

INSTITUTE OF SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGIOUS FORMATION

TANGAZA COLLEGE

THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA

**TOWARDS A CONTEMPORARY UNDERSTANDING OF
THE EVANGELICAL VOW OF POVERTY IN THE LIFE
OF THE BROTHERS OF ST. CHARLES LWANGA**

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*A long essay submitted in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for a diploma in Religious Formation*

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STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the material used herein has not been submitted for academic credit to any other institute. All sources have been cited in full.

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DEDICATION

To all the elderly Brothers and the entire membership of St. Charles Lwanga, and in memory of my late father Charles Ndyanabo.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my deep gratitude to my parents whose love and discipline designed my world. I remember my father, Charles Ndyanabo, whose death occurred on 4th March this year, when this long essay was about to be completed. My father was my mentor and acted as an elder brother to me. May his soul rest in eternal peace.

There are many people whose benevolent sacrifice made this study possible. It would be ingratitude not to acknowledge them. Many thanks to Sr. Claudette La Verdier MM, a wise, attentive and friendly tutor, who led me through the fatigue and joys involved in the journey of writing this long essay.

I am greatly indebted to the De La Salle Brothers Scholasticate community, Nairobi, for being so friendly to me for the two years I have stayed in their community. I cannot forget Christopher Aleti, M.C.C.J who contributed ideas, and assisted in editing this long essay. May God bless him.

Thanks to all my classmates in the Institute of Spirituality and Religious Formation for sharing their friendship. I am grateful to everyone who in any way, has been involved and contributed to the fulfilment of my course. To all of you, thank you.

ABBREVIATIONS

BSCL	Brothers of St. Charles Lwanga
ET	Evangelica Testificatio
PC	Perfectae Caritatis
UISG	Union International of Superiors General

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

I am dedicating this material to my Institute, the Brothers of St. Charles Lwanga (BSCL) Looking back over the years from where the Congregation has come, the prospects of our future are bright. It is through the understanding of the vows, the vow of poverty in particular, that our Institute continues to prosper, through the work of the Holy Spirit.

We must all pay tribute to our "role models," the elderly Brothers, for living what they believed. They teach us to understand the value of evangelical poverty and to live under Divine Providence by following the footsteps of Christ. We are to take to heart the gospel saying, "*I am telling you not to worry about your life and what you are to eat ... your heavenly Father knows you need them all*" (Mt6: 31). The first Brothers planted in the Institute a spirit of using the necessary things, orienting them to the goal for which they are given to us and which they can serve. "Indeed this involves a dispossession, a generous gift of all that we have and is entrusted to us..."¹ For the younger Brothers, there lies the challenge! The older Brothers have been an affirmation in our vocation, and their physical presence continues to be a consistent part of our ongoing formation.

A sower went out to sow his seed: as he sowed some fell on the edge of the path and was trampled on; and the birds of the air ate it up. Some seed fell on rock, and when it came up it withered away, having no moisture. Some seed fell among thorns and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. And some seed fell into rich soil and produced its crop a hundredfold... listen, anyone who has ears to hear (Lk 8: 4-8).

The elderly Brothers have been and continue to be the rich soil of our Institute. The Brothers revere the memory of one of them, the late Matia Tibarindeka, one of

¹ Joyce Ridick, Treasures in Earthen Vessels, (Rome: Paulist Press, 1984), p.12.

the four pioneers² in the Congregation when it was founded in 1927. He was born in Uganda, central Buganda, Mawokota County, October 1884.³

The Charles Lwanga Brothers revere the memory of all the pioneers, but Matia Tibarindeka holds a special place in their hearts because of his outstanding love for the Congregation. In his profile we read that he loved his Congregation wholeheartedly. This is confirmed by the Brothers who lived and worked with him, namely Brothers Adolfu Ludigo, Dennis Ssegamwenge, Heraclio Ssenfuma, Ludovico Ssenfuma, Emiliano Nsubuga. These Brothers agree that Bro. Matia Tibarindeka was an exemplary religious and leader, very upright and honest, and above all a man who lived up to what he believed and to his word.

He had a special love for the youth in his ministry as a teacher, and loved the Brothers without discrimination. Sad to say, other than what is remembered by those who knew him, no written documents survived the Uganda Tanzania war of 1979, when the Congregation's archives, along with a lot of other property, were either destroyed or looted.

These qualities were widely recognized, for Bro. Matia Tibarindeka served as the first African Superior General of the Institute, 1946-1951. He died in a road accident on 22 April 1958 at the age of 74 years. Although he was taken from us suddenly and unexpectedly, his memory lives on and continues to motivate all those who aspire to the holiness he modeled.

All those who are called by God to the practice of the evangelical counsels, and who make faithful profession of them, bind themselves to the Lord in a special way. They follow Christ who, chaste and poor, redeemed and sanctified men and women by obedience unto death on the cross. Under the impulse of love... They live... for Christ and for His body, the church. The more fervently, therefore, they join themselves to Christ by this gift of their whole lives the fuller does the church's life become and the more vigorous and fruitful its

² The other pioneers are Ipolito Ssabayinga, R.I.P, Denis Matovu, R.I.P, and Gonzaga Kiwanuka, who is now aged 93 and is a retired teacher currently at the residence of the aged, and still teaching catechism to young boys.

³ Adolfu Lutaya, The History of the Brothers of St Charles Lwanga (Gulu Catholic Press, 1977), p.56.

apostolate "A call to religious life is also a call to evangelical witness, to be the "salt of the earth" through a radiant solid faith in the love of God and an effective apostolate, as the Vatican Council bids."⁴

*Seeing you and the life you lead, the young will be able to understand well the appeal that Jesus never ceases to be among them. ... The example of your life constitutes the finest recommendation of the Institute and the most effective invitation to embrace the religious life.*⁵

Today, the questions surrounding religious life are very basic. Is there still a need to commit oneself to the vows? Can the vows still bear a distinctive witness to God's kingdom of perfect charity? The need is urgent therefore, to rediscover the meaning of the vows and to rebuild religious life. This is a challenge to those undertaking the work of formation. Today, more than ever, formators feel the need to be informed about the world from which the candidates come and to which they are sent. We need a formation that emphasizes both sides of the coin: stressing the theological aspect without losing sight of the aspect of human development that opens the individual to real effective freedom. This freedom is necessary if we are to carry our candidates towards a free choice of vocational commitment. It is this freedom which can lead to ability and willingness to take a counter-cultural stance which is required in order to respond and to live the vocational choice effectively.

⁴ Decree on the Up-to-Date Renewal of Religious Life, Vatican II, *Perfectae Caritatis*, (henceforth, P.C), Bombay, 28th Oct, 1965, no. I.

⁵ Paul VI. Apostolic Exhortation on the Renewal of Religious Life, *Evangelica Testificatio*, 1971, no. 55. The quotation is from the Decree on the Up-to-Date Renewal of Religious Life, P.C, Bombay, no. 24.

Purpose of the study

This paper aims to help the young members of St. Charles Lwanga and those undergoing formation to deepen their understanding of the vow of poverty, for themselves, and for religious life as a whole. To accomplish these aims the work will unfold in four Chapters. Chapter One will begin with a brief overview of my Institute, the Brothers of St Charles Lwanga. I will then proceed to the history of religious life and the vow of poverty in particular, what the Scriptures say about poverty, closing with a statement from the Vatican II document, *Perfectae Caritatis*. Since the majority of the members are from the Ganda people, the second chapter will discuss the traditional and Christian views of poverty among the Ganda. Chapter Three will deal with the challenges and the practice of the vow of poverty in the Institute of Charles Lwanga Brothers. The fourth and final chapter will focus on the formation structures, the formator, and his role in formation.

CHAPTER ONE

THE BROTHERS OF ST. CHARLES LWANGA

1.1 A BRIEF OVERVIEW

The Brothers of St Charles Lwanga, locally known as Bannakaroli Brothers, are an indigenous congregation, founded by Bishop Henry Streicher and Fr. Richard of the Missionaries of Africa, in 1927. The Institute was established in the present Masaka Diocese, which was then part of the Nyanza Vicariate that comprised all of Southern Uganda, part of Western Kenya, Northern Tanzania and Rwanda. We will discuss the geographical location and history of Masaka where the Motherhouse of the Institute is located in the second chapter.

Bishop Henry Streicher was born in 1863 in France. He arrived in Uganda as a missionary on 25th February 1890, and worked in several parishes before he became bishop. He died in Uganda on 7th June 1952, at the first Catholic parish of Masaka Diocese, Villa Maria, where his remains are buried. At the time of his death the Brothers numbered 106, with 17 in formation. Many of these Brothers were already qualified teachers, teaching in different diocesan schools.

Fr. Richard, remembered as co-founder, was born in France on 4th May 1875. He was ordained a priest in 1900. This is a man who is widely remembered by many of the elderly Brothers because it was to him that the work of forming the Brothers was entrusted. Bro. Gonzaga, the only living member of the pioneer group, tells us that, “Fr. Richard loved the Brothers and taught them the way to God.”⁶ According to Bro. Adolfu Lutaaya, the words, ‘my God’ (mon Dieu) were ever on his lips! “If you wanted to annoy him, you talked ill of his children (the Brothers). Fr. Richard was farsighted. In 1931, although we

⁶ Brother Gonzaga, “On Fr. Richard,” interviewed by the author, 5th January, 2002, Masaka, Uganda.

were only nine in number, he built the Motherhouse to accommodate 150 people.”⁷ Fr. Richard died in 1947 at the age of 72 years. He was buried in the Brothers' cemetery at Kiteredde Motherhouse in Uganda. Fr. R.P. Loranger, also from the Missionaries of Africa, succeeded him. The Missionaries of Africa retained a very active role in the governance of the Congregation until 1960, even though the Brothers assumed leadership roles as early as 1949.

Bishop Henry Streicher's aim of founding the Charles Lwanga Brothers was twofold: To have trained Brothers who would manage the Catholic primary schools and post-primary schools and to have Brothers who would help the indigenous priests in mission activities, such as teaching catechism. Charles Lwanga was chosen as the patron of the Congregation because of his strong Christian faith, his exemplary leadership, and his observance of the virtue of chastity.

Lwanga was a Muganda of the Tragelaphis Scriptus clan. His father was a Mabingo, a bark-cloth maker, and his mother, Gwokiya, was of the Genetelan clan. “Lwanga was born in 1861 at Birinzi in Masaka Buddu County, Uganda. Lwanga was of brown complexion, of mighty strength and a great wrestler. He was an exceptional leader, a great Christian.”⁸ Lwanga is admired mainly for his practice of the virtue of chastity, especially during the Christian persecution in Buganda, Uganda in the 19th century by the reigning king, Mwanga. The king was against the introduction of the Christian faith which some of his faithful men had embraced. He feared for his security and the destabilization of his kingdom by the white missionaries. Lwanga, being one of the Christian followers, did not heed the command of the king to abandon his religion. His stance earned him a death sentence. On 3rd June 1883, to punish him for defying the king's orders and not abandoning

⁷ Brother Adolfu Lutaaya, “On Fr. Richard,” interviewed by the author, 5th January, 2002, Masaka, Uganda.

⁸ Tarsis A. Nsohya, The African Heroes (Entebbe: Marianum Press, 1999), p.14.

his Christian faith, Lwanga was burned in a slow fire from foot to head at Namugongo, Busaale, the site of the present martyrs' shrine in Namugongo, exactly where the altar is placed. As he suffered, Lwanga prayed for the conversion of his executioners. He was 25 years of age. Pope Paul VI, canonized Charles Lwanga together with his 21 companion martyrs in Rome in 1964.

1.2 Origin of Religious Life and the Vow of Poverty

The origin of religious life truly begins with the special relationship which Jesus, in his earthly life, established with some of his disciples. He called them not only to welcome the Kingdom of God into their lives, but also to put their lives at its service, leaving everything behind and closely imitating his own way of life. Sandra M. Schneiders, in her book, New Wineskins, presents a historical overview of poverty as a religious virtue.

From the beginning religious have willingly chosen "poverty," by which they mean a relative lack of this world's goods, as an aid in the spiritual quest.[...] The virgins and widows of the first three centuries lived simply but they were adequately provided for by the early Christian communities in which they lived as esteemed members. The desert monastics of the fourth and fifth centuries sought a life as devoid of material supports as possible but they did not live without the necessities of life.[...] The monks and nuns of the first Benedictine monasteries founded in the sixth century had a very different conception of poverty. The individual monastics had nothing of their own, but the monastery was a prosperous economic unit that provided comfortably for the needs of its members who, in turn, cared for community's goods with the reverence reserved for God's possessions. The mendicants, founded in the Middle Ages, decided on a corporate form of poverty in which the order possessed no holdings. Therefore, the individual religious had to live by begging or by work. This was an insecure and uncomfortable life consciously modeled on that of Jesus, the itinerant preacher, but, like Jesus, the mendicants were not habitually in dire want. The apostolic orders founded in the sixteenth and following centuries, worked out various combinations of corporate possession and personal non-possession in order to pursue their apostolic activities in efficient ways.⁹

⁹ Sandra M. Schneiders, New Wineskins (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), pp. 171-172.

Hence, through the ages, the greatest desire and wish of religious was to dedicate themselves to the exclusive love of Christ in a life of prayer, meditation and good works. Today in the mind of the church, religious are men and women who have made themselves over to God. Through their consecration their whole existence becomes a continuous worship of God in love. Religious life is nothing else and nothing less than a gift of God's infinite love, centered in the Triune God.

1.3 The Definition of Poverty in the Context of Religious Life.

The Lord says, "*If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have, give to the poor and come follow me*" (Mt 19:21). The evangelical vow of poverty, lived in imitation of Christ who, although he was rich became poor for us, entails a life of labour lived in moderation and foreign to earthly riches. It involves dependence and a limitation in the use and disposition of goods according to the law of the Institute.

Generations of religious have taken these words to be an invitation to religious life and to the vow of poverty in particular. Evangelical poverty, like all counsels, is part and parcel of discipleship: following the Lord without reservation. "In Christian tradition, religious poverty is understood as a quality of spiritual and social life which is voluntarily embraced in invitation of the Lord Jesus Christ."¹⁰ Aylward Shorter views "religious poverty as necessarily including the giving out of one's poverty that others may be enriched. Simply giving one's time to listen to people is an important form of sharing. Listening to the poor is a form of evangelizing them."¹¹

¹⁰ Staff of the Catholic University of America (Ed) New Catholic Encyclopedia, Jack Heraty & Associates, 1981, p. 525.

¹¹Aylward Shorter, Religious Poverty in Africa (Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 1999), pp. 27-28.

There must be a real meeting with the poor, a meeting of hearts and minds. Therefore, the vow of poverty is a share in the poverty of Christ who became poor for our sake that we might be enriched by his poverty (2 Cor 8:9). For Jesus, poverty is not primarily the renunciation of material goods. Rather, Jesus wants us to know that the essential in life is not the material goods of this world. What is necessary is the meeting with God and the service of neighbour. Therefore, the vow of poverty does not require destitution but solidarity with other people, especially the poor.

Religious poverty is way of living out our response to Christ's love for us. Johannes Baptist Metz sees the evangelical vow of poverty as "a protest against the tyranny of having, of possessing and of pure self-assertion. It impels those practicing it into practical solidarity with those poor whose poverty is not a matter of virtue but is their condition of life and the situation exacted of them by society."¹² The sting of poverty lies not in what we lack but in what we possess and how we possess it, and how we share whatever we have and whatever we are with those in need. The vow of poverty challenges us to put our goods at the disposition of those in need (Acts 4: 34-35).

We live religious poverty by sharing all that we have, our talents, education, security, time and other resources with those with whom we live and work. The vow of poverty challenges us to be in solidarity with the poor, to struggle to make ends meet just as they do. Gerald Mackrell states: "Poverty is, of course, a rehearsal of the ultimate detachment of death, when we loosen our hold on everything."¹³ We will now look at poverty in Scriptures.

¹² Johannes B. Metz, Followers of Christ (New York: Paulist Press), 1978, p.49.

¹³ Gerald Mackrell, Thoughts for Religious (London: Paulines Publications), 1984, p. 27.

1.4 The Scriptures and the Present Situation

In the Scriptures, we are confronted with contrasting views on poverty. In the Old Testament, poverty is generally seen as a curse and a punishment from God. The poor were regarded as people who were cursed by God for wrongdoing, while the wealthy were seen as blessed and rewarded for being upright. This contrast was clearly spelt out in the Jewish community and it diminished the community clan spirit of unity among the Jews.

The community considered the poor as sinners cursed by God and they were ostracized by the society. In the early Jewish community the rich were the leaders, while the poor were labourers, and it is the poor who were heavily taxed (Prov 2:7).

This is not the same view held in the New Testament. The New Testament has a different stand on the poor. The poor have one advantage over the rich (Mt 19:24). They are by definition, less likely to be seduced by abundance of possessions. The rich are not condemned either, if they share what they have with the needy, give justice to whom it is denied, and provide homes for the homeless (Lk 12: 33-34). In the beatitudes, Jesus says, *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Mt 5:3)*. This implies that to be poor does not necessarily mean that the poor person is a sinner or is cursed by God. The New Testament speaks positively of the advantage of the poor over the rich in relation to salvation. *Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God (Mt 19:24)*.

1.4.1 What causes Poverty?

We cannot attribute poverty to God as the one causing it. Poverty is a phenomenon of the evil weakness of human society. The key cause of poverty is the human greed of wanting to possess wealth for selfish motives, i.e., the egoistic desire to accumulate things. Greed falls on two levels. The first level is the abuse of leadership that tempts people to

push others in the situation of poverty. Instead of serving the people, the leaders enrich themselves with the riches of society and become oppressors. We can see the situation of slums like Kibera and Korokocho in Nairobi. Land grabbing and demolition of poor peoples' property by force are concrete examples of what pushes some sections of society deeper into poverty, while others continue to flourish at the expense of society. These leaders do not emulate Jesus as a leader who came to serve and not to be served.

The second level is trade. The terms of trade between the rich and poor nations is not balanced. The poor countries continue to be exploited by the rich ones. Bilateral international trade between the first and third worlds is not at par. However even in local trade, the rich business people exploit rural farmers in the same manner.

1.4.2 The Problem of Wealth in Relation to Poverty

It is true that wealth is a gift from God but it must be shared in the spirit of charity with one another in order to build community rather than to isolate and alienate others. As indicated in Scripture, Adam and Eve were entrusted with the treasures of the world as custodians to share the glory of God but they misused the treasure and lost the glory. Abraham was promised land with all its riches and indeed he remained faithful and the reward was given. As we have seen, in the Scriptures things in themselves are not bad. It is rather that they so easily become idols. The rich adore their riches; their security is banked on riches and not on God. Because of their wealth they may even walk above the law, forgetting that the kingdom of heaven is a kingdom of justice (Mt 6:33). Some sections of our society continue to maintain oppressive structures against their people: donor aid is given with strings attached, farmers are not promptly paid, or get less than what they deserve, the poor are heavily taxed. All these infringements severely affect the poor in our society.

Wealth isolates its possessors from God and fills them with a sense of their own self-sufficiency. These riches cannot be final because they are essentially deceptive. The wealthy fool in the Gospel of Luke was riveted to his riches. His life was a failure because he had linked himself with what perished (Lk 12:19-20). For Luke, the poor are those who have been dehumanized, and consequently, need to place their trust in God. This is why Jesus' mission is to restore their full humanity and make them share in the blessings of the kingdom. "Their blessedness consists in this restoration of their dehumanized humanity which the proclamation of the kingdom was to bring about."¹⁴ Who are the poor in the Gospels and Acts? They are the ones who depend completely upon others for alms in the form of food, money or clothing (Mk 14:7; Lk 16:20; Acts 3:1-10). They are the paupers, like the sick man, Lazarus, who longs for the table scraps (Lk 16:20), the local poor who hang out on the village streets. There is also a group of poor who voluntarily choose to give their possessions, home and livelihood in order to follow Jesus (Lk 5:11; 18:28). They are those who respond to Jesus' command to "sell what they have and give to the poor" (Lk 12:33).

1.5 The Attitudes of Jesus towards the Poor

The prominence given to the poor by Jesus and their central place in the life of the kingdom of God is a significant change from the traditional Israelite theology of salvation and retribution. As mentioned earlier, the poor were labourers seen to be cursed by God and perhaps an ostracized section of society. Jesus spent a great deal of his time with the sick. In fact, healing the sick was, for him, a priority. There were those who came to be cured of ailments and disabilities: fever, paralysis, curvature of the spine, a withered

¹⁴ Justine S. Ukpong, "Option for the Poor. A Modern Challenge for the Church in Africa," *AFER*, No.6, December 1994, 350.

hand, epilepsy, hemorrhage, blindness, deafness, dumbness, and many other diseases. So the ministry of Jesus towards the sick was seen as part of his great campaign against evil and the powers of evil in the world. Jesus was literally surrounded by the sick, and a major part of his poverty consisted in his availability to them.

In the early Jewish tradition, sinners, the captives, blind, etc were seen as those who did not fulfill what was expected of the pious. Jesus' choice for those people created not only scandal, but also puzzled many. Pious Jews expected Jesus to preach the Good News only to the poor so that they would come into constant habitual communication with God, fulfilling ritual obligations, and accepting an eternal covenant between them and their God. Instead, Jesus held them up as an example of people who exemplified kingdom values. Jesus breaks societal barriers and traditions by habitually associating with such a marginalized section of society. He was not on either side totally, but helped all to enlarge their understanding of God as a merciful and loving God who welcomes sinners (Lk 7:46-50). It is pertinent to point out that Jesus' concern for the poor does not necessarily mean he excludes the rich from salvation.

1.6 Jesus' Message to Both the Rich and Poor

To the rich "Jesus imposes on them an indispensable requirement, quite at odds with the social values of their own society, to provide the destitute with food and other necessities of life in the world."¹⁵ Thus, Jesus' concern for the poor does not come from the fact that the poor or less fortunate in society are better than others. Instead it comes from the fact that the "poor or less fortunate need to depend on God for their life and future, rather than on the accumulation of riches, possessions or property."¹⁶

¹⁵ Mario I. Aguilar, "Genuine, Concern for the Poor: Basis for Evangelization in Africa." *AFER*, 41 (1), 1999, p. 6.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Jesus does not praise the condition of the poor and suffering. Instead, he calls for openness to God and detachment from material goods (Mk 10:50). Jesus did not condone poverty. He knows that poverty can be a source of crime, envy, jealousy, unwarranted destabilization of peace and tranquility in society. However, apart from preaching the Good News to the poor, Jesus also warned his disciples against the danger of riches (Mt 19:24). Jesus' lesson to both the rich and the poor is to exercise an act of charity and love towards one another.

Whatever little one gets, it should be shared for promoting unity and a spirit of brotherhood/sisterhood in the community. *Rather, when you hold a banquet, invite the poor the crippled, the lame, the blind; blessed indeed will you be because of their inability to repay: For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous (Lk 14:13-14)*. This is an indicator that Jesus is not discriminative in the choice of his disciples. He chose both the poor, who held no public office, and civil servants like Matthew who was a tax collector. Thus, he called people regardless of their status. Wealth should not be a determining factor for status in society. People should be accorded respect because of their authentic human values. Riches are indeed a blessing from God out of which human harmony should be exhibited for the greater glory of God.

1.7 Challenges of Poverty to Religious Men/Women

Can religious men and women of today be of one heart, one mind and share what they have with the poor? In religious communities we have all that is necessary, like cars, good houses, food, means of communication, but do these reflect the poverty we profess? Do we live in solidarity with the poor we serve? The challenge is to be fully detached from what is transitory in order to attain the full meaning of our vow of poverty.

The poverty of Jesus and his disciples was by deliberate choice for it brought them into close identification with the impoverished condition of the poor. This group renounced their possessions and became poor so as to follow the one who proclaimed God's kingdom, God's reign to the poor. And this is the poverty religious men and women ought to claim: "Dependence on God for all things, emptying oneself as Jesus did, becoming nothing so that God could become all in the depth of one's soul and spirit."¹⁷ Addressing religious in *Perfectae Caritatis*, the Second Vatican Council says that:

Voluntary poverty, in the footsteps of Christ, is a symbol of Christ, which is much esteemed, especially nowadays. Religious should cultivate it diligently and, if need be, express it in new forms. It enables them to share in the poverty of Christ who for our sake became poor, though he was rich, so that we might become rich through his poverty. Religious should be poor in fact and in spirit, having their treasures in heaven.¹⁸

In *Evangelica Testificatio*, Vatican II adds:

It will therefore be an essential aspect of your poverty to bear witness to the human meaning of work which is carried out in liberty of spirit and restored to its true nature as the source of sustenance and service.¹⁹

¹⁷ John Gillman, *Possessions and the Life of Faith. A Reading of Luke-Acts* (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1991), p. 20.

¹⁸ PC, 3.

¹⁹ ET 20.

CHAPTER 11

THE GANDA AND POVERTY

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will look specifically at the understanding of poverty among the Ganda people of Uganda. I am choosing the Ganda because this is where the Congregation of St. Charles Lwanga Brothers was founded and much of the Ganda tradition has been inculcated in our religious life tradition.

Unlike obedience, which is seen as a value in traditional Africa, poverty does not seem to sit well in the African continent. This is because the term connotes negative aspects. In Africa, as is undoubtedly true everywhere, poverty is an evil to be eradicated. And so, the vow of poverty is not well understood by the people. Wealthy people are taken to be more fortunate than the poor. The symbols of wealth include: a large number of cattle, a big beautiful house, a number of wives and children, a good job, education and plenty of land.

2.2 Buganda Geographical Setting

Buganda, an area of 66,333 square kilometers, comprises 12 of Uganda's 49 districts. It includes the capital, Kampala, and the area south to the Tanzania border and west to the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda. Buganda has a population of about 5 million people.

2.3 The Ganda People and Their History

According to Ganda mythology, "Kintu, the first Muganda and king, is supposed to have come from the sky (Ggulu) with his wife Nambi, together with his brother, Walumbe

(death). He settled in a place called Muwawa presently called Buganda."²⁰ Yet history has it that "Kintu migrated from South Ethiopia, from the tribe of the Galla or Oromo people with his brother, Lukidi, the first king of Bunyoro, a neighboring kingdom."²¹

From the 16th century, Buganda was ruled by kings (Bakabaka) starting with Kintu. "From 1967 to 1986 the kings were no longer allowed to rule Buganda. This was as a result of a power struggle between the Prime Minister, Dr. Milton Obote, and the Kabaka who was then president of Uganda. In 1986, President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni reinstated all the kingdoms and the kings could rule again. The current king of Buganda is Ronald Muwenda Mutebi II. The late kings of Buganda are 35 in number."²²

"The Baganda kings developed the most efficient bureaucracy in pre-colonial Uganda. This organized kingdom was divided up into counties and the counties divided up in sub-counties and the sub-counties divided up into divisions. Each of these divisions had a chief."²³ This kind of governance, together with the clan system which had a similar organization, helped the Baganda to live a collective life. The clan unit was based on blood kinship. Because of this, it was in the interest of the whole group to keep together in a particular area rather than separate.

Within this system, some individuals were quite wealthy while others were poor. "The wealthy never lost sight of their obligation to the kinship group, but the poor members were never slow in claiming their due. In such a society there was never room for individualism or impersonal governance."²⁴ However, the Ganda socio-cultural understanding of poverty also consisted of various undesirable attitudes. Poverty was really taken as something abominable, miserable, minimizing, blasphemous, the source of bad manners, etc.

²⁰ Ddiba J.L., *Eddini mu Buganda*, Vol No. 1, (Masaka: St. Libertum Press 1955), p.17.

²¹ Kenneth S. Caarlson, *Social Theory and African Tribal Organizations*, (London: 1968), pp. 248-250.

²² Harold Ingrams, *A Crisis of Nationhood* (London: Heinemann Education Books, 1960), p.101.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 123-124.

²⁴ Harold Ingrams, "Some Aspects of the History of Buganda," In *Uganda Journal*, No. 20, 1956, p.12.

2.4 The Ganda Proverbs Related to Poverty.

A clear understanding of poverty is well expressed in the Luganda proverbs. In his book, Engero za Buganda (Ganda Proverbs), Nsimbi M.B. expresses well how poverty is an evil according to the Ganda people.

(a) **We have to fight poverty: "Obwavu mpologoma, bw'oterwanako ekulya"**

Poverty is a lion. If you do not face it squarely and fight it bravely it will devour you.

(b) **Be careful never to be poor: "Ataawone bwavu, asuubula magi na nsuwa."** A person who will never get rid of poverty deals in eggs and clay pots that are brittle and easily breakable by any slight accident.

(c) **Poverty makes one to be despised even after death: "Na wano lulyabizibwawo (olumbe), nga lwa mwavu."** The finishing of the funeral rites of a poor person can take place anywhere. But if the funeral is of a rich person, the rites will be particular and respected.

(d) **Poverty is an evil that has to be got rid of: "Omuyonjo omutono, gukyamya enkoko ckyensuti."** A narrow basket makes a chicken's tail feathers bend. Being restricted in need leads to many evils; therefore we have to get rid of poverty.

(e) **Poverty is a misery: ".Asaasira omunaku y'amuliza."** One who pities a poor person makes him/her cry. He reminds him/her of misery.

(f) **Minimizing: "Omunaku ayanjulwa."** A poor person needs an introduction, a rich one is known to all and does not need an introduction.²⁵

Poverty for the Baganda, as we have seen from the Ganda proverbs, is something unfortunate that has to be avoided. For Ganda, a poor person is one that has little or no money, has practically no domestic animals or fowl and no land, or only a small plot which is

²⁵ Michael B. Nsimbi, Engero za Baganda (Entebbe: Government Press, 1960), pp. 57-59.

infertile. Such a person does everything possible to change his/her situation. The word "poor" also extends to behaviour. One who has no manners that fit society is regarded as poor. "*Omuseveni omwavu, y'atasiibula.*" A poor soldier goes without saying good-bye, for he has nothing to leave to his friends. While his reasons for leaving like this are clear, the Baganda still consider it very bad manners not to say good-bye to one's friends.

2.5 How the Ganda People Deal with Poverty

Africans, and indeed the Ganda people, have always been sensitive to the existence of poverty in society, as tradition reveals. As a means to mitigate it, different values and attitudes are very highly appreciated. Then major attitudes are: hospitality, sharing help, and support.

"Hospitality" is a general attitude of friendliness and readiness to entertain whoever comes to one's home in spite of time, status, or for any reason whatsoever. It is an obligation traditionally accepted and practiced. The Ganda express this in a proverb: "*Munju temuli kkubo*" (There is no way through in a house). One should not expect someone coming towards one's home to be passing by. S/he is a visitor to be entertained and be given full attention because a visitor is to be welcomed under all circumstances. The attitude of hospitality also explains the value of "sharing", that is, the willingness to share contentedly whatever is available with anybody, no matter the person's status.

The duty to help and support one another is also very strong especially when there is misfortune, such as death, or happy occasions, such as marriage. In many ways these events are ritualized for gathering together as a "family." It is typical, for instance, to work together on such occasions to contribute freely whatever is needed. It is enough to make the occasion known to people and they know what to do. In fact it is their right to participate actively.

Children are also educated, formally and informally, with the hope that they will help to maintain the society in the future. They grow up with the responsibility of taking care of the less fortunate in society, but especially to care for their parents when they are old. Usually the elder boy in the family begins to carry the duties of the father when the latter is aging. Those who neglect these responsibilities and practices are usually despised or even, in extreme cases, punished by society. If, for instance, one does not attend funeral ceremonies without very strong convincing reasons, one risks being rejected when one's own close relatives die.

Thus poverty in the Ganda culture, as we have seen, was fought individually by each person struggling to make a living. It was also fought socially by assisting each other through families, clans or groups. "Through such co-ordination poverty was checked and brought under control when the Baganda used to be conscious of keeping their customs."²⁶

But now, mainly due to the influence of Western civilization and the changing economic situation, this spirit of assisting each other is dying off. As a result there are now more beggars than before. Formerly, each person in need would find a family, friend, clan, or group to assist him or her. This stands as one of the biggest challenges to religious men and women. We need to re-inculturate these values in our formation programs and, indeed, in society, hence the application and practice of the traditional way of helping one another.

Our people even today still ask many questions of religious, especially on the vow of poverty. They want to know what it is. Oftentimes my response has been: "Poverty is being available to the community, that is, sharing what I have and what I am with the community. Furthermore, I tell them that traditional oneness is intended to mitigate poverty and, if possible, eradicate it completely for the good of the society. The evangelical poverty I embraced is something I want to live joyfully and forever for the sake of the kingdom.

²⁶ Tarsis Nsoibya, The Customs and Development of Buganda (Entebbe: Marianum Press, 1998), p.79.

2.6 The Ganda Versus Christianity on Poverty

The dissonance between the gospel and African values in terms of "poverty" makes it difficult to witness the evangelical counsels in Africa. Commenting on the contrast which exists between religious institutes and the reality of African life, with specific reference to poverty, the Synod on Consecrated Life pointed out that:

*The vow of poverty as traditionally understood and practiced no longer has much meaning in Africa where real poverty is experienced as a great evil and religious are seen as those who largely escape the scourge of poverty. When we try to describe religious and their life, the word poverty, however we define it, does not apply. The use of the word is both a source of confusion and cynicism among non-religious.*²⁷

Religious poverty is a "poverty" which is strange in the eyes of a traditional African. It may appear just as strange for religious candidates. Since the bigger percentage of religious candidates come from a peasant rural background, the son or daughter in religious life can become a sign of contradiction, both within him/herself and to his/her family and society. Therefore, it is imperative that they be given a proper understanding of the vows when they are in formation.

2.7 Similarities and Challenges of the Ganda Versus the Christian Understanding of Poverty

Between the Ganda culture and Christianity there are practically no common elements in the understanding of the vow of poverty. Among the Ganda, for example, no sooner does a person make his/her first profession than the relatives swarm in for assistance, both financial and material. They assign the young religious with young brothers, sisters, and cousins to pay for their school fees, or he/she is asked to construct a house for the grandparents or the

²⁷ Martin Coffey. "The Synod on Consecrated Life, A Report and Some Reflections," In *Hekima Review*, No 13, (1995) p. 83.

parents. It is very difficult to convince them that their religious son/daughter does not own anything financially or materially when they see him/her well-dressed, living in a nice house, having cooks, and other workers in the community, eating well and at times driving a community car.

The challenge to those of us who have embraced the religious vow of poverty is where to put our focus. I believe we should put it on the poor Christ who had nowhere to lay his head. In order to face such a challenge we need to be able to abandon everything for the sake of Christ in order to cling to his love. We are surrounded by a materialistic and consumerist society which is indeed a big challenge to us religious men/women. We should stand firm and challenge the societal style of life by being honest with our vow of poverty. We should reach out to the poor and stand for their rights when economic injustice is meted out to them, and strive to liberate them from that poverty which robs them of their dignity. This is what is happening in our society whereby a poor person is denied human recognition, and whose voice is hardly recognized in any forum.

CHAPTER III

THE CHALLENGES OF POVERTY TODAY

3.1 Introduction

Jesus asks us not to be deceived by earthly goods. *The cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it is made fruitless (Mt 13:22)*. Jesus also speaks to those who have hunger for riches in their hearts (Lk 12:34). The rich young man is called by Jesus to put his faith where it belongs; but riches were an obstacle to him (*Mt 19:16-22*).

Jesus challenges us to place ultimate trust in divine reliability, not on human resources. *For God so clothes the grass in the field that grows today and is thrown into the oven tomorrow, will he not much more provide for you, O you of little faith? (Lk 12:28)*. Jesus also reminds us to face the crucial essential decision. *[The one] who does not renounce all that [one] has cannot be my disciple. Salt is good, but if salt itself loses its taste, with what can its flavor be restored (Lk 14:34)*. One would sincerely believe Jesus was addressing these words to vowed religious men and women today, as if he had already sensed what the challenges of the vow of poverty would be..

Having got together as a community for the sake of following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, religious are required to pool their resources for communal sharing. The vow of poverty calls for a total renunciation of the legitimate desire to exercise free and independent disposal of one's income. The call to religious poverty implies the need to resist the temptation to work for big salaries for enjoyment, or for mere consumption. "It will therefore, be an essential aspect of your poverty to bear witness to the human meaning of work which is carried out in liberty of spirit and restored to its true nature as the source of sustenance and of service."²⁸

²⁸ ET, 20.

It is therefore the duty of religious to submit themselves to "the common law of labour" and to earn their living and share with their neighbour, especially the poor. The attitudes demanded by evangelical poverty, love towards the poor, working together, sharing, prudent use of worldly goods, etc, are the same as those expected of religious. We have religious models for the vow of poverty. One who stands out is St Francis of Assisi. He was able to abandon himself to the providence of his heavenly Father and await everything from God's hand and thus to enjoy the peace of the kingdom. "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven* (Mt 5:3). Francis of Assisi thought of himself as the worst of all sinners, and that made him confess that anything good in him would come only from the goodness of God. Everything he had, he thought as coming from God to share with those in need.

3.2 Realities of the Challenges of the Vow of Poverty

It may be touching a sensitive and difficult area of religious life, but conditions in our African countries are such that some people may be attracted to religious life for the wrong reasons. Since religious institutes are at a higher social standard than the common population, some may come because of well-being or because their relatives encourage them to follow the vocation so that at least one of the family members will be well off and will possibly help the family. In reality, such a candidate may have all the qualities needed for the vocation, or at least the capacity to cultivate them, when s/he enters formation. But right from the beginning, the motivation is badly confused and if formation is not capable of handling this confusion, the candidate will make his/her way through to religious profession. The results of such a situation will eventually surface and be the source of much anguish, both for the individual and the community, later in life.

3.3 The Practice of Poverty in Religious Communities

Since some religious come from "poverty" and join religious life where everything necessary is provided, they may be greatly tempted to keep as much as possible for themselves in case there will be nothing tomorrow. They are like a starving person, who, when given food, finds it difficult to eat temperately. S/he may tend to lose control and eat rather uncontrollably. So, too, is the person coming from great poverty, especially if the person did not acquire the necessary basic confidence during the phases of growth, as is usually the case. Such people can be stingy, selfish and harsh when they are asked to share with others. They may be so suspicious about tomorrow that they find it difficult to let go of anything and to abandon themselves to the designs of Divine Providence. It is hard for them to live the sharing required in religious life.

These people sometimes make unnecessary or impossible demands on the community and they tend to claim certain rights to the use of community property. They feel entitled, for example, even if it is not necessary in their case, to have a special diet which the community is compelled to provide according to their exigencies. There seems to be an insatiable need to have more, a fanatic drive to obtain anything. Their general dissatisfaction creates bitterness and, of course, jealousy and competition, as already seen above. Also in such situations, there is evident irresponsibility and wasting since one can get more without sweat.

3.4 The Family Challenges

To some religious it may be quite difficult to be honest about their commitment for various reasons. In the first place, as already mentioned in chapter 2, the young are traditionally expected to take care of the aged, especially the parents. Strong guilt feelings surely result from a "failure" to do something for one's parents or even for other family members. This is mainly because of the contrast in economic standards between the religious

and the family of origin. S/he is "enjoying" plenty while the family may be living in want, perhaps in abject poverty. This feeling of "I have not done anything for my family" may result in such incidents as, embezzlement of community funds, taking things away without permission of the legitimate superior, running personal projects to earn so as to be able to sustain the family. This situation often results in a major conflict. On the other hand the religious feels guilty for engaging in these practices because s/he knows that they are against the vow of poverty, and on the other hand, s/he feels guilty for not doing anything for the family because this is embedded in African tradition. This problem is big in our communities and we ignore it to our peril.

The choice in this paradox tends, many times, to favour traditional values at the expense of evangelical values. Religious feel pushed to respond to the demands of their culture. Even if the parents are not in need and would not demand anything from their religious sons and daughters, the religious feel the demand and remain with inner disquiet. This is because s/he is not sharing what s/he has with the "family" since s/he has more than the family of origin.

The choice is worse when the members of the family express a need. To a firstborn this is a real crisis because, by tradition, the elder child takes the major responsibility to care for the family. Some religious who find themselves in this position, may even go as far as looking for benefactors to care for their families without the consent of the superiors. We have a common saying, *The ties of blood are stronger than the waters of baptism*. This seems to be true as long as the religious values are not internalized. As long as these religious do not feel settled in their religious family, they continue to live out of their cultural traditions regarding their family of origin, often at the expense of the religious family.

Furthermore, there tend to be unnecessary movements among religious visiting the family, and the family visiting their religious son/daughter. A religious may feel obliged to

attend whatever rituals there may be in the family, that is marriage, funerals, births, etc., and this may result in imprudent absence from the community. All this affects the responsibilities and activities of the community and, of course, the vow of poverty itself, but the religious may not be aware of it because commitment to his/her Institute may not have been implanted in his/her motivational system.

There is nothing wrong per se in the traditional values but to a vowed religious, they can distort the meaning of evangelical poverty, which requires a radical detachment.

"If any [one] comes to me without hating²⁹ [...] father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, yes and [one's] own life too, [that one] cannot be my disciple" (Lk 14:26).

Evangelical poverty is a call to dispossess oneself of everything, material goods, time, space, personal qualities, yes, persons too, by leaving them free in our love for them. We must be motivated by love of God alone. A religious community is not merely a "social convenience" or a sanctuary, but a means of serving Christ, continuing his life and witnessing to its power. It is the work of formation to channel the traditional values and attitudes in our candidates and to lead them to serve for the right motive for which God is calling them into religious life.

3.5 Poverty as Practiced by the Brothers of St. Charles Lwanga

Poverty proclaims that God is a person's only real treasure. When poverty is lived according to the mode of Christ who, "though he was rich... became poor" (2Cor 8:9), it becomes an expression of that total gift of self which the Divine Persons make to one another. This gift overflows into creation and is fully revealed in the Incarnation of the Word and in his redemptive death.³⁰

If the vow of poverty is to make sense today, it cannot continue to be understood as a private choice operating in the closed system of the religious subculture. It must address the

²⁹ This is a Semitic hyperbole designed to jolt the readers into realizing what is at stake in the following of Christ, as well as the cost of discipleship.

³⁰ John Paul II, *The Consecrated Life* (Nairobi: Pauline Publications), 1996, p. 23.

organization of material resources for the good of all by modeling evangelical values. When material goods become one's central fascination, then one must compulsively procure things or become permanently tied to the goods. One is permanently and unreflectively trapped in one's traditional values and has never developed a respect for things as instruments of God's practical generosity in loving us. Instead, they are instruments of self-gratification.

One of the most painful experiences of poverty that we religious have today is the inability to "acquire" permanently the virtue of poverty. It is true that material goods are an important basis of social relationships. Often we are challenged by religious poverty in the proper handling of material goods. All religious have to admit the challenge that what we have in terms of service, knowledge, time, availability to others, is not ours, but must totally be shared with others, especially those most in need.

The most serious failure in poverty on the part of many religious has nothing to do with things but is the refusal to share themselves, even their prayer life, their faith, hope, and love with their brothers and sisters.

3.5.1 How the Brothers Lived Material Poverty

Let us turn to the subject matter concerning the material poverty of the Brothers prior to attaining their administrative autonomy, as narrated by Rev. Bro. Adolfu Lutaya in his book, *The History of the Brothers of St. Charles Lwanga*. Bro. Adolfu Lutaya is one of the third set of Brothers in the Congregation. He has witnessed the life of the Congregation right from its start in 1927 to the present time, 2002. He has written an accurate account, giving the history of the Congregation from 1927 to 1980. At the age of 91, he is blessed with a sound understanding and with an extraordinary memory. Through his eyes it is very interesting to see how God's grace worked in the first Brothers! Most of them came from the Ganda who,

from culture, hated and condemned poverty, but who abruptly and wholeheartedly surrendered everything for God's sake. And yet some came from wealthy families.

3.5.1.1 Wearing of Shoes

From 1927 to 1952 the Brothers were not allowed to wear shoes. A candidate who had shoes, on joining the postulate had to surrender his shoes once for all to the Superior, Fr. Richard, who was a Missionary of Africa. Failure to do so would mean dismissal. It was not until 6th January 1952, that the Brothers were allowed to put on sandals, but without stockings. No sooner had they been given shoes than they got another order to remove them, after only two weeks. Two major reasons were given: that wearing of shoes would make the Brothers proud, and, that they were making too much noise and disturbing the priests. For this reason the Brothers had been driven out of the church sanctuaries in a number of parishes.

After about one month they were allowed to wear shoes again with a caution never to make noise nor walk proudly. To the Brothers, this was a vague directive, because for them, holding one's head high was a natural way of walking. The Brothers neither reacted nor complained.

3.5.1.2 The Use of fountain pens

For writing the Brothers were using nibs which they had to dip into inkpots. In 1952, they were allowed to use fountain pens. Other writing pens existed but were not used until 1965.

3.5.1.3 Clocks and watches

It was in 1952 when the Brothers were permitted to possess clocks in their communities, pocket watches and wristwatches. Even though clocks and watches were not new in the country the Brothers had not been allowed to use them.

3.5.1.4 Wooden plates

During World War II, that is 1939-1945, some Brothers' communities used wooden plates, which retained the smell of fish. No matter how thoroughly, washed, the smell of fish remained.

3.5.1.5 Dress code

The Brothers' dress code was a black cassock on liturgical functions, and a black suit on official duties, but preferably and inevitably, a cassock for public functions. This dress no longer applies so universally, but is now reserved for specific occasions.

3.5.1.6 Financial administration

The Brothers were not allowed to exercise the duty of administering their finances other than getting a stipulated stipend from the Missionaries of Africa. The Provincial Treasurer administered whatever they earned financially. They did not even know what their accounts read! However such trends shifted when the Brothers gained full autonomy in 1962.³¹ The financial administration remained the same but the Brothers now have more autonomy and accountability in the use of community funds.

In all of these matters Brother Adolfu assures us, the Brothers welcomed the changes and the progress. But still they stayed in their mode of the vow of poverty, ready to surrender

³¹ Lutaya, p. 5

anything if told to do so. Having seen how the first Brothers lived the vow of poverty, let us examine the contemporary understanding.

3.6 Contemporary Understanding of the Vow and Its Challenges Today

The contemporary understanding of the vow of poverty is basically expressed by the Brothers in two dimensions: within community life and in our apostolate. In community, the Brothers express and conduct their affairs, not only basing themselves on structures but living as "friends," as Jesus said (Jn 15:15). The Brothers are those who want to participate more radically in Jesus' mission and give witness to the fraternity and the affiliation to which all are called.

As religious Brothers we know and understand well that we do not belong to ourselves. We belong to God for the good of the universal church. That is why we are bound to use our individual talents generously in fulfilling the will of God. *"Set your hearts on his kingdom and those other things will be given to you as well (Lk 12:31)."* The Brothers believe and know that through spiritual poverty they depend entirely on God and not on material possessions.

They express this freedom through a life of genuine simplicity, openness, hospitality, respect, responsibility, happiness, sensitivity, and collaboration within community and in their apostolate. To realize the norms of this freedom, dialogue and community discernment is indispensable, but most of all prayer life. Rule No. 38 states:

As the Brothers are children of the church, whose obligation is to continue Christ's work of preaching the gospel, our foremost duty is to bring salvation to all people. Therefore, every Brother is to be a channel through whom the life of God flows into other people. The Brothers perform their duty of building the church by fulfilling the purpose of their foundation namely: as artisans and educators of the youth. In their apostolate the Brothers are not after temporal gains, but serve all people, especially the handicapped, the needy, those deprived of their rights, as Jesus did.³²

³² Brothers of St Charles Lwanga Constitution (Entebbe: Marianum Press, 1995), p.29.

Let me single out some apostolates that have touched the core of our mission: the St. Luke Ganda herbal clinic, the Watoto wa Lwanga street children's project, and the artisan youth training centers. St Luke Ganda herbal clinic is an initiative of some Brothers who saw the need of using their God-given talents to offer herbal clinical services to people who could not afford treatment elsewhere. Regardless how little these needy people can give; they are given treatment as they come. The clinic has many branches all over Uganda.

Watoto wa Lwanga children's project is another area where the Brothers have developed their apostolate, assisting and living with needy children, giving them knowledge, teaching them Christian morals and artisan skills to become better citizens. This project caters for 1000 street children in Nairobi alone.

Training of youth in artisan skills, including the deaf and the physically handicapped, is part of the Brothers' apostolate in East Africa. They do this by walking in the footsteps of Jesus who cured the sick, healed the lame and the handicapped, as in, *The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the down-trodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favor (Lk 4:18-19).*

3.7 Exercise of Poverty in Communities - Model in the Trinity

The Brothers of St Charles Lwanga gratefully welcome the gift of community life granted to them by the Holy Spirit according to the model of the Holy Trinity where love is the characteristic. It is this love which is poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit that unites them together. The teaching of the gospels and the liturgy, especially the Holy Eucharist, nourishes the union. This is in fulfillment of the Lord's commandment of love. *By this love you have for one another, everyone will know that you are my disciples (Jn 13:34-35).*

Community life is exemplified in the following elements: fraternal charity, joyful simplicity, mutual relationships and friendly co-operation among members of the Institute.

3.7.1 Unity in Diversity

The consecration to God unites Brothers together in spite of their nationalities, tribes, and various activities. That variety is necessary for exhibiting the riches of God and for the good of the Institute. This eventually leads to the pulling of their resources together in terms of their talents, knowledge, both material resources and spiritual resources, like the faithful in Acts, *who lived together and owned everything in common. They sold their goods and possessions and shared out their proceeds among themselves according to the need of each one (Acts 2: 42-45).*

3.7.2 The Spirit of Work:

The Brothers continue to be witnesses of Christ through the evangelical counsels, by being a living example and doing their own work as stated by the founder of the Institute, Bishop Henry Streicher: "They shall not own individual property; they shall have a uniformity in all domestic utilities, where fertile land is available they must never buy food. They shall use their skills to construct their houses."³³ This is a compounded demonstration of how the founder wanted his sons to practice the vow of poverty. According to Bro. Emiliano Nsubuga, former Superior General, Fr. Richard, the Co-founder, was a practical formator for he also did all the activities. From 1927 to 1944, he alone was giving thorough formation to the postulants and novices in the work that comprised teaching Holy Scripture, spirituality, liturgy, catechism, pedagogy, music, church history, agriculture, giving spiritual direction, supervising all workers and caring for the sick. In all this he wanted to cultivate in

³³ Brothers of St. Charles Lwanga: The Old Rule Book (Entebbe: Marianum Press 1942), p. 22.

his sons a spirit of self-reliance. Bro. Emiliano adds that Fr. Richard was a man of prayer, always ready to do God's will, with humility, patience and obedience. He loved his sons so dearly, and all he was he wished for them.

3.8 Challenges of Poverty for the Brothers of St. Charles Lwanga

In the beginning of this paper, in chapter one, I spelled out in detail the entire essence and meaning of the religious vow of poverty. Perhaps we may still ask ourselves why we take the vow of poverty. I believe we take this vow to protest the world of gross inequalities. To this effect we are called to do all in our power to put our goods, and indeed our whole selves, at the disposition of those in need. We take this vow to free ourselves from anything that would impede us from following Jesus Christ.

The challenges of the vow of poverty are not particular to individual Institutes but are general. As Philomena Agundo states: "The vow of poverty is difficult to understand and impossible to observe unless the individual has experienced and enjoyed with gratitude the gifts s/he has received."³⁴ This implies the giving back to God the gift of self, which God has enriched through the years. This may sound mysterious and a challenge to religious men/women. However, unless we are appreciative and grateful for our God-given gifts, which we are called to share liberally, we are not at all practicing the "poverty of the heart." Such an aspect of poverty is more important in the eyes of God than quantitative material deprivation.

3.8.1 The Importance of Support and Affirmation

To actualize the gift of self, members need support and affirmation from fellow members in the community. They need affection and empathy without which community spirit is killed. In this matter the superiors especially need to be vigilant. Community life is

³⁴ Philomena Agundo, *I Chose you* (Bombay: Paulist Press Society, 1995), p.182.

"livable" only when members are assured of a community that is consistently supportive and loving. Community life, when imbued with an affirming attitude, provides the healthy social network that makes fidelity possible and the vow of poverty livable. A good number of religious men/women either violate the vow of poverty or completely lose their vocation because of lack of community spirit and affirmation. The challenge Jesus gave us should be a reminder for community affirmation. *Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am also* (Mt 18:19-20). Jesus implied that gathering in his name is a gathering in his love. It is in Jesus' presence, within us and among us, that we are given the strength to live the vow of poverty and remain faithful in our vocation.

3.8.2 Faithfulness to Material Stewardship

At the beginning of this chapter we saw the danger of family expectations from a religious family. It is possible that some of our candidates may carry with them into Religious life such expectations, waiting and hoping for an opportunity to arise where one will be in charge of finances. If any of them enter with such a motivation they are in great danger of misusing community resources, and therefore violating the vow of poverty when they become professed religious. It is the duty of formators to warn them early of the impending dangers of material unfaithfulness in their apostolate. In New Wineskins, Sandra Schneiders says, "Religious poverty is the way religious situate themselves in relationship to material goods. Since material goods are fundamental to our relationship with other people, religious poverty is necessarily a social virtue."³⁵ However Schneiders admits that the proper understanding and prudence needed for religious poverty has never been easy.

We cannot do without all material goods. The importance of material goods is always conditioned by the cultural situation in which we live. We must re-evaluate our practice of poverty constantly and adjust it to every new situation.

³⁵ Schneiders, p. 183.

On the other hand we need to guard against rigid practices of minute rules; and we need to ensure accountability.³⁶

Individual religious need to be sincere and transparent in their approach to superiors when they ask for help and suggestions for individual problems. Superiors are human beings who, in one way or another, have or have had similar experiences. They understand our problems.

Our state of life demands total honesty for our transformation in Christ. Paul says: *Think of God's mercy, my brother, [and sisters] and worship him, I beg you, in a way that is worthy of thinking beings, by offering your living bodies as a holy sacrifice, truly pleasing God. Do not model yourselves on the behaviour of the world around you, but let your behaviour change, modeled by your new mind. This is the only way to discover the will of God and know what is good, what it is that God wants, what is the perfect thing to do (Rom 12: 1-2).*

Our religious vocation is a journey that is to be nurtured and nourished with the help of the Spirit. That is why if one chooses to respond to the call, such response should be a life response. The decision that is made implies a transition from the life one is living to a life one has chosen to live and it involves a transformation in Christ. The individual assimilates or internalizes the terminal values revealed and lived by Christ in such a way that s/he can say like Paul: *Let I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved and given himself up for me (Gal 2: 20).*

In *Perfectae Caritatis* we read, "Before all else, religious life is ordered to the following of Christ by its members and to their becoming united with God by the profession of the evangelical counsels."³⁷ A call to religious life, is therefore, a call to self-transcendence, to go beyond oneself, and beyond cultural values in order to meet God and to fully establish a dialogue of love; in union with God. This transcending oneself in love, and

³⁶ Ibid. p. 115.

³⁷ Pc No. 2.

making Christ's life one's own, is the basis of religious life, the beginning of human cooperation in our vocational journey. It is actualized in the practice of the evangelical counsels as the instrumental values leading to our final destiny. This entails a life of service to others for the kingdom as a consequence of the freedom of the human heart. *If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come follow me (Mt 19:21).*

So, while it is a gratuitous gift from God, the religious vocation is also a human endeavour to respond and to go towards God. Let us try to delineate these two poles: the human and the divine, and how they converge in a dialogue.

3.9 God's Initiative in the Vocational Journey

As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, the elderly Brothers in the Institute continue to be a bright candle to those coming behind them. They are role models in the mystery of our vocation and in the virtues of hope, faith, and charity of the whole Institute. In fact, they are a voice of God in our religious life, just as L.M. Rulla writes in his book,

Anthropology of the Christian Vocation:

God speaks to us immediately as well as in a mediated way. The Spirit and grace of God which fill our minds and our hearts with their power are the immediate contact which God makes with each one of us, in different ways and with varying intensity, in the immediate experience of the mystery of divine love. The word, written or spoken, and the example of the life of Christ, are the way, mediated by meaning and regulated by value, through which God engages [...] in the vocational dialogue; and its meaning depends on the human context in which word and example are present.³⁸

When God speaks, the challenge lies with us to respond hopefully, faithfully, and in a spirit of charity as mirrored in the evangelical vows particularly the vow, of poverty, which puts us into constant conflict with the transitory world. The gift of God's loving relationship

³⁸ L.M. Rulla, Anthropology of the Christian Vocation (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1986), pp. 241-242.

with us in our call is deeply rooted in God's salvific plan. In other words, God planned from all eternity to make us sharers of the divine gift of love. This is the love we need to transmit through the evangelical counsels. *Before the world was made, God chose us, in Christ, to be holy and spotless, and to live through love in God's presence (Eph 1:4)*. Our witness for this is faithfulness, uprightness in the life we have chosen. And it is the new commandment left to us by Christ at the Last Supper which makes the core of this love. [...] *love one another as I have loved you (Jn 13:34). As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love (Jn 15:9)*.

Bro. Fulgence Mwebe, 91, who has lived religious life for 70 years in the Institute, does not regret at all the years he has lived this life in the service of the Lord. He describes his life, using the example of a ceremonial lady he once met in the king's palace. Her charge was to wait upon the deceased kings as a consort. At the Kasubi royal shrine, she was asked how she liked her office and how she earned a living there. The answer was by way of a rhetorical question. "Do you really understand what it means to be in the service of the king?" she asked. "The king is magnetic; one can hardly resist his attraction." And so also for Bro. F. Mwebe, for Jesus and his vocation.

3.10 Poverty Understood by Our Families of Origin

In reference to what I discussed in chapter two, regarding the Ganda's understanding of poverty, religious poverty sounds mysterious to the majority of our people. Again and again, they wonder how we earn a salary and give it all to our superiors, when our families are living in abject poverty, after having contributed to our education. "How come you don't assist us financially?" The question of money continues to haunt our people and there may not be answers in the near future. But there are some who understand and who view our

vocation with the eyes of faith. They give moral support and encouragement to the vowed religious. Perhaps the simple and easy answer to a few who may seem to understand our call would be: We have taken this vow as an expression of a willingness to enter into a common life, which in turn, offers us freedom to be available for the building of the kingdom."³⁹

I will now shift attention from the individual person of the religious to the formation structures and the formator. These are two other important elements in the life of a religious to be.

³⁹ Martin Orsi, The Challenge of Being a Religious in Africa (Eldoret: Amecea Gaba Publications 1996), p.176.

CHAPTER FOUR

FORMATION OF THE BROTHERS OF ST. CHARLES LWANGA

4.1 Introduction

Meanwhile the child grew to maturity, and he was filled with wisdom; and God's favour was with him (Lk 2:40). And indeed, which of you here, intending to build a tower, would not first sit down and work out the cost to see if he had enough to complete it? Otherwise, if he laid the foundation and then found himself unable to finish the work, the onlookers would all start making fun of him and saying, here is a man who started to build and was unable to finish (Lk 14: 28-30).

In this chapter, we will discuss the issue of formation structures in the Congregation of the Brothers of St. Charles Lwanga. I believe that through these structures, a Brother should be formed with a distinctive motive for his life, with a goal and an objective with particular reference to the vows.

The following are the formation structures in the Charles Lwanga Institute: initial contact, pre-novitiate, novitiate, perpetual profession, and ongoing formation. It is again through these structures that an African religious should clearly come out with a basis to face the challenges of the vow of poverty. I compare these formation structures to a staircase as one cannot climb to the second and the third levels without stepping on the first. After taking the structures one by one, we will consider the role of the formator and conclude with formation challenges. But in the first place let me examine what the church says about religious formation. Religious life brings together disciples of Christ. They need to be assisted in accepting "the gift of God, which the church has received from her Lord and which by his grace she always safeguards." *Lumen Gentium* says:

This is why the best forms of formation adapted will only bear fruit if they are animated by a profound spiritual renewal. The formation of candidates, which has as its immediate end, that of introducing to religious life and making them aware

of its specific character within the church, will primarily aim at assisting men and women religious realize their unity of life in Christ.⁴⁰

Church teachings form the basis for the entire journey of religious life. In the first structure, the initial contact between a candidate and the vocation animator, the animator would wish to see the following values in a candidate: Is he able to communicate well? Does the candidate have the experience of developing healthy relationships at home and in the community? Is he able to carry responsibility? It is very crucial that a candidate be assisted to develop these elements early enough. The choice of a religious vocation is related not so much to what the person is, but especially to what he would like to be. We will now proceed to the remaining structures.

4.2 Pre-novitiate

In a pre-novitiate program there needs to be a process to enable the continuation of assessment and to further develop personal generous response according to the demands of the Institute. The following elements are necessary: the ability to live in community, to participate both in personal and communal prayer, to take personal responsibility and to relate well beyond one's community. Rulla states:

Therefore, if the person who proclaims self-transcendent ideals at the beginning of the vocational journey, wants to grow in keeping with the values proclaimed, he must above all integrate these values with the rest of his/her personality; otherwise they will remain external and on the surface of his/her life, failing to be internalized.⁴¹

That is why candidates have to be assisted in their vocational journey. To let them go without distinctive goals is not charitable to the individual and the entire community.

⁴⁰ Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 1964, No. 44.

⁴¹ Rulla, p. 133.

4.3 The Novitiate Structure

This is also very crucial in the life of the novice it is at this level that he is helped and encouraged to focus on his personal relationship with Christ, to integrate life experiences as they are encountered, to deepen clearly his identity with the Institute and its charism. At this level one should be conversant fully with the rules that identify him with the Institute, so that later he will be able to make a free choice for commitment in the state of life to which he is aspiring.

In this paper I have made constant reference to the rule of the Charles Lwanga Brothers Institute because I compare the rule to the constitution of a nation which guides the citizens of that particular country. Rule No. 46 states:

The aim of the novitiate is to prepare the novice for his consecration in the life of the Institute through a conscious and responsible training. During the novitiate the novice is helped to confirm his decision through a free understanding of the essence of his vocation to the Institute, its charism and spirituality. It is the period whereby the novice comes to know Christ more intimately and to follow him poverty, chastely, obediently and by practicing the correspondent virtues of the vow.

John Paul II, addressing International Union of Superiors General on religious consecration and formation, said:

The primary end of formation is to permit candidates to the religious life and young professed, first to discover and later to assimilate and deepen that in which religious identity consists. Only under these conditions will the person dedicated to God be inserted into the world as a significant, effective and faithful witness.⁴³

⁴² BSCL, Constitution, p.33.

⁴³ John Paul II "Address to UISG", Rome, May, 1985.

4.4 Post-novitiate

During this structure and stage the religious should be able to find in his community a base for his personal growth through ministry and the companionship of fellow members. In the previous chapter I touched on the elements of companionship and affirmation in a religious community. If not nurtured in these ways, the religious will not find the sustenance he needs to be faithful in the practice of the vows. It is at this level that the issues of "fidelity to the life of the community, persistent integration, personal identity, a sense of fulfillment, and ability to be at ease within the community, surface."⁴⁴ As experience may show, this stage is provocative, challenging, and tempting in the life of a young religious regarding the vow of poverty. It is the period of accumulation of unnecessary material things. Perhaps in novitiate such a religious was restricted and limited in terms of material accessibility. It is also the period wherein he dwells much on the issues of the future, such as education. It is important for him to know that his spiritual future is of much greater value than his material future.

4.5 Ongoing Formation

There may be young religious who, before entering the religious life, enjoyed a certain amount of financial independence and were accustomed to obtain by themselves all that they wished. Others may find themselves at a higher level of life within a religious community than they had in their childhood or during their years of study or work. These categories of religious must be helped to accustom themselves to the here and now of their state of life. For these young men instruction in poverty should take into account the history of each individual.

⁴⁴ Margaret Kingo, David Blowey & Others, "Incarnating Christ Today," Tangaza Occasional Paper No. 11, 2001, p. 5.

Another issue, which I discussed in chapter two and three, is that certain cultures, and families expect to gain by what appears to them to be advancement for their religious child. These young religious should be assisted to focus their attention and centre their lives on the poor Jesus who is contemplated, loved, and followed. A young religious may need a lot of help especially from role models in the Institute as well as senior formators to overcome and disengage from cultural and family huddles. But this requires also the effort of the person to discern and pray for his vocation, without which the vow of poverty, under the form of solidarity and sharing, may easily become ideological. Only one who is poor at heart, who strives to follow the poor Christ, can live authentic solidarity and true detachment. I have dwelt a lot on this stage of formation because, as history and experience shows us, in our Institute this is a very precarious stage when vocations are likely to be lost if no attention is paid.

4.6 Perpetual Profession

During this period one would already have made mutual discernment, working on personal issues which tend to block the level of freedom to be faithful to community responsibilities. The outcome of such a process needs to be an integration of all the elements of religious life which include prayer, community life, as well as a commitment to one's vowed life. At this point, the signs of growth should be consistent with what is needed to thrive in religious life, between what he believes and feels, and above all, the required behaviour. The structures I have mentioned in this paper are particular to the formation houses of the Charles Lwanga Institute. In our efforts, we are encouraged by the words John Paul II addressed to the religious of Brazil, insisting that,

[e]ach religious Institute [...] has the task of planning and realizing a program of permanent formation suitable for all its members. It should be a program, which is not simply directed to formation of the intellect, but also to that of the whole person. Primarily in its spiritual mission [...] every religious must be taught to

live in or her own consecration to God in all its fullness, and in keeping with the specific mission which the church has confided to them.⁴⁵

The foregoing structures cannot miraculously transform an individual. A religious vocation is a cooperation of grace and nature. It is indeed the work of God, but it involves the participation, collaboration and response of the human person as a partner. That is why Hebrews says: *all you who are holy brothers and have heard the same heavenly call should turn your minds to Jesus (Hb 3:1)*.

It would sound unfair to complete my discussion on the formation structures without any specific word about the formator who is the immediate instrument of God and the mover of the vocational journey. Whatever is said up to now on formation structures is absolutely relevant to the formator. There is nothing more essential to formation than the maturity of the formator without which the maturity of the young candidates is less probable.

4.7 Role of the Formators

The most essential and difficult task of the formator is not so much that of presenting the values of Christ in conferences, meditations, communal and personal prayer, or the like; it is rather that of living these values in one's life. A number of formators may find this a very challenging task in the area of their mission. For one cannot really transmit something that one has not oneself become.

The formator ought to be fully transformed in such an apostolate and avoid masking, or working with a sense of being imposed upon, as revealed in such comments as, "I was brought here," or, "I may leave this place at any moment." One should be able to say, like St. Paul, "*Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ*" (Cor 11:1). Formators therefore should themselves have internalized the values of Christ. This requires a formation of the formator

⁴⁵ Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Directives on Formation In Religious Institutes*, Rome, 1990, p. 31.

which provides for an adequate internalization of Christ's values on their part, and so also make them apostolically effective. Teachers say that by teaching potential teachers, they multiply themselves, preparing others who will follow in their footsteps.

Formators should bear in mind that the demands of formation are constant and exacting. Often, if those undergoing formation are young, they may tend to exhibit a love-hate response to authority. Unless formators have a belief in their own lovableness they can be quickly undone and the formation process, which centres on their life, can come to grief. This leads me to urge, that those put in charge of formation work have to be persons with a mature relational life. Some qualities required in the person of a formator include: insight and responsiveness, a certain experiential knowledge of God and prayer, wisdom resulting from attentive and prolonged listening to the word of God. The formator needs to be a lover of liturgy, understanding its role in spiritual and ecclesial formation. He needs to be a person with wide knowledge and cross cultural experience. The formator must have sufficient time and goodwill to attend to the candidates individually, and not just as a group. Because a formator is compared to a mother of young children, who attends to each and every one of them in order to give them a bright future and destination, serenity, patience and true affection are important virtues.

To meet the foregoing standards, a formator needs to undergo training because, to be able to assist the candidates in the process of internalization, the formator needs sufficient experience gained under supervision. This training would prepare him in competency matching the delicacy of his mission. There is a common saying, "that the trained eye of a competent doctor knows where to look for signs in order to check out symptoms in a patient

before making a diagnosis." This matches well with a trained formator, whom I compare to the medical doctor.

Knowledge acquired only on a theoretical level, whether from universities, books, and magazines or from some few months' experience in group dynamics, is not enough. The training of a formator is rather an issue, which affects the whole personality of the individual.

4.8 Unfinished Business

A formator who has not worked on unfinished business may find it difficult to live what he proclaims due to inconsistencies. Rulla says, "Perhaps one of the greatest defects in the process of formation is precisely the discrepancy which those formed can observe between the values actually proclaimed by a formator and the values actually lived by the same person."⁴⁶ *Take the plank out of your own eye first, and then you will see clearly enough to take the splinter out of your brother's eye (Mt 7:3- 4).*

Imagine a formator who may not have succeeded in mastering sufficiently his need to be appreciated and accepted. He will fail to correct or confront his subjects in the necessary matters, even the small ones. He may fail to require observance of certain norms he has stated. If the formator continues to express his need to be popular and repeatedly evade his responsibility, he damages the subjects, most especially, by blunting the vow of poverty, because of the apparent good of a fatherly/motherly "kindness". Allowing oneself to be challenged in supervision can be a painful experience, but it is the price that one must pay if one is to attain some level of competence as a formator.

⁴⁶ Rulla, p. 107.

4.9 Facing Challenges

Another challenge of today's formation is the world of "instants." It goes without saying that most candidates are of the "instant coffee" culture, shaped by electronic media in every way and are a very demanding generation. They want everything "now." They are a tough audience because they are brainwashed with sophisticated secular images. To form them effectively, the formator needs to be aware of the candidates' previous experience which is highly competitive and compelling. It is only through adequate training that a formator will respect the experience of a candidate and his views. If the candidate senses this respect, he will be able to look up to his formator as a role model and both will find joys and satisfaction in the process of formation.

A formator need never be afraid of challenges and conflicts, remembering that the cross of Christ is part of life for every Christian. If the formator's apostolate is that of peace-making in the sense of challenging, catalyzing and being a spiritual leader, and if he really wishes to follow Christ's way, he will always stand firm in the exercise of his mission. Conflicts are inevitable because of certain kinds of choices which Christ demands. *Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth. I have not come to bring peace, but the sword" (Mt 10:34).* The formator who really wants to follow Christ will sooner or later be himself a 'sign of contradiction' (Lk 2: 34), and will have to suffer (2Tim 3:12).

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The elderly Brothers in the Institute are a precious gift to all the members. It is in them that the roots of the Institute's spirit are founded. We honour them by walking in their footsteps. Religious poverty, which we have discussed at length in this paper, should continue to serve as an excavator which makes room for true values by clearing away the rubbish in our religious living. The true value and witness of religious poverty is that it helps us to keep our priorities right without the need of a trauma to bring us to our senses. The vow of poverty will then bring us that elusive peace of mind, without which we are poor indeed. There is an urgent need to inculcate our values into our formation programs to create a realistic balanced state of religious living. Africa should be proud of the number of vocations that continue to come. The sower never ceases to sow his seed, but where does the seed fall? Why does our formation present signs of failure? Or, why, after trying the possible alternatives, do some of our candidates still show significant signs of immaturity in living their religious commitments? These are questions posed to whoever will read this paper.

Those who are responsible for appointing formators ought to give formation a special priority by ensuring that formators are trained, full of humour and ready to serve in that particular apostolate. Since formation is about modeling and co-journeying, to be effective it must be inculturated in order to make it meaningful to our people. In the process of inculturation the gospel challenges the culture and is challenged by it; the gospel does not condemn culture. Formators, therefore, should keep, promote, and adopt positive cultural values in the process of formation. "The construction of the kingdom cannot dispense from borrowing elements of human culture."⁴⁷

The greatest contribution we religious men and women can bring to humanity today is certainly that of revealing Christ by the transparency of our life as much as by our words.

⁴⁷ John Paul II, "Apostolic Pilgrimage", (Boston: Paulines Publications, 1980), p. 62.

Dedication to, and openness toward others in sharing their joys and sorrows, in being faithful and constant in love, without a thought of domination or exclusiveness, is the true hallmark of a Brother of St. Charles Lwanga.

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