity. Here we shall look at the Old Testament understanding of authentic witness as meaning “walking with God”, “keeping the Law” and “doing God’s will.” Some specific figures in the Old Testament will be used as examples of those who live the life of integrity. The examples are Enoch, Noah, Joshua, Tobit, David, Jonah.

### **1.2.1 Authentic Witness as Walking with God**

It is only a person of integrity who can confidently walk with God. Different figures in the Old Testament walked with God. This phrase was basically used for two figures, Enoch and Noah.

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<sup>7</sup> S. GEHMANS, *The New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible*.

Enoch (Gen 5:21-23) walked with God. He related very closely to God. He received God's favor of a long life and at a certain stage God took him for he walked close with Him.

Another person who walked with God was Noah. In Gen.6: 9-12 we read that

Noah was a good man, an upright man among his contemporaries and he "walked with God". Commenting on this *The New Interpreters Bible* mentioned that Noah not only measured up to certain relationship with God and has done justice in various dimensions of his life, but has acted blameless as compared to his contemporaries. This does not mean that Noah remains sinless but that he is a person of high integrity.<sup>8</sup>

Noah walked with God. That means he related very closely and in an unusual way with God that testified to his intimacy with God. As an individual he lived an outstanding life in the midst of a fallen world. Though the world around him was falling apart, he never allowed himself to be negatively influenced. So he found favor with God because of his steadfastness. He was compared to his contemporaries because he surely kept to the ordinances of God. So he remained close and walked with God, thus witnessing to Him authentically.<sup>9</sup>

## 1.2.2 Authentic Witness as Keeping the Law

Joshua (Jos 24:22) called the people to awareness of their vow to serve the Lord their God by reminding them that they were witnesses and thus accountable.<sup>10</sup> In Psalm 119, the Law is the supreme "Testimony," or monument to God. God established the Law and gave it to the people as a true and faithful witness for righteous living.<sup>11</sup> The Lord Yahweh spoke to Solomon and said, "for your part, if you walk before me in innocence of heart and in honesty

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<sup>8</sup> *The New Interpreters Bible*, 390.

<sup>9</sup> *The New Interpreters Bible*, 390.

<sup>10</sup> J. HASTINGS D., *Dictionary of the Bible*, 105.

like your father David. If you do everything that I commanded you and keep my Laws and my ordinances (1 King 2: 2-5)”<sup>12</sup>

The kings of Israel are invited and are supposed to walk with God and keep to his Laws and ordinance.

Tobit is another upright man who saw the need to instruct his own son to live an upright life and walk close to God. When he was about to die he sat his son down and instructed him as follows

“My child be faithful to the Lord all your days. Never entertain the will to sin or to transgress his Laws. Do good work all the days of your life, never follow ways that are not upright; for if you act in truthfulness, you will be successful in all your actions as everyone is who practices what is upright” (Tob. 4:5-6)

Tobit gives Tobiah a general rule for life to remember God and keep the Law, to seek good and avoid evil. To remember God is to seek God’s presence, to seek God’s activity in one’s life. Awareness of God’s presence then forms the foundation for discerning and according to the theory of retribution results in reward.

All the instructions Tobit gave his son Tobias are lasting directions and collections of principles to guide his relationship toward others, toward himself and above all toward God. He is to be honest in his dealings with others, especially those who work for him. So Tobiah was advised to practice justice because to relate well with neighbors is equivalent to relating well with God. His life is to be based on wisdom and discipline because the reward of his actions will be given according to his conduct. He was to be guided by the golden rule, “what you hate do not do to anyone”.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> B. METZEER – M.COOGAN, *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*

<sup>12</sup> R.S.V Genesis 9:4

<sup>13</sup> *The New Interpreters Bible*, 1016

The practical aspects of Tobit's speech to Tobiah were that he affirmed the theory of retribution, which is the reward of present life. That faithfulness to God will bring Tobiah great wealth. Faithfulness to God is defined by three elements. First, Tobiah is to fear God, secondly he is to maintain loving reverence in his relationship to God and thirdly elements are the negative and positive consequence of fear of the Lord: avoiding sin and doing good (cf Tob.4: 20-21)

David's forgiveness of Saul is another aspect of integrity linked to authentic witness, as keeping the Law, which I would like to touch upon David is a man of integrity in the face of his conflict with Saul. He is God fearing despite the fact that Saul was planning to kill him. When David had the opportunity to kill Saul, he never went ahead. Why? Because he believed and saw in Saul the God in whom he believed. David sees in Saul the "the Lord's anointed" (twice v.5). This also shows knowledge on David's part that to strike Saul is to strike the office itself. He showed full respect for the office of "the Lord's anointed." when he spoke to Saul because he is himself the Lord's anointed (I Sam 24:1-2). In this story, David's final moment of receiving power is enabled by forgiveness, compassion. He broke the cycle of violence and vengeance, and as well a new possibilities an act of someone who walks with God and who respects the Law.

David's repentance, when the prophet Nathan confronted him concerning his taking of Uriah's wife, proved him to be a man of integrity. It is only a person with integrity who can accept his weakness and truly and humbly seek forgiveness.

"David said to Nathan 'I have sinned against Yahweh.' Nathan then said to David, Yahweh, for his part, forgive your sin; you are not to die. But since you have outraged Yahweh by doing this, the born to you will die. And Nathan went home." (2 Sam 12: 13-15a)

The shock of Nathan's dramatic accusation "You are the man!" is almost equaled by David's immediate response to God's judgement, "I have sinned against the Lord!" David has not lost the capacity to choose for the Lord, and the one he has taken, confession and repentance. Power defers to piety. David did not tum on Nathan or reject Nathan's hash words. He did not assert his authority or attempt to justify or deny. His confession is as simple and direct as was the moment of recognition that follows the parable. David is the man; David is a sinner. David has dealt violence and death and violence and death are to return as his judgement. But in his confession, life continues to assert itself.<sup>14</sup>

Nathan announces that David's sin has been put aside, and he will not die. God's forgiveness can be as simple and direct as David's repentance. But the continuing claim of life made possible by David's response does not remove all consequence of sin. What David has done cannot be undone. Life can be reclaimed and continue in the midst of the consequences of sin, but the tragic reverberations from David's sin will continue to be felt in his family. David has utterly scorned the Lord and he may live, but the child conceived by Bathsheba from her union with David will die.<sup>15</sup>

### **1.2.3 Authentic Witness as doing God's Will**

The prophets of Israel came to know God's will and their own call through an experience that is probably best compared to a mystical experience. It was an experience of oneness with God in which God's mind and will entered in and take over the mind and will of the prophet who not only know God's will but he became extremely sensitive to the

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<sup>14</sup> *The interpreters Bible*, 1283.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 1293.

realities of life that surrounded him and was able to see clearly what was in keeping with God's will and what was not. This experience broke the prophet out of his old mind frame and let him see things around him in a completely different light. This transcending experience of God gives the prophet the conviction and courage to remain a fearless proclaimer of the message from God to his people. They have no doubt concerning God's will for the people. They fear no rejection and proclaim fearlessly what the Lord had demanded of them to say to the people even when all are against them. For example Elijah Tishbite. (I King 18:20-46)

Elijah after getting the message from Yahweh God did not hesitate to carry out the instruction. With zeal, courage and conviction he faced the prophets of Baal, though they were many in number, and he alone, with conviction that God will prove himself without doubt called on the God he believed in who answered him and as a result win the people over for the true God.

### **1.3 New Testament and Authentic Witness**

Throughout the New Testament the believers are instructed that their witness is to be true and faithful, reflected both in speech and life style. In the New Testament the witness theme is central to the gospel. The different authentic witnesses to Jesus present their testimony to refute the hostile charge of his enemies. Here we are going to look at the authentic witness living the Gospel values, Jesus and authentic witness and St. Paul and authentic witness.

### 1.3.1 Jesus and Authentic Witness

The faithful and true witness to the Father is Christ. He is the great witness. He came into the world precisely “to bear witness to the truth” (Jn 18:37), which he had received from the Father. Jesus’ message was inseparable from his very personhood. Jesus is the supreme witness to God and his Love. Jesus is true and faithful and so is his message. A response is demanded.<sup>16</sup>

“What I have told you from the outset about you I have much to say and much to judge but the one who sent me is true, and what I declare to the world I have learnt from him”. (Jn 8:26)

Jesus came to call attention not to himself but to the Father. And since he is God the Son as well as man, the witness he gives must be identical with that of the Father. Christ witnessing authentically to his father challenged the Pharisees and scribes for not believing, as well as not witnessing to the truth. Not living out what they preach, they as the teachers of the Law. He compelled and challenged the believers throughout the world to witness to Him by living out the Gospel values. They were instructed that their witness is to be true and faithful, reflected both in speech and life style. The elements of Christian witness are obviously verified in Christ’s witness. He invites his witnesses to love and forgive their enemies. He gave them an example, He proclaimed and demonstrated from the pulpit of the cross, proving that love is as strong as death.

As Jesus hung on the cross, he thought of himself only so he can surrender completely to the Father and seek his honor. He is all love and strength of soul for us and for

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<sup>16</sup> F. GRANT- H. ROWLEY, *Dictionary of the Bible*, 96.

all those who stand beneath the cross and look up to him. Jesus' strength of soul is expressed in the prayer: "Not my will but yours be done"(Luke 22:42).

Whatever he does was for the testification of the Father. His strong love is the single flame in which love for the Father and for us human beings fuses. The high point of Jesus' love unto death on the cross as an authentic witness of the father is his love of his enemies. His love is stronger than hatred, than all hostility. Here we see clearly the meaning of love of one's enemies and of reconciling love. This is the love for which his heart beats till the last end. This is the love he calls his followers to witness. By so doing they live out the gospel. This testifies that the love of God in Christ is here and now victorious.

### **1.3.2 Paul and Authentic Witness**

Paul employed the legal concept when he bore witness to the Galatians of their care for him.(Gal4:15)

In a more technical sense of witness, he reminded Timothy not to act too hastily in accusing the elder without at least two or three witness(1 Tim. 5: 19). He instructs Timothy on the right way that the alternative is to be clearly taught. This is the primary responsibility of the "fine minister of Christ Jesus." One who serve.

### **1.3.3 Authentic Witness as Living the Gospel Values**

Jesus as the faithful and true authentic witness invites his followers to witness to him in words and truth by living out the gospel value in their day-to-day life. Here I will just illustrate some of the gospel values we are called to witness. It is part of the core message of the New Testament that "God loved us first and he loved and prayed for those who crucified him, he asked us to love our enemies. Love makes us inwardly strong. This is the strength that steadily and unswervingly draws upon the driving force and "carrying capacity of brave, vigilant love. Love is the most intimate and powerful force of all. It creates strength of soul

devoted to everything that serves Jesus” strong souled love has a sharp eye for the afflicted. His high point of love unto death on the cross was his love of his enemies. His love is stronger than hatred, than all hostility. Here we are taught clearly the meaning of love. This is love for which his heart beat till the last. We are called to do the same as his authentic witnesses. The following are some of the Gospel values:

**Moderation:** unless we bring some standards of evaluation to all our desires and to our whole lifestyle, we can never grow in the love of God and our neighbor. These standards must be above and beyond all merely human standards of measurement.

**Creative fidelity** is the mark of true love for God and all love comes from God. This is being ever alert and faithfully attentive to the signs of the times. It is marked by mutual care for discernment of the spirit and empathetic consideration for the late comer. Only if we grow in devoted solidarity and creative fidelity will we become the salt and leaven of history. In other words, fidelity becomes a powerful force in history.

**Perseverance:** points to the inner sources of energy and strong determination to live a good and moral life dedicated to God. Its concept is related to fidelity. Our fidelity is always being put to the test and is exposed to doubt and temptation. Those who open themselves to the grace of staying power or perseverance and constantly pray for it can say with the apostle to the gentiles “I can do all things through the help of him who strengthens me” (Phil 4:13)

**Generosity** is a sign of gratitude. It speaks of inner freedom. Everything that we are, that we can do and that we have is a precious gift from the love of God. We are called to remain generous, free to give and to receive for generous persons, all their possessions, capabilities and possibilities become a treasure stored up in heaven as they serve the needs of

others, honor them and make them happy. Generosity means giving out of inner most freedom for God and for one's neighbor. Generous people are free to the extent that they seek to honor, not themselves but those to whom they give.

**Justice** is a creation of love. We should always make room for the poor in our heart. The rich glutton in Luke 16: 19-31, who has no room in his heart for the poor, who can spare him neither attention nor a piece of bread, is barring himself from the kingdom of solidarity. It is not God who condemns the sinner. It is rather the unjust person himself, who has sinned against his fellow men and women and who in so far as possible turns the earth into hell, who excludes himself from salvation and from the kingdom of love.

The Gospel offers many examples of how Jesus taught people to concentrate on the commandment of love. No individual Law should hinder us from loving our neighbor. This point is given drastic expression when Jesus says: "the Sabbath was made for human kind, not humankind for the Sabbath According to the New Testament, it is a clear demonstration of what it means to be just.

**Sincerity** is a sign of upright behavior. Deep sincerity in everything we say and do in our lives is a lofty personal value. It is also a vital good for the whole community. Our honor before God has its roots and its dimension in our gratitude and fidelity before Him. It is not measured according to the external honor that we receive from men and women, if that is out of line with our inner honor. To be sincere in the fullest sense, means that we may not try to fool ourselves or anyone else by claiming something that does not fully correspond to the truth.

**Openness** is a precious talent and virtue which we are to witness. It contains and implies transparency. It has many significant dimensions: openness to the truth, readiness to

learn and to be transformed. Openness is above all a fundamental attitude towards God, his truth and his grace.

For the sake of limited space I can only mention that there are many Gospel values that have not been mentioned here, but we are expected to witness authentically to them. Among these are forgiveness, hospitality, unity, responsibility, courageousness, faithfulness, service, reconciliation and so on.

#### **1.4 Authentic Witness in African Tradition**

“Africans are very particular about authentic life. They believe that their personal immortality depend very much on how they live their lives in the society. Moral aptitude is very important to the Africans”.<sup>17</sup> Living and exhibiting a good life while alive is highly appreciated and cherished because it brings about the long remembrance of the person after death. This motivates every African community to strive and encourage its members to live a good life with perseverance in order to reach the fullness of human maturity and respectable end while they are still alive. Therefore authentic witness in the sense of traditional African will be the person of integrity who is matured and manifest the upright and balance living of the culture. Tradition and custom of the people in confidence and consistency. If they display an excellent well-integrated life here while they are still alive, they will be remembered long after their death. It is therefore the desire of every African community that its members reach the fullness of human maturity here on earth, live respectable life during their lifetime. Hence authentic witness in the sense of traditional Africa will be the upright and balance living of the people in confidence and consistency.

### 1.4.1 African Maturity and Authentic Witness

Maturity is a quality, which manifests itself in human behavior as a person expresses him/herself in various tasks in words and actions. It is not a bathing of one day, it develops gradually and enhances with experiences. In Africa traditional community the one who is to be regarded as a diverse stages of initiations rituals and ceremonies.<sup>18</sup>

A matured person in African traditional community will certainly be some one of great integrity and respect with dignified social recognition in the community increased. Such a person is looked up to as an authentic witness. The society looks at them as people of wisdom and custodians of the culture who can lead the society in the right direction.

Moral aptitude and integrity is very important to the Africans. For any one to be regarded as an authentic witness of the culture and tradition it means the person must have shown a high degree of human maturity in his behavior and approach of life, is confident in what he or she says and does. Ponders upon things before he speak or act is given insight and guided by wisdom in all.<sup>19</sup> A mature person must have the trace of some indispensable qualities such as prudence, obedient, justice, moral integrity, sincerity because by their way of living they direct and teach others without much words.

A mature person if he or she is an elder is the one whose moral and social life is undisputable. He is a well balance person who has succeeded to integrate relatively well all elements of human existence according to Kayoya a mature elder is the one who is sincere and loves sincerely, upright of heart and loves uprightness, tender and loves tenderness.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> J.S MBITI, *African Religious and Philosophy*, 25

<sup>18</sup> J. MUGAMBI – N. KIRIMA, *The African Heritage*.

<sup>19</sup> Q. K. ONGO'M, *Spirituality of African Traditional Religious* (cf lecture Note), 2003.

<sup>20</sup> M.KAYOYA, *My Father Footprints*, 8.

Such a matured person does not study a person but draw and communicates with him. When he speaks he does not reveal what is in his mind, but what is in his heart. This person had shown traits and qualities, which marks him out as a mature person. One who has drawn nearer to what is human perfection.

“A matured person who is an elder in African society takes the leading role and as well excels in virtue, goodness and uprightness in the community”<sup>21</sup>

As authentic witness with their maturity they play the great role in determining, shaping the destiny of their respective societies especially if they are recognized as elders. They are able to exercise their responsibility with prudence and integrity, wisdom, justice and hospitality such that their presence brings light with understanding and readiness to serve the community with joy for their good and the good of the community. They as matured men know and love their community, hence are community oriented.

These matured persons in African traditional society are regarded as men of wisdom. Their words and their advice are always listened to with respect and diligence. They have proper ethic principles of behavior so people look up to them and try to emulate them. Their organized and outstanding way of living their lives among others makes them appear as light to the others in the community. Their matured mind enables them to have a clear knowledge and understanding of what their custom, culture and tradition is all about and they, with carefulness and diligence, witness to it with conviction and fearlessness. Having the courage to critique and carry out their responsibility in the community without any trace of confusion. They are not afraid to correct any wrong or anyone neither convince and know the right and as well will know how to handle their stress in case of opposition.

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<sup>21</sup> Q. K. ONG'OM, *Spirituality of African Religion*.

## **1.4.2 Authentic Witness and African Culture**

In our above definition of authentic witness we said it is a matured person with integrity and moral uprightness. Now we shall look at the culture and tradition of the African people to discuss briefly on those expected to live in accordance to the culture and tradition.

Culture Linton defines culture as “The sum total of knowledge, attitude and habitual behavior patterns shared and transmitted by members of a particular society”.<sup>22</sup> Therefore culture is a way of life, which provide design for life or a plan to living. It forms the behaviors of a group giving them custom and traditions. So culture is so much tied up with human life and behavior.

Culture is very important because it gives the people their tradition, common sense, values, attitudes and even their sense of humor. When culture informs the lifestyle of the people in this way, it does so through the values and beliefs they have which motivates their behavior. Our culture also provides our worldview. That is the way we think, see things and act in it, making us behave in particular ways. In other words culture affects the way people experience and perceive, the way people understand and make things intelligible and the way people judge and evaluate as they search for the good about things.

In the culture of the African people sociality is considered basic to human nature and most adequately expressed in the community life. The community is regarded as a framework for realizing the potential of every individual. Emphasis therefore is placed on such communal values as solidarity, cooperation, mutual helpfulness, and interdependence and reciprocal obligations. At the same time however due recognition is given to the claims of individuality-individual initiative and responsibility. Balancing the claims of community

and individuality means both paying the necessary attention to one's own needs, interests, and goals and considering the needs and welfare of other members of the community in one's thought and action.<sup>23</sup>

#### 1.4.2.1 Cultural Values

For African people their cultural values are of great importance and they express appreciation for both communal and individual values. They encourage that an attempt must be made to strike a balance between individuality and communal way of doing things. Balancing the two systems of values means that one must have two responsibilities, to oneself as an individual and to the living according to the custom and traditions, which is not always easy. Some of the outstanding values are: respect for elders and each other, which is a very important oral value to the Africans. **Responsibility and hard working:** this is the principle of morality in African society. Here the responsibility means that one is expected to have a caring attitude or conduct that one feels one ought to adopt with respect to the well-being of another person or other persons. Such responsibility includes the responsibility to help others in distress, the responsibility to show concern for the welfare and needs of others, the responsibility not to harm others and so on.

**Moral uprightness:** African cultures place a high value on good character. Good character is the essence of the African moral system. In the context of moral life in the struggle to do the right things and to lead a moral life, the quality of a person's personal

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<sup>22</sup> Linton, (cf Understanding Culture and Human Society, 101)

<sup>23</sup> cf E . BOLAJI IDOWU, *African Traditional Religion*, 90.

character is of paramount importance. For it's from a persons character that all his or her actions radiate.

**Faithfulness to one's commitment** is confirmed by Jesse Mugambe 'For the African an individual is considered a full member of the community only when he has fulfilled all the established customs and tradition of the community'.<sup>24</sup> And this proves the person a community oriented person which is also a cultural value for no individual is to isolate him or herself from the other members of the community. In support to J.S Mbiti who said " I am because we are"<sup>25</sup>

**Honesty and God fearing** is another important value to the Africans, which leads one to life of integrity. They expect each other to remains sincere and pure in whatever they do for their good and the good of the community.

**Hospitality** in Africa is more than just entertaining a guest. It's a deeply ingrained value in the African worldview, practiced in every social, economic, political and religious structure of a community. Hospitality gives the community its identity. It's an ethical duty, a way of life. A hospitable person is known to be full of integrity, reliability, honesty, kindness and knowledge of his or her cultural practices. One's social position and leadership abilities are rated by it.<sup>26</sup> A hospitable person is expected to give the spontaneous warm reception of expected and unexpected guests, especially strangers characterized by welcoming rituals, discourse, feasting, celebration, parting speeches, presentation of gifts and the practice of accompaniment (escorting). Africans are honored to have visitors at any time of the day or night. No pre-arranged time is set, no calendars or watches are consulted, and no excuses are

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<sup>24</sup> J. MUGAMBI – N. KIRIMA, *The African Religious Heritage*, 15.

<sup>25</sup> J.S MBITI, *African Philosophy*.

<sup>26</sup> D. CHINCHEN, *The Art of Hospitality*, 474.

made for being too busy. The visitor is always welcome in Africa. In fact the more visitors the better.<sup>27</sup> Generosity and hard work is another value treasured in African society. Generosity in performing his or her duties.

## **1.5 Conclusion**

Authenticity is a key word whenever morality, ethics and virtue are concerned. Witnessing involves all these. Often enough people who are essentially good and eager to do the right thing remain half blind or asleep at the wheel when it comes to some personal Law. This isolated failure does not necessarily call into question the genuine or authenticity of their moral character or of their decision to follow the basic option for goodness, because they are persons with dignity and integrity. The struggle to reach the basic decision, to witness authentically, to have it take root and achieve fertility is what makes them authentic, reliable and increasingly radiant.

Getting to the deep meaning, authentic witness has brought us to a more clear rhythm of the person with integrity which yields the qualities of love, justice, sincerity and honesty, courageousness, wisdom, faithfulness, generosity and the virtues that goes with it. And we are able to name it. In different spheres that is as concrete meaning we came up with integrity which reflects in the Old Testament as walk with God, keeping the Law, doing the will of God while in the New Testament as living the gospel value and in African traditional understanding we reflected it as being a matured person with moral uprightness, who lives and witnesses to the culture and tradition of the people authentically.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 474

## CHAPTER TWO

### AUTHENTIC WITNESS IN RELIGIOUS LIFE

#### 2.0 Introduction

The previous chapter was based on the meaning of authentic witness in different backgrounds. The chapter enables us to understand that a person who witness authentically is a man or woman of integrity. In this chapter I am going to look at religious life in the light of authentic witness. In order to bring out how religious life can be a way of witnessing authentically and also the challenges that can be encountered as a result of this way of living.

#### 2.1 The Meaning of Religious Life

According to *Perfectae Caritatis* "Religious life is a stable form of life constituted by consecration to God through the evangelical counsels. The religious is the person who gives him/herself to God totally to live exclusively for him."<sup>28</sup> *Evangelical Testificatio* pointed out "The gift of self to God is "Total and irreversible"<sup>29</sup> while John Paul II expressed that "consecration is unconditional and absolute."<sup>30</sup>

The above definition revealed that the central and distinguishing mark of religious life is the totality of the consecration of a person to God. This consecration is a special one deeply rooted in the baptismal consecration and a more complete expression of it. The New Code of Canon Law sums up the teaching of Vatican II about religious life as a consecrated life in our day with the following words:

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<sup>28</sup> *Perfectae Caritatis*, 5

<sup>29</sup> *Evangelical Testificatio*, 7

Life consecrated by the profession of the evangelical counsels is a stable form of living which the faithful follow Christ more closely under the action of the Holy spirit are totally dedicated to God who is loved most of all so that having dedicated themselves to his honor the up building of the church and the salvation of the world by a new and special title, they strive for the perfection of charity in service to the kingdom of God and having become an outstanding sign in the church, they may foretell the heavenly glory.<sup>31</sup>

The canon in the light of the teaching highlights the importance and purpose of consecrated life as the total dedication or total reservation of the person to God in a way accepted by Him. It is a complete commitment willed by God and accepted by the person who wishing to belong entirely and exclusively to God, pledge himself or herself to the practice of the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience. A consequent duty is to make Jesus his/her way of life, to which he gave absolute eschatological value present in time and place. "Through the authentic witness of religious life his characteristics features are constantly made "visible" in the midst of the world, directing attention toward the mystery of the kingdom of God already at work in history even though it will reach completion only in heaven."<sup>32</sup>

From the above mentioned definitions I will now want to reflect individually on some of the points such as religious life as a consecrated life, vowed life, life of prayer, life lived in community a call to holiness.

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<sup>30</sup> cf HAN UR BALTHASAR, "Teologia Deli Istituti Seculari", 428-430

<sup>31</sup> The New Code of Canon Law, 573

<sup>32</sup> Pope John Paul, Vita Consecrata, I

### **2.1.1 Religious Life as consecrated Life**

Religious consecration is a covenant, which expresses a conscious and free response to the gratuitous call of God to live totally for him by the practice of the evangelical counsels. Relying on the love of Christ, the religious as an authentic witness gives him or her whole self to God and is committed to His service in a new and special way. Chosen and destined by the Father “to be holy and spotless, and to live through love in his presence” (Eph.1: 4) the religious as an authentic witness by living his or her consecration, contributes to the holiness of the church and serves as a sign of the church’s union with Christ.

Today especially in a world where men and women have become alienated from God, the religious as an authentic witness is called to reflect deeply into their life, becoming sure and aware of who they are and what is expected of him or her so that living his or her consecrated life awakens, his or her fellow men and women to a sense of God’s deep involvement with the universe and the living reality of Christ present within it.<sup>33</sup>

By his or her consecration the religious as an authentic witness holds him or herself personally responsible to help create a climate favorable to the presence of Christ among us, so that in everyone he can bring to full maturity the fruit of His spirit “Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Fidelity and self control”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> JOHN PAUL II, POST- Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Vita: Consecrata, 15

<sup>34</sup> cf. Gal. 5, Rom 8: 11, Pet. 1:3-11; pc 12

### **2.1.2 Religious Life as a call to Holiness**

Consecrated to God in community, sundering herself totally to the merciful love of Jesus to continue in the church the saving acts of Christ, leaving all things to follow Christ in order to grow in the fullness of love for God and neighbor by embracing the evangelical counsels according to the words and example of the Lord, seeking to persevere in this vocation for the good of the whole church unto the glory of the most Holy Trinity which in Christ and through Christ is the fountain and wellspring of all holiness, the religious as an authentic witness understands his or her life from the one who calls him or her to oneness, special ministry and gives him or her special charism and special witness.

The life of the religious as an authentic witness is one that must tend toward holiness. He or she exists within the church to give authentic longing for communion with God. In fact the first task of the religious is to pursue holiness not to merely for herself but also for the welfare of the entire church. He or she is intended to be a visible sign of the need for everyone who is Christian to belong totally to Christ and his paschal mystery.

The religious who authentically witnesses his or her life will focus on the absolute. And that will enable him or her to bring God to the people. What people are looking for is simply God. And they are looking for someone who will speak to them quite simply about God as the person whom he or she knows intimately and come alive again.

### **2.1.3 Religious Life as Vowed Life**

By the dedication of vows in which the most human values are consecrated the life of witness given by the religious is transcendent, redemptive and eschatological. For the church

the religious life constitutes a living sign to the world in its self-realization and its true self-expression. It is the transcendent sign for in it the strength of God is manifest in human weakness. The wisdom and power of God is at work to confound the wise and the strong. It is a redemptive sign, for the transforming power of the cross and the resurrection becomes manifest in the person of the religious who witnesses authentically. The religious is a sign to all men and women of the way that they too must walk. It remains for each person in his or her own life to accept Christ's redemptive power.

The act of profession is seen as an act of confidence in God, a confession of belief that God is trustworthy in regard to his promises (Mk 10:30). Vowing is not a mere matter of acting or appearing outwardly, even though it may include this. It is the appropriation of an inner life vision and attitude. Once this vision or attitude ceases to exist then the commitment becomes difficult. Once one turns towards a style of life that is incompatible with one's original self gift then there may come a moment when one finds this new style more attractive and more personally compelling than the one presently being followed. Religious who are called by God to render their particular and distinct service to their brothers and sisters, should recall that they have a lifetime obligation to nourish and foster the precious gift which the Lord has given them in and for his church and for all people.

#### **2.1.4 Religious Life as a Life of Prayer**

A person who embraces this life of total consecration must necessarily be one who strives to live a deeply spiritual life. Consequently the person of God is for him or her, not merely an academic study, he or she cannot be satisfied with simply a theoretical knowledge

of or about the risen Lord. He or she is called to know Him by a warm, personal knowledge, to know him as a reality with whom he or she is personally involved. "This is eternal life that they may know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent" (Jn 22:3). This knowledge is brought about not only in and through encounter with others but fundamentally through personal and community encounter with God.

A religious as an authentic witness must be able to say with St. Paul "Be imitators of me as I am of Christ." He or she must therefore come to know him not only in the manner of theologians but in the manner of the saints. Such knowledge must not only be speculative but it must also be effective and assimilative, through adoration, love and imitation. The effective service of the religious is inseparable from the interior life of prayer.

### **2.1.5 Religious life as a Life Lived in community**

As the life of the Holy Trinity is a communion of three distinct persons united in love, so a religious community should reflect that life and share intimately in that relationship of love<sup>35</sup>. As Christ members living fraternally together let religious excel one another in showing respect and let each carry the others burdens. It is Christ himself who has called the religious as he called the first Christians to form the church a True family, "united heart and soul" and experience the joy of his presence."<sup>36</sup> In response to the call of Christ religious have made total self-donation to him by their profession of evangelical counsels. Because of this religious consecration involves community life; there is an essential relationship between the quality of the community life and fidelity to commitment.<sup>37</sup>

Every religious according to her ability brings to community life a real spirit of collaboration for each shares fully in the apostolate of the community, whatever his or her particular role in it may be. Also it will be realized that each generation has its special

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<sup>35</sup> cf. *Gaudium et spes* # 24

<sup>36</sup> cf. *Perfectia Caritatis* 15, 12, 13, cf. Act 4-32

<sup>37</sup> cf. M. M. A. LAFOND, S.C.N.C, *Community life need no apology*, 4

contribution to make and that diversity of age, gifts, nationality and culture contributes richness to community life and community merits.

Community is defined as a body of individuals organized into a unity: unified religious group with a union of objectives, and responsibility. A religious community presupposes an affirmation of unity in all things, unity in aim, unity in spirit, unity in government, unity in the observance of rule, unity at all time and in all places. Unity is preservative against schisms which not only paralyze the working of institutions but cause their complete dissolution. This unity alone will lead religious to a “sharing of prayer, work, meals, leisure, cooperation in the same apostolate and mutual support in community life.”<sup>38</sup> on the basis of private opinion, nor can you tolerate or encourage the kind of individualism that has destroyed religious orders and congregations in the past.

## 2.2 The Vows

The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia defines “vows as a conscious, free promise made to God, which has as its object a moral good that is both possible and better than its omission. Those entering religious life take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.”<sup>39</sup> Vows are solemn promises made freely to God to do some task or to live according to a certain way of life. It can be private, made individually, or public such as those made by members of religious communities. By profession of religious vows an individual dedicates one’s life to

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<sup>38</sup> A FLANNERY, *Vatican council II, The Conciliar and Documents, Lumen gentium*,44

<sup>39</sup> M. GLAZIER- M. K. HELLWIG, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*,35.

God and the service of God's people. The traditional vows of religion are poverty, chastity, and obedience.<sup>40</sup>

### **2.2.1 The vow of chastity**

Celibacy is a gift of God, which only few can accept for the sake of the kingdom. It had its ultimate foundation on Christian revelation, the word of God, the teaching of Christ, the life of his virgin mother and the apostolic tradition. By celibate life the religious, as an authentic witness, symbolizes that sublime union between Christ and his church, a union that will have fulfillment only in the eschatological age.<sup>41</sup>

Through celibacy religious manifest for the benefit of mankind, the choice of a more intimate and complete relation to the mystery of Christ and the church. So it dawns on her or him that the source of celibacy is intimacy with Jesus, a self giving love agape, a deeper consecration to Christ out of love which results in deeper and close friendship with him, his/her spouse and friend. It is this vow that imposes on the religious a particular life style and makes him or her center all attention on Christ as the "one thing necessary." It is therefore within this pledge of love that poverty makes sense and obedience meaningful and responsible to the religious. That is why the Vatican II teaches that chastity touches intimately the deeper inclinations of human nature. Moreover even though loving, willing and having, constitute the three fundamental human cravings, it goes without doubt that loving is the most fundamental of the three.

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. J.DOWNEY, *Religious Life: What the Church Teaches*, 17.

<sup>41</sup> cf. *Perfectae Caritatis*

A religious as an authentic witness realizes that the fundamental purpose of consecrated chastity does not end with the negative aspect of privation, of rejecting marital pleasures that the human heart ceaselessly covets. Our supreme pontiff John Paul II tells us that virginity cannot be compared to remaining simply unmarried or single because virginity is not restricted to a mere “No” rather it contains a profound “Yes” in the spousal order: the gift of self for love in a total and undivided manner.<sup>42</sup> Thus it also embraces the positive value capable of unfolding according to its evangelical dimensions.

Yves Raguin tells us that divine love and human love elicit in the heart the same emotions and the feelings vibrate to the touch of God’s love as they do to the deepest stirrings of human affection. He insists that both loves play on the same instrument but in the case of divine love, the quality of the resonance gives one to understand that it comes from a distance and that being so, the vibration is deeper.<sup>43</sup> Moreover St. Paul tells us that “The unmarried woman or girl is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit but the married woman is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please her husband. (I Cor.7: 32-34). So through celibacy a religious sees him or her self as one in love with God in Christ and so tends with all his /her vital forces toward union with him. As she encounters Christ in a more intimate way she experiences an impelling attraction toward him. So she begins to withdraw in solitude and for greater interior quiet so as to contemplate her beloved. This situation the prophet Hosea expresses as follows:

.....I will allure her and bring her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her.....and I will betroth you to me for ever, I will betroth you to me

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<sup>42</sup> cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Mulier Dignitem*,79

<sup>43</sup> CF. Y.RAGUIN, *Celibacy for our Times*, 45

in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness and you shall know the Lord.<sup>44</sup>

The religious allows him to enter his/her heart and gradually but steadily moulds him or her changing his or her ways of seeing, thinking and acting. The religious also realizes that God loves him or her with an unconditional love and demands his or her love in return. It is in loving his or her neighbors in their weakness that he or she gives that love back to God. God put him or her in the midst of his/her brethren that he or she can love them with an unmerited love. The vow of chastity frees her to be a better and more active instrument of God's love for people. The Vatican Fathers tell us "it is the most effective means of dedicating themselves whole heartedly to the divine service and the works of the apostolate."<sup>45</sup>

Within this context of the vow of chastity, the religious is aware that as a sexual being he or she will continue to experience sexual impulses and so feel strongly attracted to members of the opposite sex. This in itself is natural and not sinful. But as one committed to consecrated celibacy, rather than seek satisfaction of these urges through sexual union with any one, he or she learns through prayer and self control to sublimate them with strong confidence in God. Thus his or her love for the individual, far from being based on physical attraction, will allow him or her as a authentic religious to accept him or herself as a sexual being and to direct his or her sexuality beyond genital expression. His or her sexuality will be experienced without guilt or denial and he or she will pursue the relationship without motivation to physical union.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Hosea 2: 14:20

<sup>45</sup> Perfectea Caritatis, 12a

<sup>46</sup> Q. HAENEWERTH, For The Sake of the Kingdom,30.

He or she becomes fully aware that evangelical freedom in celibate chastity does not mean renunciation of love which will increase egoism, envy, jealousy and hardness of heart in a person. Rather the religious gives up the use of his sexual instinct because he or she sees religious celibacy as a means to an end, as a means to being a fuller instrument of God's love.<sup>47</sup> So far from renouncing love, he or she only gives up a mode of love as expressed in conjugal union to liberate him or herself for a more universal love. A famous author Bouyer holds that:

Those who follow a vocation that presupposes celibacy, renounce married love cannot for all that renounce fatherhood or motherhood. They are simply called thereby to undertake a higher form of parenthood, one not limited to the narrow circle of one particular family, but open to every one.<sup>48</sup>

Therefore the heart of the religious is strong enough to be on fire with zeal for God and His kingdom, large enough to embrace all mankind in love like God's, warm enough to give without receiving in return and trusting enough to give without limit. It is peaceful because its only goal is God's will, persevering since it is not its own end, courageous as it grows more beautiful in sacrifice and serene because it always possesses its beloved who is ever faithful.

Religious as an authentic witness is convinced that to achieve this intimate union with Christ he or she must keep vigilance in prayer and humility relying completely on God since we have this treasure in earthen vessels. That is why the Vatican fathers advise that:

Religious therefore, at pains to be faithful to what they have professed, should believe Our Lord's word and relying on God's help, they should not presume on their own strength. They should practice mortification and custody of the senses. Nor should they neglect the natural means which promote health of mind and body<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> R.FARICY, *Spirituality for Religious Life*, 33

<sup>48</sup> L. BOUYER, *Introduction to Spirituality*, 173-174

<sup>49</sup> *Perfectea Caritatis*, 12b

### 2.2.2 The Vow of Poverty

The vow of poverty by which one sacrifices both right and act of ownership,<sup>50</sup> is understood as non-possession of material goods and a total dependence on one's religious family for every need in life. As such the religious voluntarily renounces the right to dispose of material good for the love and imitation of Christ. Whatever he or she acquires by personal labor or on behalf of his or her religious family belongs to that congregation. In like manner he or she cannot retain for him or herself the ownership or use of whatever comes to him or her in any way through salary, gifts, pension, grant or insurance etc. These becomes the property of his or her religious family. In the same vein she cannot donate, lend or borrow without the permission of his or her superiors. However, exceptions to this rule are as expressed in the Constitution of each religious institute or congregation.<sup>51</sup>

It then becomes clear that this vow of poverty implies asking for one's needs and depending on authority or the community for the disposal of one's own property. Nowadays many reject the idea of material poverty and dependence. They hold that it simply means availability of one's person, time and talents to God who made all things good and wants us to use them for his glory, that poverty implies simply respectful use of creation but Dubay tells us that there has not been:

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<sup>50</sup> In its complete form, the right of ownership is the right to acquire goods by any Lawful means, and to dispose of them as one pleases. On the other hand the act of ownership consist in disposing of some temporal thing in an independent manner. While an owner does what he likes with his or her property or possessions, a religious cannot do so since dependence in the use of the possessions either of one's own or those belonging to others, is the characteristics of the vow of poverty.

<sup>51</sup> B. COLE- P. CONNER, *Christian Totality: The Theology of the Consecrated Life*, 117.

Any significant or essential change in the meaning and obligation of the vow of poverty. The basic obligations of common life and dependent use remain intact, minor changes (dropping the distinction between solemn and simple vows, the optional surrender of one's patrimony, the precise superior who may or may not give permission) do not affect the core reality. No document issuing from the teaching church has suggested any essential change in this vow:<sup>52</sup>

So the religious as an authentic witness understands that these views are faulty as the vow includes material poverty a factual frugality, a sparing life style. This is because alleged poverty of spirit without poverty of fact is an illusion. This genuine frugal life style will be such that it can show the rest of our affluent society what it must do to share more equitably with the vast multitudes of the poor. It acts as a deterrent against greed, superfluities, avarice and worldliness. By renouncing the interior rights to possess, the soul is liberated from complicated ambitions and goals that weight it down. The intellect is freed from the reasoning, cunning and shrewd intellectual battles that occupy the mind as it seeks to keep what it possesses and acquire more. It is thus liberated to ponder the mysteries of God<sup>53</sup>.

Dependence on superiors and fellow religious together with the privations incumbent to communal living promote a growth in humility and patience. Mutual forbearance of human weaknesses makes one forget oneself for the good of others. Poverty as a vow, reaches down into the depths of the soul requiring a generous gift of one's time, talents, strength, a love of virtue and even life if necessary. It permits one to sacrifice for God and neighbor. Not only is it a daily death but also a daily resurrection since every part of us given is replaced by more of Jesus<sup>54</sup>. Poverty then is a gift to the whole church and not merely to the individual and the congregation. Its goal is to attach us to God, to make us love him above all things and consider him our infinite good and eternal happiness.

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<sup>52</sup> T. DUBAY, *What is Religious Life*, 65.

<sup>53</sup> G. H. ANDERSON, *Witness to the kingdom*, 46.

<sup>54</sup> B. CHILTON- C..A .EVANS, *Authenticating the Activities of Jesus*, 19.

Poverty does not end with material good or dependence on the community. It has a more positive value, deep rooted in the example of Christ himself who lived a poor life and explicitly said to the rich young man “if you would be perfect go sell what you possess and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven and come follow me.”<sup>55</sup> Moreover he claimed to have come for the poor and the poor in spirit (called *anawim* in the Old Testament) are blessed.<sup>56</sup> Realizing that the poor are very dear to God and that Christ himself chose to live in poverty from his birth till death, the religious gladly shares in the self-emptying of Christ<sup>57</sup> who though rich became poor for our sake so that by his poverty we might become rich<sup>58</sup>. He the Lord of all things lived in such poverty that he had not even a place on which to lay his head. Even his own mother lived a lowly form of life and played her indispensable role in our redemption in poverty.<sup>59</sup>

The religious understands that poverty does not mean destitution. We learnt from Christ that the basic attitude of religious poverty is turning away from material wealth toward heavenly things. It therefore leads to a style of life, which uses earthly things with moderation and according to need and not want. Just as God intended them to be used. It also implies the voluntary limitation of the right to possess and dispose of them.

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<sup>55</sup> Mt. 19:21.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Lk. 6:20, Mt. 5:3; 19:27, 2Cor.8:3.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Phil. 2: 7- 8.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. 2Cor. 8: 9, Mt. 8: 20, *Perfectea Caritatis*,13b.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. *Lumen Gentium*,46:2.

### 2.2.3 The Vow of Obedience

The Post Vatican II obedience is a virtue, which in its perfection demands maturity. It involves a choosing where the options are open. Therefore it must be possible for one to disobey if one is to obey. So when one chooses a human environment and decides to live according to its requirements, that in obedience. It lies in the choosing by an autonomous person of the act, which is also evoked by some other factor and that factor one has also chosen. In religious life one has voluntarily opted for an environment by choosing the religious institute one is going to join. By doing so one has in a wide sense chosen as well the rules, traditions, constitution, charism etc of that particular institute. This includes the authority figures. So though one has not chosen them by election to the office, by opting for this way of life, one has chosen them as one's superiors. Having chosen the environment one then chooses the behavior itself.<sup>60</sup> Thus it is no longer a question of submitting to somebody imposed on one, it is rather choosing to impose it oneself. That is why the free choice of the candidate is ensured before profession. One is therefore free to disobey but has not a right to do so.

With this we see that obedience, far from implying abandoning one's will, is rather an excellent procedure towards maturity. It provides an opportunity for the proper exercise of the consequences of one's choice. That is why O'Doherty insists that obedience is a virtue, which resides in the will and so forms the personality. Even though obedience may include conformity and identification, it differs from both in so far as it is not just for public order

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<sup>60</sup> B. COLE- P. CONNER, *Christian Totality: The Theology of Consecrated Life*. 196.

nor just for personal satisfaction. The love of the Lord is the supreme and overriding motive

so:

Obedience is a function for the human person at the maximum level of development. This is the change I think in our understanding of what obedience is. It is not a change in the moral nature of authority, nor in the obligation to obey. The change lies in the understanding that it is only for fully -grown and mature people.<sup>61</sup>

Through obedience the religious expresses his or her entire dependence on God and filial adherence to the will of the one who was "obedient unto death, even death on the cross (Phil 2: 8) learned obedience through what he suffered (cf Hebrew 10:20).<sup>62</sup> It therefore sums up the whole of Christian life being seen as the most perfect expression of love.

Through this sacrificial obligation religious dedicate to God every spare moment of his or her whole life. In this way he or she binds him or herself more closely to the church's service and endeavors to attain to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.<sup>63</sup>

The liberating force of obedience then begins to appeal to the religious. He or she realizes that obedience is a liberating force. It frees us from egoism, self seeking, weaknesses and illusion, from love of power and to a large extent from being dominated by our own passions. The commitment to obey is an act of full freedom used in the noblest way. The religious does not obey through coercion but because he or she has chosen to do so.<sup>64</sup>

Moreover Pope Pius XII talking to the participants of the second Congress on the state of perfection points out that far from offending the dignity of man who submit to it obedience frees him interiorly. It represents to him the acceptance of his state of subjection. This is however not as a constraint imposed from without but as a deliverance of self into the hands of God whose will is expressed by the visible authority of all those who have the

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<sup>61</sup> E. F. O'DOHERTY, *Consecration and Vows*, 131.

<sup>62</sup> *Perfectae Caritatis*, 14.

<sup>63</sup> Eph. 4: 13, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 14

<sup>64</sup> Cf. *Evangelica Testificatio*, 27.

mission to command.<sup>65</sup> That is why the Vatican Fathers remind us that in accepting God's will religious achieve real freedom since they are devoting the powers of their understanding and will, their gifts of nature and grace to the carrying out of God's will. Religious obedience, far from lowering the dignity of the human person, brings it to maturity, ennobling it with the freedom of the sons of God.

Obedience therefore, strengthens the will since it is constantly being freely exercised and made strong by its adherence to the will of God in the present moment. Fidelity to this vow enables the soul of the religious to strive to see God in everything and in everyone. Obedience also frees the religious in regard to his or her neighbor. We often rebel at the actions, sufferings, pain, injustice and trials in others' lives. This vow enables us to be at peace with the will of God in their regard. Once we have done what we can to alleviate the pain of others.

### **2.3 Major Challenges Facing Religious Life Today**

Religious life today faces a great number of challenges. These challenges take different dimensions such as gospel value, cultural, economical, geographical, and psychological. Though there are variety of challenges that the religious life encounter I will want to dwell more on the major challenges facing religious life not because they are not important but for the sake of concretizing my facts. Vita Consecrata expressed that

The prophetic task of the consecrated life is brought into play by three major challenges. These challenges relate directly to the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience. The decision to follow the counsels, far from involving an impoverishment of truly human values, leads, instead, to their transformation. The evangelical counsels should be

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<sup>65</sup> Cf. PIUS XII, *To the participants in the second congress on state of perfection*, 1957 on obedience-*The greatest Freedom*, 40.

considered as a denial of the values inherent in sexuality, in the legitimate desire to possess material goods or to make decisions for oneself.<sup>66</sup>

### **2.3.1 The Challenge of Living the Gospel Values.**

The modern world seems not to consider vows as relevant today or even as the substance of the whole consecrated life. We have started to rationalize them instead of letting God to work in us through them. We have forgotten that obedience, chastity and poverty are the very life of Jesus himself indeed the life of the gospel. Hence “The vows embrace the gospel value of Jesus’ own life on the earth and are a public statement of one’s desire to live simply, love inclusively, and listen attentively in service of God’s people and the Church.”<sup>67</sup> In fact these vows are no longer considered as gospel values when we look at the coldness at which people try to live it out or rather the happenings today in our contemporary world. But yet the profession of these vows invites all religious to live together responsibly, in a common spirit of simplicity, availability and attentiveness because the religious vows free one to respond passionately and firmly. “Here I am Lord, I come to do your will.”<sup>68</sup>

### **2.3.2 The Challenge of Living the Vow of Poverty.**

Through the vow of poverty religious promise to live simply, to share all of their income, and their resources, to be content with whatever is provided for their use, and to love the poor in a special way. The vow of poverty does not mean destitution; sisters, brothers, and religious priests drive cars, use computers, and enjoy simple pleasures. It means that they

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<sup>66</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Vita Consecrata, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation*, 89.

<sup>67</sup> [http://www.scjvocation.org/vocationinformation/religiouslife\\_03.html](http://www.scjvocation.org/vocationinformation/religiouslife_03.html) ,*Religious life*, (9/22/2004 ).

<sup>68</sup> Heb. 10: 7.

make Jesus their primary treasure and see all possessions as helping them spread the message of Jesus. This is a very big challenge because many people will not understand their actions nor their reason for doing them and you cannot go around explaining to them but instead bear the pain of the criticism from them. Anyway this vow of poverty is a reply of the consecrated life to today's challenge of materialism as expressed by Pope John Paul II in *Vita Consecrata* that

Another challenge today is that of a materialism which craves possessions, heedless of the needs and sufferings of the weakest, and lacking any concern for the balance of natural resources. The reply is found in the profession of evangelical poverty which can be lived in different ways and is often expressed in an active involvement in the promotion of solidarity and charity.<sup>69</sup>

Religious by these vows are challenged to continue fighting to overcome the hunger and causes on the poor as well as to fight for justice. For the contemporary African religious the challenges sometime are more because of their background. The vow of poverty has no relevance in Africa. Africans believe that if somebody is poor then God and the ancestors have cursed the person. So anyone among the Africans who lives without wealth or property of any kind is regarded or considered to be selfish and as well a witch or wizard. Such a person is considered as not community mindedness. This is very challenging to the Africans especially if the religious happens to be the first child who is expected to take care of the younger one's and now as a result of the vow cannot actually help the family members freely. Considering this if the religious is not a strong and firm willed person, he or she may regret forever becoming a religious. Some religious get very confused since he or she cannot freely give assistance to his or her suffering family members. Another aspect of poverty that is a challenge is the fact of seeking permissions before using or giving out anything.

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<sup>69</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Vita Consecrata*,90.

Anyway, for the religious who is faithful and willing to live or witness authentically despite the confusions and the challenges he or she remains firm in his or her conviction.

### **2.3.3 The Challenge of Living the Vow of Chastity.**

To authentically live out the vow of chastity is a great challenge. Because the religious or the individual who is striving to live according to the norms of the vow, is a sexual being who is fully human and fully alive. Many times nature calls for attention and this brings a lot of struggles in the part of the religious. Some times there is great temptation to give in or satisfy the sexual urges but yet he or she struggles against the desire respecting his or her commitment. This struggle in one way or the other affects one's relationship with the others be it toward an opposite sex or not. In some cases it causes the religious to avoid people, especially the opposite sex, though this is not the best way to handle the problem. Many times the religious becomes workaholic and manifests other strange behaviors. Though there is a lot of struggle the religious is challenged to give themselves entirely to people in love without reservation just as Christ gave himself. Religious who profess the vow of chastity need to be persons of compassion who possess spiritual and emotional maturity. This maturity will enable him or her to enjoy intimacy and friendship, founded on the spiritual power of love. This is a very challenging way of living and it requires or calls for much sacrifice and self-giving.

### **2.3.4 The Challenge of Living the Vow of Obedience.**

Obedience is a listening vow, challenging the religious to be attentive and open to God's call of service to others. Just as Christ submitted Himself in loving obedience to the

will of His Father, so the religious who profess the vow of obedience desire to place themselves at the service of the religious community in the mission of the church. This is a very demanding and challenging vow. It is not always easy to witness authentically to the vow of obedience because the tendency of wanting to remain free not to be controlled by any one or any thing, to live without any restrictions, especially in our world today where the young ones feel they know it all. Freedom in this case of obedience becomes a problem and makes it more challenging. Generally it is not always easy to submit to another persons idea or opinion especially when we are convinced of our opinions, neither is it easy to listen and hear God speaking through that person. All these make the vow of obedience difficult to practice and as a result imposing a great challenge.

### **2.3.5 The Challenge of Living a Community Life**

In religious community the members certainly differ from one another in many ways. St. Paul exhorts us, “Submit yourselves to one another because of your reverence for Christ”<sup>70</sup> This is of great importance in community living and on the other hand it is very challenging and demanding. Different members have different gifts, abilities, and ministries all of which can contribute to the proper functioning of the community and to the apostolate. These must be recognized and harnessed but unfortunately many times the members find it very difficult to affirm each other and this make the community life more difficulty and challenging since the members are all human beings. Community living in religious life challenges the religious to be accommodative, receptive, and loving in order to promote unity in diversity. This is not always easy due to the differences in personality, background, desire,

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<sup>70</sup> Eph. 5: 21.

inclinations, and the level of the people involved. All these impose challenges but St. Paul exhorts us to look at the need of the saints as our own and to be generous in offering hospitality. We must accept each other, support one another in love and let our feelings of deep affection for one another come to expression.<sup>71</sup>

### **2.3.6 The Challenge of Living an Authentic Prayer Life**

Living a good and authentic prayer life is a very challenging step in the life of a religious. Prayer is not only something that plays an important part in the life of the religious but permeates his whole life<sup>72</sup> Religious should follow Christ “regarding this as one thing that is necessary and be solicitous for all that is his or hers.”<sup>73</sup> In order to be transformed into a holocaust offered to God in union with the sacrifice of Jesus, religious life demands that a sufficient amount of time be reserved to prayer in its various forms and expressions, all of which is directed to a personal meeting with God. Religious are debtors toward men and women and especially the young: by their being. For this purpose prayer must be given a primary place in their lives.<sup>74</sup> Even more, their lives must become identified with prayer itself. On the other hand religious face a lot of challenges because of human frailty. Some factors make it so difficult such as tiredness, distraction, and also in some cases the religious become too busy with apostolate hence it is very challenging to strike a balance as an authentic witness.

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<sup>71</sup> Rom. 12:13, 15:7, Eph. 4:2 cf. Rom. 15:2, Rom. 12:10.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. *Evangelica Testificatio*, 45

<sup>73</sup> *Perfectae Caritatis*, 5.

## 2.4 Conclusion

All religious are bound to bear witness that the world cannot be transfigured without the spirit of beatitude,<sup>75</sup> and the carrying of the cross after the example of Jesus. St. Paul tells us that Baptism is rebirth, a regeneration, a new life, a new existence of God.”<sup>76</sup> Religious consecration on the other hand is qualitatively different from and adds to consecration to Christian life. Thus in a non-sacramental way it is a full flowering, an intensification and actualization of our baptismal consecration. So religious unlike Christians in general undertake to go beyond the precepts. Vatican II refers to religious consecration as a deeper consecration, a closer imitation and greater likeness of Christ; greater freedom and clearer witness, a more abundant harvest from the grace of baptism and a fuller expression of it.<sup>77</sup>

This act of consecration is primarily God’s work since every activity on human’s part to dedicate himself completely to God’s service is already the fruit of divine grace in the human heart. Striving to live the consecrated life authentically, comes with a lot of challenges as we mentioned above but this is possible by the grace of God. Thus prayer is very important. Apart from the challenges mentioned above there are many other challenges that come from day to day living of the life. In fact each step taken in religious life is a challenge of its own and some of the non-mentioned challenges are the family, cultural background, apostolate, forgiveness and reconciliation, listening to each other, formation and other activities are all challenges facing religious life as one strive to live it authentically.

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<sup>74</sup> Cf. *Evangelica Testificatio*, 45.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 31

<sup>76</sup> cf. 1:3-5, 23, 2Pt. 1:4, Titus 3:5-8, Eph. 2:4-6, Rom, 5: 1-2.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 44, 1: 44, 3.46, 3,44,1 *Perfectae Caritatis*, 5, 7

## Chapter Three

### AUTHENTIC WITNESS OF THE REDEMPITIVE LOVE OF CHRIST IN THE LIFESTYLE OF THE SISTERS OF THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS

#### 3.0 Introduction

In chapter one we looked at the meaning of authentic witness and in chapter two we looked at the meaning of religious life in the light of authentic witness and the major challenges facing religious life in our contemporary world today as they strive or rather in the process of witnessing authentically. While in chapter three we shall look at the authentic witnessing of the redemptive love of Christ in the lifestyle of the sisters of the sacred heart of Jesus.

#### 3.1 Brief History of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

The congregation of the sisters of the sacred heart of Jesus is an African indigenous religious institute founded in 1975 by his grace Archbishop Patrick Ebosele Ekpu, the Archbishop of the Benin Archdiocese in Nigeria. The congregation was founded primarily to promote the glory of God especially by acknowledging in their own lives and making known to others the selfless redemptive love of Christ's sacred Heart.<sup>78</sup> Also bridge the disunity, animosity and hatred between tribes and as well spread the gospel of God's concern and love for all.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Sisters of the sacred Heart of Jesus constitutions Art. 4.

<sup>79</sup> *A Journey of faith. The History of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus*,.1.

The congregation draws its specific spirituality from the sacred heart of Jesus, which is its source of inspiration and model. And the motivating spirit of its member's actions and work is the sacrificial love and Christian humility.<sup>80</sup>

The congregation was initially named Nigeria sisters of the sacred Heart (NSSH) but was later changed to sisters of the sacred Heart of Jesus (SSH) dropping "Nigeria" in order to avoid ethnocentric implications.<sup>81</sup> Its members pronounce public vows of chastity, poverty and obedience and dedicated themselves to contemplation and apostolic work according to the universal Law of the church and the constitutions of the congregation.<sup>82</sup>

### **3.1.1 Archbishop Patrick Ebosele Ekpu and the Foundation**

The consecration ceremony of the Archbishop of Benin city with the right of succession on November 21<sup>st</sup> 1971 marked the birth of the first indigenous Bishop of the Diocese making him successor of Bishop Patrick Kelly, SMA, who was the Bishop of the then Benin Diocese. In the reception following this ceremony the faithful of the diocese expressed the wish that the diocese should "have its own indigenous female religious. This served to encourage Bishop Ekpu to pursue his intention of bringing this religious congregation into existence. He commanded the congregation into the patronage of the sacred Heart of Jesus due to his strong devotion to the sacred Heart of Jesus.<sup>83</sup>

His search for a formation team was a long and extremely frustrating one. He applied to many congregations both within and out of the country requesting for formatters but the

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<sup>80</sup> *Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Constitutions*, Art. (i)

<sup>81</sup> *A Journey of Faith: History of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus*, 3-4.

<sup>82</sup> *Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Constitutions* Art. 2.

<sup>83</sup> *The Bride of Christ: Reflection and interview of the father founder*, 36.

general response was very discouraging. Despite the difficulties encountered archbishop Patrick Ebosele Ekpu never gave up nor accepted the proposal made by the Irish sisters to take over and merge the congregation to their own. Nevertheless he continued his search for formatters by writing to a friend in the united state of America who gave him some addresses of congregations and that enabled him to make more contacts. Finally, his contact and communication with the Superior General, Mother Rose de Lima Hazeur, of the sisters of the Holy Family (SSF), yielded fruitful results. Sister Sylvia Thibodeaux, (SSH) arrived in Nigeria to take up the assignment as formation directress in the congregation.<sup>84</sup>

The life of archbishop Patrick Ebosele Ekpu as the founder of the congregation has been a source of inspiration to its member. For him every human person is precious and forms a member of the family of God. This desire that people unite to bring about the one family of God on earth inspired him to found the congregation of the sisters of the sacred Heart of Jesus. A congregation, whose charism takes the unity of God's family as her primary concern. His motto is "ut unum sint" (that they maybe one).

### **3.1.2 Development since the foundation**

Since the religious life begins with novitiate the reception of the first set of young women into the novitiate on first of young women into the novitiate on April 1975 who were received by the founder marked the foundation, the birth and the official beginning of the sacred Heart of Jesus. "The first group made their first profession on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November 1976 and since then there has been inflow of vocation although not all became professed

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<sup>84</sup> A Journey of Faith. The History of the sisters of the sacred Heart of Jesus, 5-6

members of the congregation.<sup>85</sup> In 1978 the indigenous habit was introduced. This bold step of changing the habit from the popular but foreign habit to one that is indigenous become one of the reasons for the dropout of some of the members who at this time found this move too revolutionary for them.<sup>86</sup>

Since its foundation the congregation has grown in number and expanded. Currently the congregation numbers about eighty members working in different diocese in Nigeria and as well in Rome. Besides the numerical growth the congregation has also grown in maturity. In 1985 the congregation celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary which was marked by the sisters first general assembly where they evaluated the issues affecting the congregation at that time and as well take decisions to guide the future.<sup>87</sup> The second general assembly was held in august 1990 and the discussion was focused on the understanding of the identity of the congregation. There was no election in the two general assembly mentioned but the two sisters at the end of it felt stronger and more hopeful about the future.<sup>88</sup>

The congregation held its first general chapter in March 16<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> 1992. And the focus of discussion was on the charism and patrimony of the congregation, they reflected and discussed on how to fit into enculturation and to understand what it entails.<sup>89</sup> With that chapter, the governance of the congregation was entrusted to the members. Since then the congregation has held three further general chapters the last of which was held in august 2004. The General chapter has enabled the congregation to redefine its formation programmer and reorganize its administrative structure. The constitution of the congregation

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<sup>85</sup> *A Journey of Faith. The History of the sisters of the sacred Heart of Jesus* 12-13.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, 23

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, 45

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, 47

<sup>89</sup> *A Journey of Faith. The History of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus*, 47.

was revised and reviewed in the light of the new code of canon Law and the lived experience of the sisters during the second General chapter held in 1996. The final amendment was affected on the recommendations of the sacred congregation in Rome when approval was granted for the congregation to be canonically erected as a religious institute of diocesan right and the final version was approved by the local ordinary of Benin city who also is the founder of the congregation then handed over to the congregation in April 1999 during the canonical erection of the congregation.<sup>90</sup> Hence the congregation got the NIHIL BSTAT in April 1999 and celebrated its silver Jubilee (25 years) in April 2000 and will be thirty years old on the 6<sup>th</sup> April 2005.

### **3.2 The Charism of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus**

The charism of the congregation of the sisters of the sacred Heart of Jesus is to experience and make all people aware of the redemptive love of Christ that binds us together as members of the one family of God and enhance the realization of Jesus prayer “That they may be one”, the motto of the congregation therefore is “*UT UNUM SINT*” (Jn 17:21)<sup>91</sup>

The sisters give concrete expression to the new bond of unity, which our insertion into Christ mystical body by baptism brings about. By baptismal consecration we become the family of God on earth. “There is but one body and one spirit just as there is but one hope given all of you by your call. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and father of all, who is over all and works through all and is in all.”<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 29

<sup>91</sup> *Sisters of the Sacred Heart Constitutions* Art. 3 (i).

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 3 (ii).

For the Africans, the family creates a strong bond of unity and communio. But since by baptism we become the family of God on earth we endeavor to foster unity and communio among the new family of the baptism and even more so among the sisters of the sacred Heart of Jesus who are bound to Jesus by new consecration through religious profession. "All of us who has been baptized in Christ have clothed ourselves with him. Just as Paul instructs that there does not exist among you Jew or Greek, slave or freeman, male or female, so do we strive to express through our lives that there is no destination between Edos and Ibos, Hausas and Efiks, Yorubas and Urhobos etc. "All are one in Christ." (Gal.3, 27-28) Hence as Christian women from all tribes and different ethnic groups we come together to live out our unity in Christ and thus prove that the gospel of Christ makes one out of all the members. Many though they are one body and so it is with Christ. It was in one spirit that all of us, whether Jew or Greek, slave or free were baptized into one spirit. (Cor 12:12-13). Furthermore, the sisters should seek to resolve all their difference and be reconciled with one another. If you are angry, let it be without sin the sun must not go down on your wrath, do not give the devil a chance to work on you (Eph 4; 26-27).<sup>93</sup>

The charism of the congregation as mentioned above act as the master key that opens and closes the door of the lifestyle of the sisters of the sacred Heart of Jesus because it affects everything they do. This charism gives the sisters their mission. It calls the sisters to witness to it authentically. As expressed in the charism the sisters are to first and foremost experience the redemptive love of Christ that is they are call "to be with Christ" in order to savor the sweetness of his love. It is by being with him that we can experience him, listen to him, hear him, test him, hear from him how to love and this certainly will bring us to the point of

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., Art. 3(iii)

conviction that we can go out to spread and make known our experiences to others. This then brings the aspect of being sent. The charism also invokes the practice of unity among the sisters and others because they are to let others know that it is the redemptive love of Christ that binds us together as God's family.

### **3.3 The Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Call to Authentic Witness**

The call to witness authentically the charism of the sisters of the Sacred Heart is a call to a specific spirituality. The spirituality of the congregation which is drawn from the Sacred Heart of Jesus is directed, moulded and grounded in the charism of the congregation as expressed in the constitution and as mentioned above. Hence the lifestyle of the members is highly and greatly influenced by the charism. Their daily expression of these charisms manifest itself in their different dimensions of life, such as prayer life, community life, apostolic life, the living peculiar to the congregation such as the characteristics and sound values and traditions of the congregation. The congregation's constitution expressed in the light of *lumen gentium* and *Evangelica Testificatio* on the members' way of life as follows.

Above everything else, the sister's way of life takes its impulse from their "personal love of Christ. They choose to live with him, the kind of life he chose. They strive to express and deepen their love by giving themselves totally to him as he gave himself to them and the whole church. Following the pattern he laid down by word and deed, they accept for themselves the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience."<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> *Sisters of the Sacred Heart constitutions*, Art 7 (cf. *lumen Gensium*, 45, *Evangelica Testificatio*, 7)

### 3.3.1 Authentic witness through Evaluation

The sisters of the sacred Heart of Jesus right from the early stage of the congregation want to know who they are and what they were founded for. Their daily experience aroused many questions as on what they have probably understood through the year and the demands of their charism. These experiences of new dimensions of life, enables the sisters to always time and again come together to share and discuss on their identity and other important aspect for a better understanding and a willful and joyful authentic witness because by getting to know and understand the members will be more convince and courageous in witnessing. During one of this gathering the sister came to the realization that as Africans and in particular as sisters of the sacred Heart of Jesus call to witness authentically we must live out our lives in authentic African religious spirit. We realized that we witness by our example of honesty, hard work, and efficiency, reconciliation, poverty, chastity and obedience and above all loving as the Heart of Christ loves. This gathering and evaluations has help the sisters to be able come up in summary with definition of who they are and what their mission is considering the charism and patrimony of the congregation in fitting with the spirit if enculturation and this they expressed as follows:

We are a community of African women we are daughters of Africa who by choice and in freedom unity in diversity, in our own day, striving always to be alert to the needs and signs of our times. In this present era of evangelization, we commit ourselves to making concrete our charism of doing all that we can to improve the quality of life especially the of our women. As ministers in joy, we witness to the sacrificial love of the sacred Heart by our quiet and silent presence in the church. Indeed no speech, no word no voice is heard yet their Spam extends through all the earth; their words to the utmost bounds of the world' (ps 19:3-4).<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> *Sisters of the Sacred Heart, Journey of Faith, 46.*

### **3.3.2 Authentic witness through Evangelical Counsel**

The life of the Evangelical counsels calls for a renunciation, but for a renunciation that is motivated by love and brings fulfillment. Accordingly, the sisters of the sacred heart of Jesus as authentic witness commit themselves by vows that are by free and deliberate promises made to God, to follow the evangelical counsels. As authentic witness the sisters seek to follow in the general legislation of the church and the constitutions of the sisters of the sacred Heart of Jesus.

#### **a) Through consecrated chastity**

The sisters of the sacred Heart of Jesus as authentic witness understands that celibacy is a gift of God which only few can accept for the sake of the congregation is a promise made to God and accepted by a superior. By our vow of chastity we as authentic witness have freely chosen to consecrate to God, the integrity of our mind, our body and our heart. By our celibate life we symbolizes that sublime union between Christ and his church, a union which has been establish by God and would be fully manifested in the world to come.<sup>96</sup>

In virtue of this vow, the sisters is vigorously bound to live perfect chastity in celibacy and to avoid whatever circumstances that constitutes an obstacle or grave danger to the life and perfection of the virtue consecrated celibacy.<sup>97</sup> The constitution of the sisters of the sacred Heart of Jesus in agreement with *perfectea caritatis* specifies that the sisters are to

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<sup>96</sup> *Sisters of the Sacred Heart constitutions*, Art.12.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. *canon 599*

“undertake mortification and observe custody of the senses and imagination to be modest in dress and demeanor and to be alert to the growth of inordinate personal attachment.”<sup>98</sup>

Therefore in their day today life or rather in practice in order to foster and preserve their chastity the sisters try to avoid friendships that can not help our chastity such as avoiding danger that are associated with exclusive friendship whether with male or female. We admonish one another honestly. While each one of us is encouraged to examine her conscience and honestly make a personal effort to live this vow. We commend ourselves to the Lord who alone can give us strength seeking inspiration in the sacred Heart of Jesus and his virgin mother we work at making our communities peaceful ones so that we would not need to seek love from outsiders.<sup>99</sup> This is express in the constitution, as

The sisters should keep in mind that the chastity of all would be better safeguarded in a community where genuine charity prevails. Because the bound of union in the congregation is strengthened by real friendship and true sisterly love, the members will strive to be sincere loving sisters and friends of one another.<sup>100</sup>

#### **b) Through consecrated poverty**

Poverty for the sisters of the sacred Heart of Jesus does not mean destitution. We learnt from Christ that the basic attitude of religious poverty is turning away from material wealth toward heavenly things. It therefore leads to a style of life, which uses earthly things with moderation, and according to need and not want just God intended them to be used. It also implies the voluntary limitation of the right to possess and dispose of them.

The counsel of poverty implies that the sisters of the sacred Heart as authentic witness give up being enslaved by them and so lead a life of dependence on the providence of God.

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<sup>98</sup> Cf. *perfectae caritatis*, 12, *sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus constitutions*, Art 13.

<sup>99</sup> *Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus vowed and community Handbook*, 5

<sup>100</sup> *Sisters of the Sacred Heart Constitutions*, Art. 14.

Poverty enables them to avoid unascertained solicited for the well being of body or soul. Even in spiritual things they strive to acquire a holy abandonment to the will of God. By the vow of poverty the sisters renounce the liberty of using or disposing of any of her goods without the permission of her own superior while reserving to herself the right of ownership of them and the faculty of possessing new ones.<sup>101</sup> So by this vow, the sisters renounces the “might of money” and the false “greatness” that comes from wealth and possessions and which often makes it hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. In choosing evangelical poverty the sisters also choose to be subject to the common Law labored unto complete weariness.<sup>102</sup>

The sister’s commitment to evangelical poverty calls for sharing as well as for renunciation through life of sacrifice. Sisters share with each other their gifts, talents, time energy, and ideas and also by the permission and the approval of the superior general the communities that have more substantial income will share their resources with communities that suffer need. Hence all the incomes and gifts are brought together forming the common purse of the congregation.

Whatever a sister acquires by personal labor or on behalf of the congregation belongs to the congregation. Whatever come to her in any way through pension, grant or insurance also passes to the congregation.<sup>103</sup>

### **c) Through consecrated obedience**

For the sisters of the sacred Heart of Jesus as those striving to witness authentically. At the root of the vow of obedience is a staunch act of faith in Christ’s promise to be alive

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<sup>101</sup> Cf. *Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus constitutions*, Art 19.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, 22

<sup>103</sup> *Sisters of the Sacred Heart constitutions* Art 14

and active in the church until the end of the age. In taking the vow of obedience the sisters of the Sacred Heart give witness to their belief. From profession onward they sisters listen for the voice of Christ as it filters down through the hierarchy and ultimately through their superiors into their lives. The vow of obedience is therefore not a mere expedient for providing checks and balances in a group that has come together to work at a particular enterprise; neither is it just an ascetical practice. It is the determination to hear the voice of Christ more clearly and more articulately in one's everyday life. By hearkening to that voice in the hear and now the sisters intend to make of themselves total gift to Christ. Underpinning this intent is the Biblical conviction that it is more accepted to offer God ones will and judgment than to present him with material goods. "Obedience is better than sacrifices: and to harkens rather than to offer the fat of rams" (I Kings 15:22)<sup>104</sup>

Through obedience the sisters express their entire dependence on God and filial adherence to the will of the one who was obedient unto death, even death on the cross (Phil 2:8). Through this sacrificial oblation of obedience the sisters dedicates to God every sphere and moment of their whole life. In this way they bind themselves to the churches service and endeavors to attain to they measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

In order to make the ideal of obedience their own and remain faithful to it always, the sisters cultivate deep humility and perceptive faith. In humility they will accept for themselves decisions made by their Lawful superiors which are of critical important in their lives.<sup>105</sup>

Fidelity to this vow enables the sisters to strive to see God in everything and in everyone. For the sisters as for Jesus surrender of their freedom will be the most painful of all renunciation: "let it be as you would have it not as I would have it" (Mt 26:39). But in this renunciation and in others they will find new freedom to unite themselves completely with God's loving

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<sup>104</sup>cf *Sisters of the Sacred Heart constitutions*, Art.32.

design for themselves and for their mission. Obedience among the sisters of the sacred Heart of Jesus also implies responsibility that is the ability to respond to what is heard and perceived and in addition they believe that the response is made to someone perceived as a loved one. Also of recent the obedience of the sisters of the sacred Heart of Jesus goes with dialogue for the sisters are given the point is dialogued with the person concern for the good of the individual and the congregation.

### 3.3.3 Through Spiritual life

The sisters of the sacred Heart of Jesus also strive to witness authentically to their charism through their spiritual life. “The first and principal duty of the sisters of the sacred Heart of Jesus is the contemplation of things divine and constant union with God in prayer”.<sup>106</sup>

The sister in their effort to witness authentically gives prayer the priority in their life. They strive and endeavor to allow prayer to pervade their whole lives: their thought and words, their work and recreation and therefore as individuals and as a community they always set aside undisturbed periods which are given entirely to prayer.<sup>107</sup> The call to follow Christ is a growth in holiness that continues at every moment in every aspect of their lives so in order to achieve and fulfill this, the sisters nourish this call in their own heart and show it in their conduct toward their sisters in community and toward the people whom they meet in their apostolate, under the transforming influence of the holy spirit in their daily experiences

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<sup>105</sup> *Sisters of the Sacred Heart constitutions* Art, 40 (cf Canon 663).

<sup>106</sup> *Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Directory* Art 24

<sup>107</sup> *Sisters of the Sacred Heart Constitutions*, Art 46.

the sisters realizes that central to Christ's way of life is his personal relationship with the father and since this forms the kernel point of Christ becomes the heart and center of the sisters of the sacred heart of Jesus, thus prayer becomes the key to all their actions. Prayer is then given primary importance since through it they draw strength and inspiration for their apostolate and daily life. In prayer we learn to be open to God. This implies an attitude of humility and sincerity. We learn to acknowledge ourselves sinful, weak, and in need of God's special attention. God love them with unconditional love since we are totally unworthy of his love. Our only claim to His love is like that of a child on the parents. Their intension and genuineness manifest itself in different ways as they strive each day to witness authentically.

**Eucharist:** In grateful and loving response the disasters make Eucharist celebration the central to their spiritual life. It is the spiritual center of our life. It is the spiritual center of our community because in it Christ is present and active, He the center of our hearts. And this deepens our bond of unity, which is express in our charism.<sup>108</sup>

**Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus:** In modeling our lives after the sacred Heart of Jesus, in our experience of our own heart and in the gospel seek the heart of Jesus. The virtue of love, compassion, humility, obedience. The sisters as devotees of the Sacred Heart dedicate reasonable time to be with him. It is part and parcel of the sisters to begin the day with an hour adoration and every first Thursday breaking Friday the sisters have all night adoration where each member of the community take turn to adore the Lord in the Blessed sacrament.

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid, Art 45 Sisters of the Sacred Heart constitutions Directory Art 36.

**Faith sharing:** This is one of the ways the sisters try to practice and as well nurture and nourish their spiritual life. Ones every week the sisters come together to share their faith experience with each other and pray about them. This enable them to learn from their experiences and that of others and as one family of God pray in gratitude to God for the experiences.

**Spiritual and scriptural** readings are other means of spiritual development and nourishment which the sisters endeavor to give attention. This is done both individually and communal. Annual Retreats, Monthly recollections, and sacrament of reconciliation are other means that enable the sisters to keep the flame of their spiritual life burning.<sup>109</sup>

### 3.3.4 Through Community Life

“Our fraternal life in community bind all our sisters into a special family in Christ. This union of the members, rooted and based in charity, is to be an example of universal reconciliation in Christ.”<sup>110</sup>

The sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus regard their community as a family. For we have been brought together as one family of God by the redemptive love of God that bind us together. We try to respect one another. We encourage each other to be themselves for each of us is uniquely loved by God. Certainly we differ from one another in many ways. Yet we try to remember that the Lord and spirit had called us to form one unity.<sup>111</sup> We are members of a community who belong to one body and the one spirit and share on one hope. We do the little we can to tolerate one another and as well forgive each other just as we have been forgiven by Christ. Living a community life is not always easy because of

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<sup>109</sup> Sisters of the Sacred Heart constitutions Directory Art 29.

<sup>110</sup> Sisters of the Sacred Heart constitutions Art 55.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 56.

the differences in personality, character, background etc. but the grace of God invites and strengthen us to accept, to understand and love each other as they are.

As sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus striving to witness authentically to our Charism We always remember that we are called for fraternal solidarity and communion among us. We try to bear with each other, caring for one another, helping those in need, and sharing in the joys and sorrows of one another. Sharing is one of important aspect of our community life. As sister of the Sacred Heart we bring together our individual insights, talents, and energies to plan and to execute evangelical undertakings for the good of the congregation and the church. Each person is encouraged to make their contribution toward creating an atmosphere of friendliness and harmony in the community. We believe and know that our vows are better lived out in a community. To facilitate our vowed life therefore we do all we can to make our community a living home for ourselves so that each person will feel accepted and loved.<sup>112</sup>

### **3.3.5 Through Apostolate**

Canon 673 state that, the apostolate of all religious consists first in their witness of a consecrated life which they are bound to foster by prayer and penance.” As religious congregation therefore this become the first and most important apostolate of the sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. However, since our congregation is dedicated primarily to prayer and service, we have consistently, from the very beginning, sought ways to concretely express this commitment to the church and ultimately to Christ.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>113</sup> Cf Canon 673

The sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus will labour to share in the work of evangelization and engage in apostolic works that will teach others about Jesus' unifying love, and they shall do this, not only by their prayers and by the witness of their lives, but by their words and their deeds.<sup>114</sup>

The primary apostolate of the congregation is to experience and spread the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. This apostolate is concretely expressed through devotional acts and through such ministries as

- ☒ The elevation of the dignity of the downtrodden womanhood.
- ☒ Education, (both formal and non formal )
- ☒ Collaboration in pastoral ministry.
- ☒ Medical works and Counseling.

The motivating force and distinguishing mark of the sisters at work is "charity"- the sacrificial love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

#### Education

We work to educate people formally in Nursery, primary, and secondary schools and vocational institutions. We also educate non formally, by instructing people, especially those in the villages where opportunity for training is limited. We have holiday study programme for primary and secondary school pupils. This programme is referred as the vacation activity programme(VAP). For us education is not limited to those already mentioned. Being part of a large society, we recognize that there are certain societal issues that people, especially those in the rural area who would otherwise not have the opportunity for such education, need to know. We therefore, organize activities in the village where we work to educate the natives on issues that affects them so that they are able to make their

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<sup>114</sup> *Sisters of the Sacred Heart Constitutions Art. 74.*

decisions base on their knowledge. Such issues include basic health habit for villagers, education on deadly diseases and how they can both be avoided and manage, etc.<sup>115</sup>

#### **a) Upliftment of the Dignity of Downtrodden Womanhood**

Our congregation feels obliged to concentrate more on working to train the girl child while not neglecting the boy child. No one would doubt in most Africa today, that, the female child has, for a very long time, been at a disadvantage as far as formal education is concerned. Only quite recently have people come to realize that the role of the woman is no longer solely “in the kitchen.” It is not new that our women have generally been downtrodden. We, as daughters of Africa, have taken up as one of our apostolate and challenges, the upliftment of the downtrodden womanhood. There are diverse ways in which the sisters concretely express this apostolate. One way is by our apostolate in schools and another facet of this apostolate is express in the cottage industry established to help the especially young women who are school dropouts, and who would otherwise have not have opportunity to gain any skill for future livelihood. Such young women are trained in the industry free of charge, and some of them afterwards are employed in the same facility to earn a living while some choose to establish on their own after they have worked and saved some money are assisted to do so.<sup>116</sup>

As part of our commitment to womanhood, our congregation has begun an apostolate with our young women who have either been forced into or have deliberately entered into prostitution within and outside the country. This is very challenging! Part of this ministry involves discouraging the practice, and rehabilitating those who have opted out of this ugly

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<sup>115</sup> *Sisters of the Sacred Heart Journey of Faith*, 30.

trade and giving them an alternative lifestyle and helping them to realize their dignity as human persons. <sup>117</sup>

#### **b) Medical apostolate**

We are also involve in the health ministry and had worked in various health establishment and at the moment are in charge of diocesan hospital. St. philomena's Catholic Hospital, Benin city.

#### **c) Collaboration in Pastoral Ministry**

Our sisters often went into the villages in the parishes around our formation house to assist the Priests in parish ministry through teaching catechism, being with the people, organizing Basic Christian Communities and organizing Para-liturgical services. This is especially in those villages where the Priest could only celebrate Mass with the people once in two months or so.

### **3.3.6 Through Sound Tradition**

“As daughters of Africa living the Gospel, we will find ways of integrating into our lives, all that is good and beautiful in our Culture.”

The sisters had picked up some of the African cultural values, and make it part of their own values, since they do not oppose the Gospel values. And the persistence of this practices had automatically made them the sound values of the congregation.

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 35.

### **a) Hospitality**

This is a distinctive mark of our early members and still remains one of our primary concerns.

As daughters of Africa, the spirit of hospitality which is our identity, extends not only to our members but to all visitor to the community. The sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus cheerfully welcome, in charity all visitor of all social standards, clergy, religious and lay people, who comes to their houses, willingly offering them descent hospitality. Guest rooms are to be provided outside the cluster.<sup>118</sup>

### **b) Hard work and Self Reliance**

The congregation of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus is solely a self reliance institute. We work very hard to sustain ourselves and keep the congregation moving. Our first sister began with poultry, yam, vegetable, maize, rice etc which is much larger today and are still sources of sustenance. These farm is managed by our sisters and it still provide reasonable amount of food for consumption and for sale. We have from the first days operated a small bakery where we bake bread both for our consumption and for sale. This bakery remains part of our cottage industry today.

The cottage industry mentioned here was established in 1984 as a weaving center to provide training and subsequent employment for our young women in the village. When the center began in 1984, the sisters were the first to learn how to weave fabrics so as to be able to teach other young women. The industry was eventually expanded to include the already existing bakery a sewing and knitting section a tie and dye/batik and printing on fabric section and a candle making section. It is a thing of pride for us that the weaving section of the cottage industry weaves the sisters official habit. Presently, apart from training and

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 36.

providing job opportunities for our young women, it has become an appreciable source of income for us.

**The Way Forward:** Sisters of the sacred at end of each day as a community recite the way forward as a way to remind themselves of community living demand of them as authentic witnesses.(see the Appendix I). Also the Habit is one of the unique aspect of the sisters and it gives a remarkable Mark and meaning about the S. S. H. (see Appendix II-V).

### 3.4 Conclusion

The witness of any congregational charism, always reflect it self in the different aspect of the congregations lifestyle. Since the lifestyle is moulded and directed by the charism and spirit of the congregation, the nature at which the congregation operates will be unique. The congregation of the sisters of the sacred heart of Jesus as a religious congregation strives at all cost to live their lives out the demands of their charism. And as indigenous religious congregation, they strive to make use and put in practice all that is good and beautiful in their culture. That is their values.

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<sup>118</sup> Sisters of the Sacred Heart Constitutions, Art. 3(i).

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

It is a fact that for one to be an authentic witness, the person needs to make a conscious effort and a great sacrifice in life. A person with integrity lives a life that makes an impact on others. He or she is like a light that shines in the darkness for others to see. Authenticity is a key word whenever morality, ethics, and virtue are concerned. An artist could write a striking book on the aesthetics of virtue, or moral goodness. A good number of “silent”, both as individuals and as a group, could serve as tremendous exemplars of goodness and authenticity, which are precious embodiments of the beautiful. That is the point of the traditional thesis that the True, the Good, and the Beautiful are inseparable and “Transcendental”. Together they constitute the splendour and happiness of a successful life. An authentic witness in celebration of its moral and spiritual maturity practices the virtues of authentic life such as justice, courage, generosity, goodness, moral uprightness, sincerity, respect, tolerance, humility, fidelity, prudence, wisdom, trust, hope, perseverance, even the virtue of aging with dignity. The essay in looking at the meaning of authentic witness touched some figures both in the Old and New Testaments who had live an authentic life. In the Old Testament those individuals like Enoch and Noah who walked with God, David who kept the Law, the Prophets like Elijah who did the will of God are all regarded as people who lived an authentic life. While in the New Testament, Jesus’ most authentic witness ,who witnessed to the will of His Father urges all His followers, all believers to live out the Gospel values, that their life should shine for the world to see. While in traditional Africa community life, they consider a matured person to be an authentic witness, because a mature person is some one with integrity, respect and moral uprightness, thus living exemplary life.

Considering all these, an authentic witness in religious life therefore will be any one who does his or her best to live up to the demand of religious virtue despite its challenges. This is the challenge and of the sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus who try to live out the demands of their congregation's Charism. As authentic witnesses to something they hold deeply precious in the midst of an often unbelieving world.

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

**V.A.P-**Vacation Programme.

**S.S.H.N-** Nigeria Sisters of the Sacred Heart Jesus.

**S.S.H-** Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

**S.S.F-**Sisters of the Holy Family.

**P.C-** Perfectae Caritatis.

**L. G-** Lumen Gentium.

**E. T-**Evangelica Testificatio

# APPENDIX I

## THE WAY FORWARD

We have come to the realization of our limitations as we try to live our lives in community. We have also come to a deeper understanding of Evangelization and the need for us to first evangelize ourselves within our communities before we can evangelize others.

### **We hope to achieve these....**

- By avoiding cliques
- By being sisters to one another
- By reaching out to one another
- By showing true love to one another
- By being sincere in our relationship with one another
- By being open to one another
- By being responsible for each other
- By giving Sisterly corrections
- By participating in sisterly sharing and recreations
- By understanding one another
- By giving positive confrontation

### BY PRAYING FOR ONE ANOTHER

### **To effectively evangelize the self, we are deeply challenged to:**

- Cultivate self-knowledge
- Have a constant examination of self
- Be convinced of my calling
- Cultivate an appreciative attitude of self and others
- Have a sense of forgiveness
- Understand my community
- Accept some degree of blame
- Watch my words.

**TO BE AN INSTRUMENT OF PEACE, RECONCILIATION AND UNITY, WE NEED TO AVOID JUDGING FROM WHAT WE HEAR FROM ONE PERSON; REFLECT ON WHATEVER WE HAVE HEARD BEFORE COMING TO CONCLUSIONS**

All of these call us to be ourselves active evangelizers and authentic witnesses among ourselves in community, and the society at large. We pray and trust that the Sacred Heart of Jesus will inspire us to be GOOD NEWS bearers.

**IN JESUS,  
WE ARE ONE.**

## APPENDIX II

### OUR RELIGIOUS HABIT

The first group of professed Sisters wore an off-white or milky colored gown with a pleat on either side of the front lower ends with short sleeves and, an emblem of the Sacred Heart embroidered in white on the chest. This served as the habit at this time.

This Habit was to be a temporary one since our founder, from the very beginning, intended that the members of this congregation be truly indigenous, most of all in the mode of dressing. This was with the aim of reflecting the image and culture of the Nigerian woman. Since he did not want to impose a particular design on the group he waited until the group was sizeable enough to decide on the design or pattern they wanted hence our first members temporarily wore a gown as Habit.

### **Christianity incarnates our cultural Heritage (Founder's sermon)**

Culture by its nature is dynamic, if it stagnates, it dies. The Nigerian culture is no exception. Living culture therefore reaches out to assimilate what it encounters and rejuvenates itself. Another dynamic of culture is that whatever of it is true and beautiful must be able to enhance humanity as a whole and to that extent it belongs to humanity and is universal. Dress is an aspect of culture that is dear to the Nigerian. The Nigerian mode of dressing has both influenced other cultures and been influenced by them as well. This is to be expected because our world has become a melting global community. Again and again, in the Nigerian social structure, peer groups and solidarity groups delight to dress in common patterns and tinctures. This is socially unacceptable in the western world except among the uniformed careers much as the military, the police and the nursing. Not so in Nigeria, for purely social

groups wear common patterns of dress and do encourage their members to do so. They sometimes impose sanctions for failing to fall in line.

Social scientists agree that clothing is never neutral. This is true of everybody but more so for women. More often than not clothes are outward pointers to our inner intentions. If the message is, "I am....." and I couldn't care less who you are. Others inadvertently react to such arrogance with hostility and corresponding contempt. The manner we dress often reveals the three levels of our existence viz; our INNER ATTITUDES, on the more superficial level the work we do, and on the most profound level they symbolize our meaning. For example, in a place like Ibusa, when a widow wears an all black dress it symbolizes more than an attitude of mind, more than a uniform someone wears to mourn a beloved spouse. It symbolizes a mode of life, which in this case is a state of penance and atonement for the death of a spouse. In traditional society one never really dies of natural causes, the spouse is always presumed to have some responsibility for it. The same is true of Olokun priestess dressed in white. The dress symbolizes more than a mentality. It is not just a uniform of worship... It serves to draw the wearer and her clients to a new mode of existence. This live as devotees of the goddess Olokun.

There is some truth in the old adage that dress not only manifests a person, "clothes make a man". There is a self-fulfilling prophetic aspect about dress. If a person wears a certain uniform long enough he will eventually come to behave like those who officially wear the uniform. "The way a person dresses affects the way he thinks. They not only express his self-image; they create it. Clothes are life reflectors. They not only reflect what we are, but they also act as reflectors in which we see ourselves and assume the shape of what we see." Father John R. Sheets, S.J.

My dear sisters, I have gone into this socio-psychological discussion of clothes to prepare your mind for the statement I want to make about the new habit for the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. As a believer in the Nigeria culture, I want Christianity to incarnate our cultural heritage of manner of dress. Thus we shall consecrate to the service of God, the Catholic Church and to humanity one of our best cultural values decency couple with beauty and elegance in dress.

## **Founder's Statement on the New Habit**

The habit forms only one aspect of the life of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It has always been my profound desire, as Founder of this new congregation that a DIFFERENCE be expressed. This difference should manifest itself in spirit as well as in a constant immolation of all that is good, true and beautiful in Nigerian culture. Hence it is with this idea that the young group is daring an indigenous dress – one which adopts both the traditional church concept and our own cultural concept of feminine dress.

We have engaged in an on-going dialogue, and have constantly sought advice on this matter. As founder, I must listen, but the identity, purpose, and direction remains my responsibility during these formative years of the Congregation. Therefore, it is with this spirit that we are taking this **BOLD** new step, in trying to do what in my conscience I feel is in conformity with God's will. As you do so, I want you to represent what is best and beautiful in the Nigerian womanhood, to uphold, promote it, and consecrate it to the service of God and mankind as a whole. Cease looking to the western world as though it were the sole creator of what is best in the and beautiful in the world. Let your whole mental attitude, your words, your behaviour, your very deportment be a witness to the Sacred and religiously authentic in our culture enhance your service of God and man. Above all, be purifying agents of society,

elevating it to God, spiritual incense that rises up to God like an evening sacrifice. For “we are Christ’s incense to God for those who are being saved and for those who are not; for the last the smell of death that leads to death, for the first the sweet smell of life that leads to life”.



*The Official Habit of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.*



*The Second Habit of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.*

### APPENDIX III



His Grace, Most Rev. Dr. P.E. Ekpaka  
*Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Benin*

*The Founder of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.*

## APPENDIX IV



*Cross section of the Sisters with their Founder*

## APPENDIX V

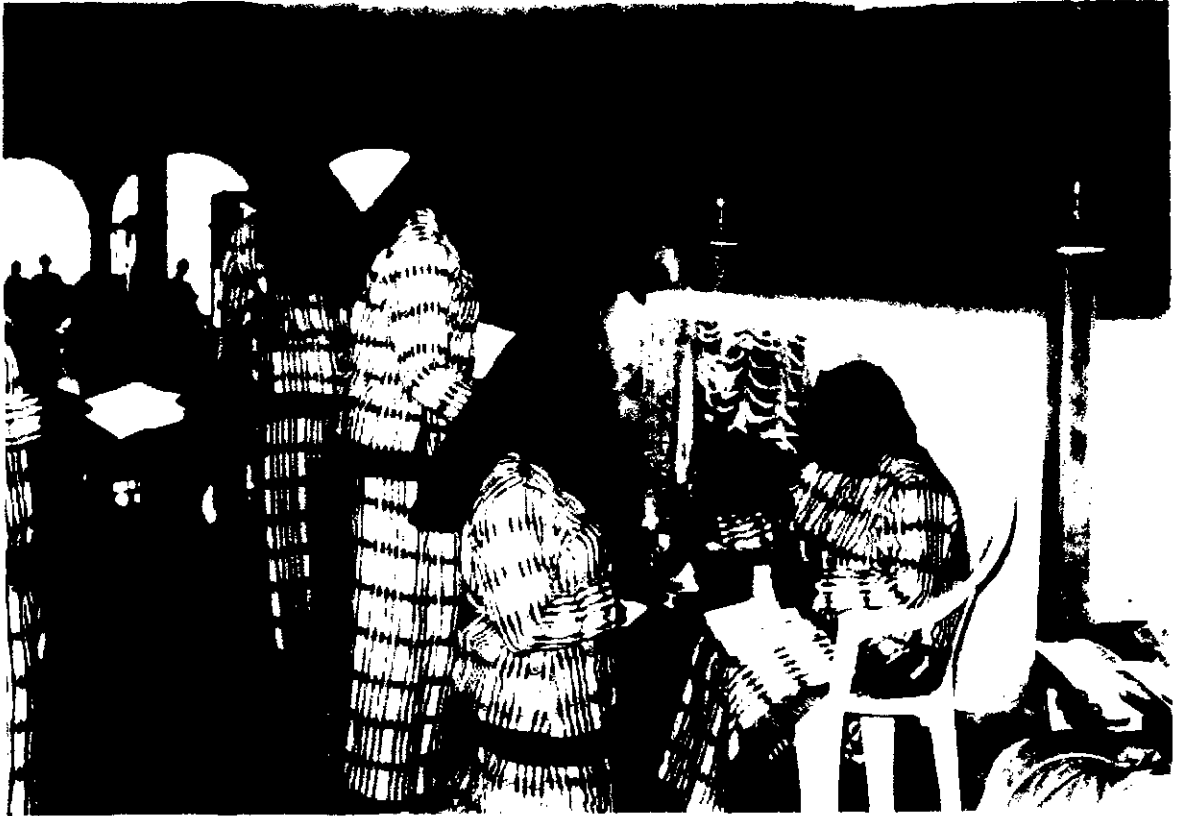


*A Sister pronouncing her Vows before Sister Sylvia Thibodeaux, SSF.*

*The first formation Directress and Superior General.*



*A Sister Signing her Formula of Vows.*



*A Sister receiving the Symbol of her Final Profession (ring).*

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