

# **PRIESTLY VOCATION AND DISCERNMENT: ESPOUSING THE GAMALIAN APPROACH IN SPIRITUAL FORMATION.**

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## **Abstract**

The priestly vocation is a mystery and its discernment is metaphysical because the reality of the call to the Roman Catholic priesthood is ultimately divine, therefore it calls for proper discernment from both the formandee and the formators. The Letter to the Hebrews Chapter Five makes it clear that “no one takes the honour upon himself”. Vocation to the Priesthood which is a call as well as a precious gift from God “is the love of the heart of Jesus” as congregation for the Clergy reminds us in June 7, 2013, the World Day of prayer for the sanctification of Priests. In this light, Gamalian Spirituality is born out of the way of life, the reputation and the way in which Gamaliel; a Pharisee approached the issue of the conflict between the Sanhedrin and the persecutions of the early Church when Peter and John were persecuted cf. Act 5:34-40. Gamaliel said, “so in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this undertaking is of men, it will fall; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!” To this effect, in the formation and the discernment of priestly vocation, Gamalian spirituality is very important.

**Keywords:** Priestly Vocation, Seminary Formation, Spirituality, Gamalian Spirituality, Discernment

## **Introduction**

Priestly vocation is a mystery, life itself is a mystery and the task of discernment of the call itself is indeed a mystery. Francis Cardinal Arinze

was once asked to explain his vocation to the priesthood he however, gave a brief history of his life how he was influenced by Blessed Michael I. Tansi (his former parish priest who is now a Blessed). Cardinal Arinze said, “Only God can finally analyze the reason a person is attracted to the Catholic priesthood.” In the book titled “SAINT JOHN PAUL II THE STORY OF MY LIFE Gift and Mystery”, our loving Saint Pope John Paul II gives the reality of this mystery!<sup>1</sup> Vocation to the Catholic priesthood is a mystery. How can one know that he is called? How could this call be discerned by those in charge of forming candidates for the priesthood? In fact, formation could be defined as ‘deciding for God’ those whom he has chosen. This tells us that formation as a process or art is not an easy task. How can formators despite human limitations recommend young men whom “they may not know in totality” for the priesthood? This is also a mystery. To further this mysterious nature of this vocation we are led back to its discernment. The story of the way David was anointed readily comes to mind. Before Samuel could discern that David was the one chosen by God after God rejected seven sons of Jesse tells us the difficult task of discernment cf. I Sam 16:1-13.<sup>2</sup> It is on this note we shall look at some terms that need clarification as follows: Priestly Vocation, Seminary’s Formation, Spirituality, Gamalian Spirituality, and Discernment.

### **Priestly Vocation**

The priestly vocation, is a mystery, it is a call to become another Christ. Vocation is from the Latin word *vocare* which means to call. In the Latin Rite, it is to be a celibate. By the laying on of hands and the prayer of consecration the man that was in the seminary becomes another Christ. This means that priestly vocation is a called to discipleship. In fact, the Holy Orders is a sacrament of service. In the Latin rite, we have seven sacraments, three of these are sacrament of initiation while two are sacrament of healing, and the other two are sacrament of service namely: Holy Orders and Matrimony. The priestly vocation as the sacrament of service, is a call to become another Christ and a mystery. To this effect, because of who the priest is, the Church as laid down through experiences ways in which young men are admitted to the seminary so that they could be formed and their calling to this great ministry discerned; this is why formation in the seminary is necessary.

### **Seminary’s Formation**

The Council of Trent in the sixteenth century instituted Seminary formation. The seminaries were given directive for the formation of men for the priesthood. It is imperative to know what is a Seminary before going to the seminary’s formation. Seminary is a nursery ground for the

training of those preparing for the Catholic Priesthood. It is reserved to schools instituted, in accordance with a decree of the Council of Trent, for the training of the Catholic priests.<sup>3</sup> A theological seminary (*grand séminaire*) provides courses in Holy Scripture, philosophy, theology and so on to give young men immediate preparation for ordination.<sup>4</sup> A priest is the representative of Christ among men: his mission is to carry on Christ's work for the salvation of souls; in Christ's name and by His power, he teaches men what they ought to believe and what they ought to do: he forgives sins, and offers sacrifice of the Body and Blood of Christ. He is another Christ (*sacerdos alter Christus*). His training, therefore, must be in harmony with this high office and consequently different in many ways from the preparation for secular professions. He must possess not only a liberal education, but also professional knowledge, and moreover, like an army or navy officer, he needs to acquire the manners and personal habits becoming his calling. To teach candidates for the priesthood what a priest ought to know and to make them what a priest ought to be is the purpose of seminary formation.<sup>5</sup>

It is to this effect that the Seminary's formation is divided into four major parts as it had been laid down by the church from experiences through the inspiration of the 'finger of God', the Holy Spirit who is going to lead the Church to the complete truth (cf. Jn 16:13) and in *Pastores Dabo Vobis* of Pope John Paul II numbers 42 to 59 the four areas of Priestly Formation as follows: (1) Human Formation, the Basis of All Priestly Formation, (2) Spiritual Formation, in communion with God and Search of Christ, (3) Intellectual Formation, Understanding the Faith, and (4) Pastoral Formation, Communion with the Charity of Jesus Christ the Good Shepherd.<sup>6</sup> These areas of formation is indeed good and useful for forming candidates for the priesthood in its synthesis and none of this parts should be neglected as if it were unimportant. For Christ to be formed in an individual candidate, these areas of formation must as a matter fact, be united. In fact, I would like to call it "an indispensable tetra-formative process" and in parts they cannot formed but in their unity we see another Christ, who is human, spiritual, a scholar and a pastor as well. To this end, we look at the spiritual formation of a candidate by examine Spirituality. As noted by the fathers of the Second Vatican Council, spiritual formation is a necessity for priestly formation. And just as religious institutes use the period of novitiate to introduce their candidates to their spiritualities, that is, (to the way in which connection with God is sought and established in their particular traditions) the spiritual year is a duration set apart for initial spiritual formation in view of the priestly life and ministry.<sup>7</sup> And this

spiritual formation continues in major Seminary or theological Seminary.

### **Spirituality**

In order that the term spirituality might be understood in its entire dimension, it is necessary to explain what is meant by the term spirit. Spirit is from the Latin word, *spiritus* meaning *breath*, *Spirare to blow, breathe* which is an animating or vital principle held to give life to physical organisms, a supernatural being or essence.<sup>8</sup> Spirit is mysterious in nature and it is ascribed to a divine origin.<sup>9</sup> In the Bible, the Spirit is called the creative, animating power or divine influence of God (cf. Joel 2:28).<sup>10</sup> So when we are talking about spirit, we refer to the activating or essential principle influencing a person, an inclination, impulse, or tendency of a specific kind and a special attitude or frame of mind.<sup>11</sup> However, in as much as there are different kinds of definition of spirituality this paper uses the definition provided by Fagun when he was asked the meaning of Spirituality. He says,

Spirituality is a core aspect of religion though some non-conformists try to create some spirituality in the air. Spirituality is essentially based on religious practices. In fact it leads to the height of religious experience. It consists of a particular experience of what is divine. I say a particular experience because there are many sides to spirituality based on one's faith and character. For according to my slogan, "A kùí ẹ̀ ẹ̀gbàgbọ́ kọ́já ìwà ẹ̀nì" - one's character is basic to one's spiritual life, because character would dictate the level of cooperation with divine grace. Authentic faith is a gift of God, and it is grace that inspired the spiritual person who freely cooperates.<sup>12</sup>

So, the context in which this paper shall adopt as regard spirituality is the influence of the Spirit of God in an individual irrespective of the person involved and how this stimulus reflects in the individual day-today living and most importantly, noticing the Spirit of God at work in a certain person or in a given situation most especially a particular way of experiencing the divine as noted by Fagun. In the aspect of spirituality, spirituality means being spiritual, relating to, consisting of, or affecting the spirit, incorporeal, connected with religious values, related or join in spirit.<sup>13</sup> Relating to or affecting the human spirit as opposed to material or physical things, relating to religious belief.<sup>14</sup> What then is spirituality? Spirituality, therefore, means sensitivity or attachment to religious values, the quality of being spiritual.<sup>15</sup> That is, a soul is acted upon by the Holy Spirit.<sup>16</sup> The basic truism from this

definition is that spirituality has a transcendental dimension which goes beyond physical reality for it is a religious term. This implies that spirituality, as a concept is a broad concept. That is why we have different kinds of spirituality like African traditional Spirituality, Buddhist Spirituality and Christian spirituality. In Christian Spirituality, there are many kinds of Spirituality.

Some words associated with spirituality are piety, devotion, godliness and holiness.<sup>17</sup> The word “Spirituality” and “mysticism” are somewhat used in an equivalent way.<sup>18</sup> Spirituality etymologically suggests “life”, and “dynamism” and “breathing”. And that is what the spiritual life aims to be: coming to life in all one’s dimensions.<sup>19</sup> The word “Spirituality” a word obviously “contaminated” by the “spirit”<sup>20</sup> often refers to a way of living in line with a particular way of life. To further this example, let us examine what Donald Dorr has to say about Spirituality.

Now I prefer to begin at the other end to accept that the most privileged ‘place’ in which God speaks to me is my own spirituality. This means that I can no longer think of a person’s spirituality as something that comes from outside. Rather it is that which is most deeply personal. My spirituality is me. Not the ‘me’ that so often is distracted, scattered, and inauthentic; but the most genuine and profound ‘me’ that exists.<sup>21</sup>

This tells us how spirituality is personal and entails a communication of the divine to the human person. It is the sum total of religious or ethical values that govern a person’s life. Spirituality is that which determines and directs one’s life.<sup>22</sup> Christian spirituality is therefore, a participation in the mystery of Christ through the interior life of grace, actuated by faith, charity, and the other Christian virtues. The life that the individual receives through participation in Christ is the same life that animated the God-man, the life that the incarnate Word shares with the Father and the Holy Spirit; it is, therefore, the life of God in the august mystery of the Trinity. Through Christ, the spiritual life of the Christian is eminently Trinitarian<sup>23</sup>

The difficulty in constructing a theology of the spiritual life consists in the fact that the spiritual life is at once a *mystery* and a *problem*. It is a mystery specifically since it is life, indeed divine life, a sharing in the Christ-life. Although one may experience this life in the depths of his being as a life of union with God, it is nevertheless ineffable because the supernatural and transcends human comprehension.<sup>24</sup> However, living well is at the heart of all serious spirituality.<sup>25</sup> This implies that no matter how secularized the word spirituality is we cannot remove religiosity from it if it is to be authentic. It is on this note we have different kinds of spirituality: like Islamic Spirituality, African Traditional Spirituality and Christian Spirituality which follows a doctrine or a way of life of a

particular religious figure. For example, Jesus for the Christians and Muhammad for the Islam and the practices with different gods in African Traditional Religion in relation to the Supreme Being (God). As noted earlier that spirituality is a broad term, and that its definition in particularity might be very difficult. This same difficulty is also apparent in Christian Spirituality that sometimes becomes difficult to define it with any specificity. In other words, Christian Spirituality manifests in different forms, and so, it is difficult to find one common form of Christian Spirituality.<sup>26</sup> However, in the heart of any Christian spirituality is Jesus Christ and the working of his Spirit. Fagun defines Christian spirituality as imitation of Christ when he was asked in an interview the question: “What is Christian Spirituality”?

Christian spirituality is a life of spiritual perfection in the imitation of the lifestyle of Jesus Christ as he taught his followers to be perfect (Matthew 5:48). And this perfection requires placing spiritual values over and above the material in practice (cf. Matthew 19:16-29).<sup>27</sup>

Let us examine the definition of Spirituality according to Balthasar. The notion of spirituality is a modern one, found neither in the tradition of religious philosophy nor of biblical theology. It is therefore important to determine its content and bearing. In General (negative speaking) it may be said that there is no reason for the Christian to limit spirituality to the context of Christianity; just as Christians speak of a “medieval” or a “Carmelite” or a “lay” spirituality, so can we speak analogously of “Buddhist” or a “Sufi” spirituality. On the basis of the same common understanding of the idea, spirituality may be approximately defined as that basic practical or existential attitude of man which is the consequence of expression of the way in which he understands his religious or more generally, his ethically committed existence; the way in which he acts and reacts habitually throughout his life according to his objective and ultimate insights and decisions.<sup>28</sup>

### **Gamalian Spirituality**

The Pharisees are one of the Jewish religious sects in Jesus’ time. This particular sect was always at loggerheads with Jesus. In fact, Jesus Christ had confronted them with statements like: “woe to you Pharisees”, “you hypocrites” and so many others unkind statements. In fact, there is no less than six woes for the Pharisees and scribes in the gospel according to St. Matthew (cf. 23:13-39) this is because of the ways in which the Pharisees presented themselves and ultimately the way they organized and practiced the Jewish religion. This statement by Jesus to the Pharisees was because of their external observance of law and religious practices that were not truly internalized or even practiced with the spirit of the law. Hence, they followed the law (*Torah*) to the letter as against

the spirit behind the law. Another aspect of this pharisaic way of life is the trait of self-righteousness, which Jesus Christ was totally against when he gave the parable of the tax collector and the Pharisee who were in the temple for prayer and the Pharisee's prayer was rejected because of the lack of humility which is an essential element of an authentic prayer to God (cf. Lk 18:9-14).

Be that as it may, there exist questions that could be raised from the above and which need careful consideration. Firstly, is everything wrong in being a Pharisee on one hand? If this is yes, why would Jesus Christ recommended that people should observe and practice everything that the Pharisees tell them? (cf. Mt 23:3). But then, this recommendation has a clause and that is "what they do". In other words, this recommendation by Jesus excludes "what they do". Secondly, can anything good come from a Pharisee? Or are the Pharisees totally bad? These are basic questions which this paper tries to address that despite the disputes that existed between Jesus Christ and the Pharisees in the gospel we can have a spirituality that could be useful for Christians which is named after the Pharisee called Gamaliel. The aim and objective of this work is to examine and expose Gamalian Spirituality and show how a Christian Spirituality may be gotten from a Pharisee namely: Gamaliel and how it can be applied to the discernment of priestly vocation.

### **Discernment**

Discernment is the process of gaining insight into a situation in order to arrive at appropriate judgment, often times in view of taking or not taking a certain action. In spiritual direction, one analyzes how a person's spirit is moved to determine whether or not the movement comes from the Holy Spirit. It is quite possible, even in what appears to be favorable inspiration that comes from the evil spirit or from the person himself.<sup>29</sup> But in priestly vocation it means the process of recommending a candidate for the priesthood. Of Course, in the major Seminary or the theological seminary it is the sole responsibility of the rector in conjunction with other formators to decide whether or not a candidate is suitable for the priesthood. The management of the seminary is in the hands of the rector, who alone under the bishop governs the seminary, calls to orders, admits and dismisses the students; a treasurer has full charge of temporal matters, while to a spiritual director is entrusted with the formation of the students in piety(which is the Spiritual formation). The professors are merely teachers. However, all the formators have a share in the administration of the seminary; and all important matters are decided by a vote of the faculty. The spiritual directors and confessors of the students have no voice in the faculty meetings when one of their

penitents is concerned.<sup>30</sup> To this end, discernment in spiritual matters as well as priestly vocation is not an easy task. Since vocation to priesthood is a mystery so its discernment is demanding. For example, a Seminarian was expelled in a minor seminary in view of priestly vocation upon the issue he honestly did not know anything about. But by providence would have it, this same rejected stone by the builder became the cornerstone not just a cornerstone but “a special-cornerstone”. It will interest you to know he became a deacon, a priest and a bishop who has ‘the fullness of priesthood’, ‘the successor of the Apostles’ who was raised to the higher level greater than those who expelled him.<sup>31</sup> When it comes to the issue of vocation one needs to tread with caution and that is why Gamalian Spirituality is paramount in this case. St. Pope John Paul II in *Pastores Dabo Vobis* No. 2 was aware of the difficulty in the discernment of priestly vocation when said:

For this reason, the total trust in God's unconditional faithfulness to his promise is accompanied in the Church by the grave responsibility to cooperate in the action of God who calls, and to contribute toward creating and preserving the conditions in which the good seed, sown by God, can take root and bring forth abundant fruit. The Church must never cease to pray to the Lord of the harvest that he send laborers into his harvest, (cf. *Mt.* 9:38). She must propose clearly and courageously to each new generation the vocational call, help people to discern the authenticity of their call from God and to respond to it generously, and give particular care to the formation of candidates for the priesthood. The formation of future priests, both diocesan and religious, and lifelong assiduous care for their personal sanctification in the ministry and for the constant updating of their pastoral commitment is considered by the Church one of the most demanding and important tasks for the future of the evangelization of humanity. The Church's work of formation is a continuation in time of Christ's own work, which the evangelist Mark illustrates in these words: "And he went up on the mountain, and called to him those whom he desired; and they came to him. And he appointed twelve, to be with him, and to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons" (*Mk.* 3:13-15).<sup>32</sup>

### **Gamaliel to Gamalian: A Christian Spirituality**

To this end, the major concern of this aspect most especially the different kinds of spirituality we have apart from Christian Spirituality and the Christian (Catholic) Spirituality in particular had been exposed. This aspect is to attribute Christian spirituality after Gamaliel and that is, Gamalian Spirituality. It is a way of life lived after Gamaliel, a Pharisee, as recorded in Acts of the Apostles chapter five. Hence, “Gamaliel to Gamalian” is the transposition of Gamaliel’s way of life to a Christian way of life in all its good aspects.

Furthermore, Gamaliel, as a person belonged to a particular religious sect called the Pharisees. So for better understanding of the background to which Gamaliel belonged to at that time, it is very important to examine the spirituality of some religious sects of Judaism. The working definition of spirituality that this paper adopts is the definition by Fagun that had been cited earlier. In it, Fagun gives credence to the fact that religion and spirituality are closely related when he says: “Spirituality is essentially based on religious practices.”<sup>33</sup> The sect we are going to examine is the Pharisees since it is to this sect that Gamaliel belongs.

### **The Pharisees**

The word Pharisee is from the Hebrew word פְּרִישִׁים *perusim* meaning separated, separated ones, separators.<sup>35</sup> They are called Hasidim;<sup>36</sup> as a continuation and development of *Hasidaeans* the Hebrew word פְּרִשְׁטִים; Aram. *p<sup>r</sup>rîšayā*, from which the Greek word Φαρισαίοι is derived means those who had “separated themselves”<sup>37</sup>. The Pharisee, ‘separate’ or ‘detach’ as the name connotes. In this regard, from whom did the Pharisees separate themselves? From those, particularly priests or clerics, who interpreted the Law in a different way than they; from the common people of the land or people of the earth *am-ha-ares* (Cf. [John 7:49](#)); from Gentiles or Jews who embraced the Hellenistic culture: from certain political groups? All these groups of people the Pharisees would have been determined to avoid in their decision to separate themselves from any type of impurity proscribed by the Levitical law — or, more specifically, their strict interpretation of it.<sup>38</sup> They were an active, vocal religious Jewish sect in the centuries before and after Christ appeared on earth. They represented by and large the intellectual sector of their people, because they were passionate, continuous students and teachers of Jewish religious law. Their intensity and single-mindedness resulted in a harsh and uncharitable emphasis on the legal aspects of religion at the expense of charity and loving concern. Jesus represented a threat to their intellectual security and leadership. They tempted him at every opportunity. They tried to trap him into wrong answers (Mat 22:15-22).

They opposed questions, hoping to prove contradictions (Mat 22:34-40). They criticized the company he kept. They objected to his Sabbath activities (Mk 2:15-17).<sup>39</sup> These appellations were given to describe what the Pharisees stood for at that time. But then, this does not mean that the Pharisee do not have spirituality on which their religious practices are based. It is on this note that their spirituality shall be examined.

### **The Spirituality of the Pharisees**

The teaching of the sect was based on the oral tradition as well as on the written Law. The Pharisees held such religious truths as the resurrection of the body and the existence of angels. Since these doctrines were not clearly taught in the Pentateuch (the only Scripture accepted by the Sadducees), the Pharisees founded their belief in them upon later writings and oral traditions. In the field of morals, the Pharisees taught a rigorous observance of the Sabbath and insisted on legal purity and the payment of tithes. They offered various opinions on observance of these and other precepts degenerating into rigorism and casuistry. The result was frequently a sterile externalism destructive of a real religious spirit. After the destruction of the Temple, and the overthrow of the Jewish state, the Pharisees, became practically the only influential group among the Jews. They held the Jewish people together. Later rabbinical schools looked back with admiration upon the Pharisees as the true upholders of Israel's Law and traditions. The rabbis of the Talmud<sup>40</sup> were their spiritual descendants.<sup>41</sup> In order to join this spiritual association and be called a Pharisee, it was necessary to have an exact knowledge of the Mosaic commandments (the written Torah) and the Traditions of the ancients (the oral Torah), to adhere with mind and heart to the teachings of the doctors of the party, and to distinguish oneself by the exact fulfillment of all their precepts. As Josephus Flavius points out, the Pharisees concerned themselves with the strict interpretation and observance of the Torah, and spared themselves no efforts to fulfill the Law in every detail, earnestly and consistently striving to practice the ideal propounded by the Torah scholars. In that sense, they were the classic representatives of the course adopted by Judaism in its inner developments during the post-exilic period. Juridical science of the Pharisaic rabbis manifested itself particularly in three points: the observance of the Sabbath, legal purity, and the payment of the sacred taxes.<sup>42</sup> Many of the Pharisees, like the Essenes, believed in doctrines such as resurrection of the body, Day of Judgment, apocalyptic holy war and life in the world to come, while Sadducees disagree with Essenes and Pharisees, over these doctrines. The Pharisees hold only the written Torah as authoritative<sup>43</sup> and they agree that the Torah admitted of variation in applications, but Jesus pressed the variation further than they

did.<sup>44</sup>With regards to the Sabbath rest, they had multiplied prohibitions, going into even the smallest details. On the question of impurities, the most minute prescriptions had been added to the Mosaic legislation regarding foods, diseases, corpses, apparatus in daily use, ablutions and purifying baths, contact with persons and things considered impure, and so on. As to the tithes to be paid to the priests and Levites, the list of goods, revenues, and products affected had been considerably lengthened.<sup>45</sup>The rabbinical writings show that the problems raised by the observance of these traditions suggested refined casuistry. Thus, with respect to the Sabbath: was it permissible to eat an egg laid on such a day, or fruit plucked from the tree on that day? With regards to ablutions: which kind of water purified best, and how far must one throw one's hands into that water? Regarding taxes: was it lawful to eat vegetables or fruits bought at the market without knowing for certain whether the tithe had been paid on those products.<sup>46</sup>This is the religious sect which Gamaliel belongs. To this effect, who is this Gamaliel?

### **A Biography of Gamaliel**

Gamaliel, Rabban Gamaliel I, so called, to distinguish him from his grandson Gamaliel II who lived around 100 A. D. Gamaliel is also called 'the Great'. He was a Pharisee and a member of Sanhedrin which judged Peter and John. Gamaliel intervened in favour of the apostles with prudent reasons. He intervened in their judgment noting that if the Christian movement were merely human, it would of itself break-up but if it were from God then it would endure. He then admonished his colleagues to exercise caution (Acts 5:34-39). In his address to the Jews in Jerusalem, Paul claimed that he had studied under Gamaliel (Acts 22:3).<sup>47</sup>The word, Gamaliel, is a Greek form of the Hebrew name meaning 'reward of God'.<sup>48</sup>He had a son named Simeon. He was of the city of Jerusalem, and a noble family, of the sect of the Pharisee, which were above others in the accurate knowledge of the laws of their country.<sup>49</sup>But it seems that he took a special interest in social reform, particularly in bettering the legal status of women.<sup>50</sup> Base on who Gamaliel is, Fagun has this to say when he was asked the question "Do you know anything about Gamaliel of Acts 5:34-40?"

Gamaliel was a rabbinic scholar of the school of Hillel, the liberal minded, as against the school of Shammai, the far right in Israel. He was one of the chief judges in the Sanhedrin court at the time of the Apostles of Jesus Christ, and Paul would later boast of being his student (Acts 22:23), because he was a highly esteemed and popular scholar (Acts 5:34).<sup>51</sup>

From the above, we see clearly the personality of Gamaliel and his reputation. His name designates in the New Testament a Pharisee

and celebrated doctor of the Law. Gamaliel is represented in Act 5:34ff as advising his fellow-members of the Sanhedrin not to put to death St. Peter and the Apostles, who, notwithstanding the prohibition of the Jewish authorities, had continued to preach to the people. His advice, however unwelcome, was acted upon. So great was his authority with his contemporaries.

### **Gamalian Spirituality: Theological Look at Acts 5:34:40**

In order that we may better understand Acts 5:34-40 which shows Gamaliel's intervention or advocacy for the apostles during the persecutions in the early Church at Jerusalem, it is very important to recall what happened in the previous chapters 2, 3, and 4 of the Acts of the Apostles in order to understand what led to Gamaliel's intervention of which Gamalian Spirituality is solidly based. The Holy Spirit had just descended upon the apostles (cf. Acts 2ff) and the apostles were able to preach with confidence without fear of the Jews (cf. Jn 20:19). As a result of Sadducean jealousy at the apostles' reputation for the healing of a man lame from birth (cf. Acts 3:2) and many other signs and wonders, they had been arrested and put to jail, only to be released by an angel (cf. Acts 5:12-20). When the Sanhedrin convened, their captain and officers eventually tracked the apostles down in the Temple, and brought them before the council (vv. 21-27). The high priest demanded to know why the apostles persisted, in spite of prior threatening, to teach in Jesus' name. They replied thus: "we must obey God rather than men." They also accused the Sanhedrin of murdering the saviour (vv 27-32). Condemnation of death at that moment seemed certain (v 33).<sup>52</sup> It is in this certainty that Gamaliel gave the following admonitions to the council which is the foundation of Gamalian Spirituality:

So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this undertaking is of men, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God! (Act 5:38-39)

Gamaliel intervened and cautioned against imprisonment and further persecutions. His standing in the Sanhedrin is assumed to be great, in that he commands the apostles to be put outside for brief time (v 34). He, then, urges caution, and gave instances of Theudas and Judas the Galilean which had come to nothing. The apostles also will fail, if their movement is of men (vv 35-38). If their movement is of God, Gamaliel argues that the Sanhedrin would be unable to prevail, and it will even be a fight against God (v 39). Having been convinced by Gamaliel's arguments, the Sanhedrin released the apostles after flogging them and repeated the old command, not to speak in Jesus' name (v 40, cf. 4:17).

However, the apostles were very happy to suffer for the sake of Christ and they did not cease to talk about Jesus. The second and last mention of Gamaliel occurs in Acts 22:3, during a speech of Paul, in which the apostle claims to have been instructed at the feet of Gamaliel with an exact knowledge of the ancestral law.<sup>53</sup> These passages give credence to the fact that Gamaliel is a person with high integrity. To this end, Gamaliel's counsel to the council is the bases for the Gamalian spirituality which calls all to a life of tolerance, respect for human dignity and being sensitive to the action of the Holy Spirit. Gamaliel was able to be sensitive to the signs of time and his expression testifies truly he was a man of high repute as earlier described by the evangelist (cf. Acts 5:34).

### **An Application of Gamalian Spirituality to Priestly Vocation and its Discernment**

The priestly vocation is indeed a spiritual thing and through the application of Gamalian Spirituality to the spiritual formation and the entire process of formation there will definitely be a proper judgment, helping the seminarian to better appreciate his call, give him another opportunity this will definitely makes him to value the mystery of his call, a mystery that goes beyond the one who is called the letter to the Hebrews 5:4 tells us: "And one does not take the honour upon himself, but he is called by God, just as Aaron was." Pope John Paul II gives credence to this point in *Pastores Dabo Vobis* when he says:

The absolute primacy of grace in vocation is most perfectly proclaimed in the word of Jesus: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide (Jn 15:16). If the priestly vocation bears unequivocal witness to the primacy of grace, God's free and sovereign decision to call man calls for total respect. It cannot be forced in the slightest by any human ambition, and it cannot be replaced by any human decision. Vocation is a gift of God's grace and never a human right, such that "one can never consider priestly life as a simply human affair, nor the mission of the minister as a simply personal project" Every claim or presumption on the part of those called is thus radically excluded (cf. Heb 5:4ff). Their entire heart and spirit should be filled with an amazed and deeply felt gratitude, an unshakeable trust and hope; because those who have been called know that they are rooted not in their own strength but in the unconditional faithfulness of God who calls.<sup>54</sup>

## Conclusion

To end, the fact that priestly vocation is a mystery calls for a careful discernment of which Gamalian Spirituality is very important. Fr. Michael Bunmi Olofinlade, in his book *“Mystery of God’s Call: A Reflection on Discipleship”* reflecting on the mystery of vocation and the choice of the twelve by Jesus out of many that he had called says: “Thus, Jesus Christ is the one who determines the choice of his disciples, it is not a human choice despite human instrumentality in its discernment.”<sup>55</sup> This, therefore, is a pointer to the reality that seminarians are not to give up. If they do not become Catholic priests they can still be useful in the church. They must not use it to alienate themselves from the church or become anti-Catholics. If one becomes a Catholic priest after one’s seminary training, we can only attribute it to the grace of God. The Letter to the Hebrews tells us, *‘no one takes this honour upon himself’*. That is why vocation is a gift as well as mystery, says St. Pope John Paul II.<sup>56</sup> Pope Francis reminds us in his message for 2018 World day of Vocation that: “the Lord’s call – let it be said at the outset – is not as clear – cut as any of those things we hear, see or touch in our daily experience...”<sup>57</sup>. This tells us that both the formed and the formators are to tread with caution in this discernment there must not be harsh judgments base on sentiments. In fact, Gamalian spirituality gives credence to probation by which the formators gives second chance to a given seminarian. As regards vocation, all that can be expected is not indeed certainty, but probability.<sup>58</sup> And this is why the formators recommend candidates for the priesthood while dismissal from the seminary means no more than that the student is not considered fit for the priesthood. But then, Gamalian Spirituality will plead to give more chance(s) because if they have the call they will definitely be. Just has the Bishop who ordained me into Catholic priesthood was expelled in the minor seminary but he later became a Bishop! Can we say the judgment was wrong or that was the path that God wants for him? But history proves he was expelled but later exalted. Prof. Plo Lumumba says: “history is a fair judge, it is a judge that is able to identify the things that speak for themselves”. And if Gamalian Spirituality is applied in formation it will save many fruitful vocations. But then, Gamalian spirituality is not an advocate of seminary where anything goes! It is about a careful discernment.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Saint John Paull II, *The Story of My Life: Gift and Mystery*, (Vatican; Libreria Editrice Vaticana: 1996, In Paulines Publications Africa, 2014 with a new title: *The Story of my life on the occasion of the canonization of Pope John Paul II*) It must be

noted that the title that was given to this Book when it was first published in 1996 by Libreria Editrice Vaticana was "Grace and Mystery" But on the Occasion of his Canonization in 2014 the Paulines Publication added the title "The Story of my Life".

<sup>2</sup>The Holy Bible Revised Standard Version, 1 Samuel 16:1(RSV) Says " The Lord said to Samuel, 'How long will you grieve over Saul, seeing I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons" This explains that even before David was anointed had already been chosen by God. Applying this to formation one could say that before a seminary formation a seminarian had been called by God himself. For example in the life of David, he was already a Shepherd and the qualities of a leader has been inculcated one could say his formation was on the field he was called on the field. This could be applied to the story told by Francis Cardinal Arinze that he was influenced by his former parish priest Blessed Michael I. Tansi the influence that Blessed Tansi had on the lad, Francis Arinze provided a suitable ground for his seminary formation. This too is a mystery!

<sup>3</sup> Viéban, A. (1912). Ecclesiastical Seminary. In *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. New York: Robert Appleton Company. Retrieved April 26, 2010 from New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13694a.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Apostolic Exhortation 'Pastores Dabo Vobis' I Will Give you shepherd*, (Vatican: St Paul Publications Africa, 1992) 42-59

<sup>7</sup>"The Spiritual Year" in Ikenna Henry Okoroji, *Catholic Seminaries Directory Nigeria*, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition (Abuja: Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria Abuja, 2011) 67.

<sup>8</sup> Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 11<sup>th</sup> Edition, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) 1391.

<sup>9</sup> "Spirit" in *The New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of The English Language* (USA: Deluxe Encyclopedic Edition, Trident Press, 1977) 1210.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Fredrick C. Mish (et.al.), *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11<sup>th</sup> Edition, (USA: 2004) 1203.

<sup>12</sup>Michael, Fagun, "A Theological Appraisal of Gamalian Spirituality in Acts 5:34-40." An Interview, Ado-Ekiti: September 23, 2018. It worth noting that Fagun is Emeritus Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Ekiti, He was ordained as a Bishop on October 10, 1971 he is an Historian and he had authored many books.

<sup>13</sup> Fredrick C. Mish (et.al.), *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11<sup>th</sup> Edition, (USA: 2004) 1203-1204

<sup>14</sup> Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 11<sup>th</sup> Edition, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) 1391.

<sup>15</sup> Fredrick C. Mish (et.al.), *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11<sup>th</sup> Edition, (USA: 2004) 1204.

<sup>16</sup>The New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of The English Language (USA: Deluxe Encyclopedic Edition, Trident Press, 1977) 1210.

<sup>17</sup>William M. Thompson, *Christology and Spirituality*, (New York: Crossroad Publication, 1991) 4.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 5.

<sup>21</sup>Donald Dorr, *Spirituality and Justice*, (New York: Macmillan, 1984) 19-20.

<sup>22</sup>Abraham Kadaplackal, *The Spirituality of the Diocesan Priest*, (Bandra: St Paul's Publication, 2010) 15.

<sup>23</sup> Jordan Aumann, *Spiritual Theology*, (London; Sheed and Ward Stagbooks; 1980) 18.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Richard S. Briggs in Kevin J. Vanhoozer (et.al), *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, (USA: Baker Academic Publisher, 2001) 768.

<sup>26</sup>Obi Oguejiofor, "The World As Summum Bonum: Impact of African Idea of Ultimate Reality on Christian Spirituality" in MarySylvia Nwachukwu and Augustine Oburota, *Theological Perspectives on Spirituality and Piety In Nigeria*, Proceedings of the 19<sup>th</sup> Conference of CATHAN(The Catholic Theological Association of Nigeria) Held at St. Augustine's Major Seminary, Jos 14-16<sup>th</sup> April, 2004,( Enugu: 2005) 101.

<sup>27</sup>"What is Christian Spirituality?" Michael, Fagun, "A Theological Appraisal of Gamalian Spirituality in Acts 5:34-40." An Interview, Ado-Ekiti: September 23, 2018.

<sup>28</sup> Hans Urs Von Balthasar, "The Gospel as Norms and Test of All Spirituality", In Christian Duquoc and Claude Geffré et al, *Spirituality in Church and World*, Vol. 9 (New York; Concilium Paulist Press, 1965 ) 7.

<sup>29</sup> Theodore W. Walters, *A Guide For Spiritual Direction* (Kenya: Paulines Publication Africa, 2015) 48.

<sup>30</sup> Viéban, A. (1912). Ecclesiastical Seminary. In The Catholic Encyclopedia. New York: Robert Appleton Company. Retrieved April 26, 2010 from New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13694a.htm>

<sup>31</sup> It worth noting that this is a life Story of the Bishop Who ordained me into Catholic Priesthood. Cf. *Portrait of A Servant of God: Biography of Bishop Ayo-Maria Atoyebi, O.P. @ 70* (Ilorin: Published by Catholic Diocese of Ilorin 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday Committee, 2014)

<sup>32</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Apostolic Exhortation 'Pastores Dabo Vobis' I Will Give you shepherd*, (Vatican: St Paul Publications Africa, 1992) 2.

<sup>33</sup> "What is Spirituality?" Michael, Fagun, "A Theological Appraisal of Gamalian Spirituality in Acts 5:34-40." An Interview, Ado-Ekiti: September 23, 2018.

<sup>34</sup> Hebrew word for Pharisees <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pharisees> Accessed on 3 March, 2019 9:35 pm

<sup>35</sup>John A. Hardon, *Pocket Catholic Dictionary: Abridged edition of Modern Catholic Dictionary*, (New York: Doubleday, 1985) 326-327.

<sup>36</sup>William Bridgewater (et al.,) *The Columbia-Viking Desk Encyclopedia*, (London: Macdonald, 1968) 843.

<sup>37</sup>New Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. XI (USA: Catholic University of America, 1967) 252.

<sup>38</sup>"Pharisees"[https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/pharisees/\(3/3/2019\)](https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/pharisees/(3/3/2019))

<sup>39</sup> John A. Hardon, *Pocket Catholic Dictionary: Abridged edition of Modern Catholic Dictionary*, (New York: Doubleday, 1985) 326-327.

<sup>40</sup>The Talmud (/ˈtɑːlməd, -məd, ˈtæl-/; Hebrew: תלמוד *talmūd*) is the central text of Rabbinic Judaism and the primary source of Jewish religious law (*halakha*) and Jewish theology. Until the advent of modernity, in nearly all Jewish communities, the Talmud was the centrepiece of Jewish cultural life and was foundational to 'all Jewish thought and aspirations', serving also as "the guide for the daily life" of Jews. Cf. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talmud\\_\(7/3/2019\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talmud_(7/3/2019)).

<sup>41</sup>New Catholic Encyclopedia, (London: Catholic University of America, 1969) 252.

<sup>42</sup> Francis Pereira, *Gripped by God in Christ: the Mind and Heart of St. Paul*, (Bangalore: St. Paul Publications, 1993) 24.

<sup>43</sup> John T. Pawlikowski and James A. Wilde, *When Catholics Speak About Jews*, (New York: Liturgical Training Publications, 1987)24.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 25

<sup>45</sup>Francis Pereira, *Gripped by God in Christ: the Mind and Heart of St. Paul*, (Bangalore: St. Paul Publications, 1993) 24.

<sup>46</sup>Francis Pereira, *Gripped by God in Christ: the Mind and Heart of St. Paul*, (Bangalore: St. Paul Publications, 1993) 25.

<sup>47</sup>The New World Dictionary *Concordance to the New American Bible*, (USA: Catholic World Press, s.d,) 2000.

<sup>48</sup> Gigot, Francis. "Gamaliel."The Catholic Encyclopedia.Vol. 6. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1909. 26 Apr. 2010 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06374b.htm>>.

<sup>49</sup>Josephus Flavius, *The Works of Josephus*, (USA: Hendrickson Publication, Transl. by William Whiston, 2006) 12.

<sup>50</sup>New Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. VI, (USA: Catholic University of America, 1967) 275.

<sup>51</sup>Michael, Fagun, "A Theological Appraisal of Gamalian Spirituality in Acts 5:34-40." An Interview, Ado-Ekiti: September 23, 2018.

<sup>52</sup>Bruce Chilton in David Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 2 (London: Yale University Press, 2008) 904.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Apostolic Exhortation 'Pastores Dabo Vobis' I Will Give you shepherd*, (Vatican: St Paul Publications Africa, 1992) No. 36

<sup>55</sup> Michael B. Olofinlade, *The Mystery of God's Call: A Reflection on Discipleship*, (Ado-Ekiti: AFUSCO Printing Press, 2001, ) 24-25.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. St. John Paul II *The Story of My Life: Gift and Mystery*, (Libreria Editrice Vaticana: 1969 in Paulines Publications Africa 2014)

<sup>57</sup> Pope France *Message for the 2018 World Day of Vocation*, Vatican: 3 December, 2017.

<sup>58</sup> Viéban, A. (1912). Ecclesiastical Seminary. In The Catholic Encyclopedia. New York: Robert Appleton Company. Retrieved April 26, 2010 from New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13694a.htm>