

HARNESSING OUR RESOURCES FOR THE FORMATION OF SEMINARIANS TO THE PRIESTHOOD IN THE POST-MODERN AGE

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Abstract

Formation is a divine assignment and those involved in it must be conscious of the gravity of its demands. No one forms another wholesale and no one forms himself all alone. Education is a systematic effort between a superior and an inferior, between a mentor and a mentored. Education environment is an academy of individuals with at least a vision. It is a mission to give birth to another through the process of intellectual midwifery to use the words of Plato. Its content is a heritage based on set values that humanise and imbued the individual with the character adequate and noble for a set goal. It is harnessing available resources to realise a personality immersed in a world that is experiencing exponential growth in technology, but with less capacity of an authentic integration of the true and needed values.

The human person is entangled in the drive to know and improve the self, even unconsciously so as to be able to rule one's life and possibly dominate others. But since culture regulates this drive and direct human affairs; information becomes both a possession and a heritage. It is about character building and a journey of an entire life of a person in society in diverse engagements.

This project seeks to draw attention to the fact that the present circumstance requires a re-evaluation of the system of formation; not just in the seminary but a far-reaching endeavour in the light of a world that is redefining anthropology. It calls for a more rigorous incarnation of the ever-relevant resources of the church and especially the recent document on the formation of candidates to the catholic priesthood.

Keywords: Formation, Seminarian, Priesthood, Education, Information, Seminary.

Introduction

I am constrained to say that no one forms another wholesale and no one forms himself all alone. Education is a systematic effort between a superior and an inferior, between a mentor and a mentored. Education environment is an academy of individuals with at least a vision. It is a mission to give birth to another through the process of intellectual “midwifery” to use the word of Plato. In the words of Edith Stein, “Education is not an external possession of learning but rather *the gestalt which the human personality assumes under the influence of manifold external forces,...*”¹ In relation to this claim she further opined that:

The first fundamental formation happens in the soul. Just as *an inner form resides* in the seed of plants, an invisible force making the fir tree shoot up here and beech there, there is in this way an inner mold set in human beings which urges the evolution into a certain direction and works towards a certain *gestalt* in blind singleness of purpose, that of personality which is mature, fully developed, and uniquely individual.²

The drive to know and improve oneself is one that the human person is entangled with and even unconsciously so as to be able to rule one’s life and possibly dominate others. But since culture regulates this drive and direct human affairs, information becomes both a possession and a heritage. It is about character building and a journey of an entire life of a person in society in diverse engagements.

The Theoretical Foundation of the Choice of Topic

The theoretical background to this presentation is the latest official document released by the Vatican for the formation of candidates to the celibate Catholic priesthood. In the mind of the Church; “The intellectual formation of candidates for the priesthood finds its specific justification in the very nature of the ordained ministry, and the challenge of the ‘new evangelization’ to which our lord is calling the Church ...”³ Added to this is the overall formation activities ranging from academic and cultural dimensions.

Moreover, it should be emphasised that the intellectual dimension, with the prescribed study of philosophy and theology, is not the only factor to be considered when evaluating the journey completed by the seminarian in each stage, and the progress that has been made. Rather the overall discernment by the formators regarding all aspects of formation will allow only those seminarians to pass on to the next stage who, in addition to having passed the necessary exams, have reached the level of the human and vocational maturity required for each stage.⁴

The above citations summarize the aim of this paper as the human, spiritual, intellectual and cultural formation of seminarian in the Western region and elsewhere in Nigeria. I will try as much as possible to pay attention to the new document on formation and harness the possibility of a daring audacity for credible reasons. I wish to, in particular, emphasise the integral link between our various disciplines and then ask for a concerted effort among all to pursue a synthetic formation. This will demand a lot of sacrifice from all of us formators, to create a harmony of knowledge in view of a wholistic education that makes gentlemen and men of the church.

The simple rationale for this approach can be stated thus: "To ensure adequate intellectual formation of future priests, all disciplines must be taught in such a way as to make their intimate connection stand out clearly, avoiding fragmentation."⁵ This poses a challenge to all formators who should see their duty as a sacred function and humanitarian service to the world in the church. Humans learn by fragments, but care must be taken not to yield to the modern tendency to fragmentation. "Philosophy [and indeed all disciplines] can reflect the fragment nature of the human ability to acquire knowledge; but when it leads to fragmentation of knowledge it becomes inimical to its well-being..."⁶, and might not augur well for evangelization.

The last two quotes are not just good for the envisaged purpose of priestly formation of seminarians to the Catholic Celibate priesthood; it is also recommended in my opinion as the quintessential requirement for training in any well-founded society of human dignity. It is also crucial to the success and failure of any future endeavour that merits integrity not only in a religious institution in the 21st century. Is it possible to attain such a system in our world today? The answer is no and yes. No because, if things continue the way they are now, this will be a mirage. Yes because, the only thing it takes is a conscious and honest decision by all stake-holders to make a difference.

The State of Things at the Moment:

Everything that is known about order, prognosis and prognostications is giving way to chaos, irascibility, uncertainty, rashness and populism. There is a new world order that is emerging in the history of humanity. The world is at a crossroad. Capitalism in my opinion has not satisfied the yearnings created at its advent. So, it is becoming more compelling to agree with those who claim that capitalism has failed and there is no certainty of what comes next. The western world is labouring under the yoke of self-imposed scourge that is inflicted by liberalism, unrestrained licentiousness and over-ambitious hedonism. The East block is surging and a new partitioning of the world is crystallizing. Here Africa is

experiencing a metamorphosis that is not clear-cut (this is an issue for another research). A region that has been and represented as a figure of endless battle ground for new and potential powers. All known symptoms of a revolution are whimsically present and what emerges from this new interregnum is the problematic that researchers have to deal with and all well-meaning institutions have to follow with keen interest. The world is hungry and confused, but there is no political foresight to the direction that will lead to a more cohesive globe and a safer life.

Mechanical development is taking a Dionysian trend in technological and digital advancements, but the sophistication needed by the human mind to handle the teleological complexity that it requires is not equipageous. There is a lop-sidedness that calls for attention. "At...times we have our talks and end up not implementing anything to the disappointment of millions and millions of people around the world who look up to this body to provide leadership in a world that is constantly oscillating between advancement and doom."⁷ This statement reveals a hypocrisy that is discernible in global politics and its complication in an already exacerbated world.

Stating the Problem of the Present

Why is this paper a product of curiosity and concern about the reality of the moment? Your guesses can be as good as and even sometimes better than my own. The reason this is true is that there is a subtle but obvious fact of mediocrity and indolence in the world today. The human capacity to know has been broadened in all ramifications. There are great achievements in infrastructural development in terms of technologies for industrial and food productions, but the quality of integral life has not been attained comparatively in its welfare and safety.

We live in a time of extraordinary opportunity. Breakthrough in science, technology, and medicine are curing illnesses and solving problems that prior generations thought impossible to solve. But each day also brings news of growing dangers that threaten everything we cherish and value. Terrorists and extremists have gathered strength and spread to every region of the planet. Rogue regimes represented in this body not only support terrorists but threaten other nations and their own people with the most destructive weapons known to humanity.⁸

There are so many meanings one can draw from such statement above and many other presentations during the same assembly. But the question is, if every leader is aware of the difficulty and threat of the time and knows how inimical it is to human progress and the crucial peace that has become more of illusion than a mirage; what is missing? One

can imagine that there is need for honest dialogue among leaders and leaders among their people.

The Seminary and Seminarians

To state this problem and its extension one needs to look at the problematic from various points of reference. Since our focus is the formation of young men for the purpose of ministerial priestly life; it will be right to be specific. The problems highlighted above are not just reverberating only in the political arena, but they are widely diffused in all facets of human life. The seminary is not exempt in this beleaguering and odious world order paradoxically orchestrated by science.

Science provides the foundation and marks the development of hierarchic power. Science is but one of the forms of knowledge, yet it exists today in a manner that makes all other forms of knowledge look insignificant, of little value or even harmful. One of the features of today's science is the possibility to obtain high-level knowledge in universities. What you can't learn at the university is not scientific; at best – it can be made scientific.⁹

Today, there is so much information that no one bothers about retention of information. There is hardly any need for profundity. This is a scourge of Secularism aided by pragmatism which has made depth and rigour of inquiry anachronistic and abhorrent to the vast majority. The seminary and seminarians are not insulated against such pretexts.

The word “seminary” is from the Latin word *Seminarium*, which means plots where plants are raised from seeds. A garden where seeds are nurtured and nourished to grow, become strong and bear fruits. It means breeding ground. When this is used in reference to the priesthood, it means breeding ground for priests. It means in my opinion an academy as in the most ancient available record of the Socratic peripatetic school and the rabbinic school of discipleship. A seminarian is usually a male member of the faithful (who ought to be baptized and confirmed), who feels called and presents himself or is presented for training as priest. He is then accompanied by those with requisite competence.

And so pastoral formation certainly cannot be reduced to a mere apprenticeship, aiming to make the candidate familiar with some pastoral techniques. The seminary which educates must seek really and truly to initiate the candidate into the sensitivity of being a shepherd, in the conscious and mature assumption of his responsibilities, in the interior habit of evaluating problems and establishing priorities and looking for solutions on the basis of honest motivations of faith and according to the theological demands inherent in pastoral work. Thanks to an initial and gradual experience of ministry, future priests will be able to be inserted into the living pastoral tradition of their particular church. They will

learn to open the horizon of their mind and heart to the missionary dimension of the Church's life. They will get practice in some initial forms of cooperation with one another and with the priests alongside whom they will be sent to work. These priests have a considerably important role, in union with the seminary program, in showing the candidates how they should go about pastoral work.¹⁰

The critical nature of the programme of formation is outlined in the above citation and one can only call the attention of all concerned to reflect sincerely on them so as to be able to truly fulfil the task of formation.

One major issue that constitute and could continue to be a problem in formation is the apathy of Seminarians. The apathy of Seminarians here means a general attitude prevalent among seminarians towards the various levels of formation. In retrospect, I am forced most of the time to question myself about motive when I see the rate of shallowness among young men who present themselves for formation to the priesthood. One is further concerned by a disposition of dismissiveness. Here seminarians rather than pay attention to the critical parts of formation; that is aspiration to heroism, they settle for mediocrity and materialism. What is more? In many cases, rather than take instructions and obey them by executing them, there is a general attitude of negotiation of what seminarians choose to do rather than obey and carry out instructions. To cap it all, what seminarians in the major part engage in nowadays is to resort to what they refer to as “psyching” the formators and priests in their Dioceses to make their way to the priesthood. Many have succeeded in this and they are in the field of ministry. These are disturbing trends.

Concerns from the Above/Tendency

One of the gravest concerns of today is the fact that for the majority of those trained in the seminary probably believe that the priesthood is the point of arrival. In the ordinary sense, the seminary is the nursery where the seed of the vocation is nurtured and come to maturity. The actual application of the self to the work only begins at ordination. In the major part, from parish experience and the opportunity of having to teach in two seminaries, it is a strong opinion of this paper that many seminarians get retired as soon as they are ordained. From personal experience and from pastors of souls, one can only conclude that personal entertainment in seeking pleasure most of the time take the energy or attention of many young priests. This is because for such people, the priesthood is the point of arrival instead of the beginning of the call to service. For the seminarian, the seminary ought to be a place of dreams and aspiration to self-immersion in the work of saving souls. Instead, the seminarian sees

the ordination as the end of suffering and sacrifice and the beginning of enjoyment having conquered. Here ordination becomes an achievement rather than an opportunity. At the end of the day, there is a suspicion that the aim of the church is contrived from the beginning.

Each seminarian is the protagonist of his own formation...and is called to a journey of ongoing growth in the human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral areas, taking into account of his own personal and family background. Seminarians are likewise responsible for establishing and maintaining a climate of formation that is consistent with the values of the Gospels¹¹

Very often the problems that arise can be numerous: in common experience, we have candidates who seem to respond and present themselves for formation who do not really wholeheartedly submit to formation. Some also come into the seminary with a disposition that make it impossible for the process of the formation to be authentic and fruitful. Cases abound in parishes and dioceses where seminarians who were highly esteemed in the seminary for discipline and maturity turn to have pretended all through their formation process only to reveal their true colours after ordination. Some seminarians are also caught in the web of the confusion between the principles of their life in the seminary and the remarkable difference it comes to experience in the parish setting. What could be done to bridge the gaps between the authentic life that the call of the gospel demands on the individual and the reality of the personal experience and his environmental influences? The answer is a structural one. All stake holders are to be diligent in the discharge of their duties from the family to the parish community and the seminary. It will be the responsibility of the individual seminarian to be honest in the search for God and the direction of such a hunger for God in the right direction

Educational System

Another problematic that I wish to highlight here is the educational systems world-over. Technology with all its beautiful results ought to be at the service of the human person. This is visible in many instances of our world events. But it is also true that technological advancement has led to a laziness that makes rigorous engagement of the human mind a waste of time and obsolete practice as we now have technological elements that can live our lives for us. At the same time and ironically too, we witness how different groups are organizing different programmes of natural brain engagement in complex calculus and rewards awarded to those who distinguish themselves. These, point to serious issues of confusion as a result of a misguided use of human

capacity in technological investigations. Do we have to make people lazy by relying on robots even when they are not needed to lives?

The Nigerian experience?

In the ordinary sense the above problem is true, but as if it were not enough; the decadence of such technological obscurity is further compounded by the inept tradition of penury in the Nigerian society. The statement of the Catholic Bishop's Conference of Nigeria after their second plenary session in a Communiqué, has the following: "The inability of Government to address the inequitable situation in the country has provided breeding ground for violent reactions, protest and agitations, which exploit the grievances of different segments of the country."¹² As member of the comity of nations and actors in a world that is becoming more and more a village, we are left with the refuse of technological advancement at the 'admiration' of those who reap the dividends of the victory of the human spirit over the natural world. The major part of ills like the one highlighted here is the lack of targeted educational programme, be it in the theoretical background and in its practical implementation.

There is a challenge here and it is again global. In the theoretical world today, science and its method tend to redirect "technology" in a way that the aim of every human endeavour rather than seek the Supreme Good which is the hallmark of every particular goal now descends to seeking exclusive individual fragments. The negligence of a broader inquiry either by way of induction or deduction becomes the bane of illusive contentment and empty happiness. Utility and immediate satisfaction and the empty pragmatic dogmatism have driven the taste of the majority of people. This in itself is transgression of science that has led to the yawning gap between the Dionysian progress in mechanical science and the poverty of the fruitfulness of human satisfaction in the midst of the blessings of the earth. "The headlong development of the world and a keener awareness of existing inequalities make for the creation and aggravation of differences and imbalances."¹³ This imbalance is the result of an increasing fragmenting bifurcation of reality into scientific and metaphysical. This is a condition that arises from the deep-seated crisis in the human person. "The dichotomy affecting the modern world is, in fact, a symptom of the deeper dichotomy that is in the human person himself. He is the meeting point of many conflicting forces."¹⁴

Consequences

The symptoms of the above depravity of the human spirit are obvious to a reasonable mind. Today more than ever before, human hunger for

peace and fulfilment is plenty and the helplessness of institutions as a result of this failure is aplenty. All these point to the fact of failure in the society. One basic fact that plagues the globe today is instability.

The next point about the problems the world face is the failure of Capitalism. This is linked with the political exigencies of our time. The political terrain is volatile and chaotic. The result of all these encumbrances and the role they play in human psychology is clear. There is a high degree of fear and vulnerability which has given rise to pseudo-populism. What can one hold? We can conveniently assert that the utopic promise of inexistent paradise appeals easily to the malnourished and disgruntled populace. The level of unpredictability of the world politics that our world has known is a clear case of the rot in the human mind that manifests itself in the various ways of our present predicament.

The above analysis is simply a red signal in our society today. The least consequence of indifference is only a compound of accumulated disaster. Among them are some of the current world affairs. In the world today, terrorism is a part of every household preoccupation and the scourge of civil society. Since human wants are “insatiable” as the economic principle states, to use Adams Smith resources. The world is only at an elementary stage of wickedness and eventually nihilism. What substantiates this position is the fact that because man is naturally proud and power driven, he can descend low to bestiality to prove his capacity. Today we are grappling with a nuclearized North Korea. We have the power and exotic ego-driven president in the oval office in the United States of America. Europe is going through a new metamorphosis with Brexit. The middle East is only becoming more and more unreachable and the hope of a solution of a better region with Arab-spring is only so far, a mirage. What about communist China? With its new infiltration and ubiquity in the globe. Where will Africa be left at the end of the current new order?

What can be done?

These are worrisome indices and to the fickle mind a sign of hopelessness. But the choice we have to make is inescapable. If we refuse to take the necessary though radical decision, we will be worse of. The decision we need to take is to be well equipped to face a new world order and become active players in a post-modern world. The Church has and continues to make available opportunities and resources to her members to be well-equipped to engage the world for the good of the human person and the good of the universe.

The Church as a mother is under an obligation, therefore, to provide for its children an education by virtue of which their whole lives

may be inspired by the spirit of Christ. At the same time it will offer its assistance to all people for the promotion of a well-balanced perfection of the human personality, for the good of society in this world and for the development of a world more worthy of man.¹⁵

To stress this further, the Pope in his Encyclical *Laudato Si*, emphasises that:

We are always capable of going out of ourselves towards the other. Unless we do this, other creature will not be recognized for their true worth; we are unconcerned about caring for things for the sake of others; we fail to set limits on ourselves in order to avoid the suffering of others or the deterioration of our surroundings. Disinterested concern for others, and the rejection of every form of self-centredness and self-absorption, are essential if we truly wish to care for our brothers and sisters and for the natural environment...¹⁶

The problem most of the time is that it is one thing to have the opportunity and another to know and make responsible use of it. Here the words of Etienne Gilson become crucial.

As knowing being, man is able to distinguish between things, to be acquainted with their specific natures, and consequently to determine his own attitude toward things after his own knowledge of what they are. Now to be not determined by things but regulated by one's own knowledge of things is precisely what we call to be free."¹⁷

This is not a task that seminarians by themselves can achieve alone. The need then arises for commitment that promotes a robust response from those who are undergoing formation and the willingness on the part of the formators to be selfless in responding to the demands of the human mind to be equipped for mission. It is the view of the new ration that;

The task of the agents of formation can be defined as interior openness, rooted in an intense spiritual experience. It is aimed at constant discernment, which allows one to learn from life and from different circumstances, and to discover in them the providential actions of God in his Christian or priestly journey. The quality of the service rendered to seminarians can be measured from the depth of this openness, and, at the same time, a calm formative atmosphere in the Seminary depends on it¹⁸

The extent to which the formator is open to this task will go a long way to enrich his own life and lead to proficiency in his task as formator. This is so because:

While carrying out that mission, the formator has an opportunity for growth, and can discover the specific charism of vocational accompaniment and of priestly life as a call that belongs to him personally. In this way, the Seminary can become a school that prepares those who will be responsible for ongoing formation. That is to say, he who has been a Seminary formator acquires a particular sensitivity and a rich experience to be able, later, to assist in the ongoing formation of the Clergy.¹⁹

There are many ways in which this programme can nurture the present for a future turn-around that helps to avert the impending crisis that the current situation of the direction of world event is moving. There are few things that this paper will elaborate as suggestions to help improve the present situation. Those in training must seek ways to apply themselves to the current curriculum of their formation to the extent that the desired 'personal-centred' formation (auto-formation) can be realized. If Seminarians can open up to the programme as it is at the moment; a lot can be achieved in the interim. But even at that there will still be a lot to be done. The new manual that the congregation responsible for the formation to the priesthood recently reviewed and distributed to houses of formation signal a need to overhaul formation outfit to respond to the present moment. "Whenever it may prove necessary to make changes to the previously approved *Ratio Nationalis*, due to new or unexpected developments, the text may be amended by seeking the further approval of the Congregation for the Clergy."²⁰ We have to, in the spirit of this new terrain of world events; prepare ourselves to play our noble roles in rescuing the world that is beleaguered by avoidable crisis. The crisis in the world is only a reflection of the potential of the deep-seated depravity and corruption of the human person. To be able to address the problem is to renew the vigour to heroism and turn around the present disposition of self-enslavement to technology and make science serve the need of man and not make man a puppet to the work of his hands.

Review of the Present Programme

Since it is the conviction of this paper that the present programme needs a review and in consonance with the requirement of the Congregation for the formation of Clergy; there is so much to be done. Besides the need to respond to the universal Church, there is also another need as a Local Church. "Each *Ratio Nationalis* must also specify the stages of formation and the programme of studies, the objectives and their length, respecting the norms of universal law."²¹ That means that Nigerian Church must quickly realise and respond now to this dual perspective:

her immediate local needs as well as her effort at missionary activities. In one of my recent vacations besides the Conference that took me out of the Seminary before closing down for the 2017/2018 Session, I participated in two other conferences: one was organized by Association of Black Catholics in America from 6th to 9th of July. The other was organized by African Conference of Priests and Religious working in United States (ACCRUS). It was obvious that the Nigerian Church is ahead in the population of priests and religious among other African countries who are missionaries. What fascinated me is the fact that the American Bishops had prepared a document of integration for such priests and religious when they come into their country.

Recommendations

The Need to Emphasise our Values

The world under our watch has gone more individualistic and populist. Whatever interest such promote, one imagines that the dynamics of the present cannot be served by populism. But there is something that is crucial that needs to be emphasised; that is the fact of value. Value is an accent to the commonality of a people and the heritage they make to the gamut of global civilization. Although it is peculiar, it does not disintegrate the coalition of global alliance when it has to do with human solidarity. The task that humanity faces is to be conscious of and realise the importance of heritage and the endurance of a common experience even when they have to be looked at from different perspectives. This is a position that even some of the most fervent critics of objectivity in values will confirm.

The issue is clearer now than of old, because we now have a more explicit standard whereby to decide what ontology a given theory or form of discourse is committed to: a theory is committed to those and only those entities to which the bound variables of the theory must be capable of referring in order that the affirmation made in the theory be true. ... But utility need not imply significance, in any literal linguistic sense.²²

We have a common experience in which everyone is immersed. But our relation with the objective becomes a matter of our own exclusive lived-experience that colour our worldview.²³

1. The Value of Family and Social Ties

One can still claim today that in Nigeria and I believe in most part of Africa that notwithstanding the consequence of globalization and western isolationism, there still exists a reasonable social bond. This is not just a family value, but it extends to the society. The importance of this point is to be able to harness this social opportunity in the selection

of candidates to the Seminary for training as priest. The dioceses, Parishes and vocations directors are to emphasise ties with people and employ such as instrument in the process of recruitment for seminary training. The knowledge of the family background for instance can go a long way to assist the diocese in making a well-informed decision on who to admit or otherwise. This is a method that some congregations have used and it has proven to be very helpful. The tendency is to say those values are disappearing in our time and no one really bothers. We can activate such values and let the civil society learn from us. It will not be a novel idea, but a return to the role of the church to the society. In the traditional system, the formator and the formed live out a very intensely close relationship. Can we boast of such commitment from our system today?

2. Document prepared or received by Local Church for Formation

I am aware that there has been a document on formation in the category of *Ratio Fundamentalis* by the Nigerian Bishops' Conference. But as I stand here, I have not set my eyes on such document despite all my efforts to acquire it. This is not the way we should go about our formation. What I am proposing is that, the Nigerian Church should prepare a document or update what is there to reflect the cruciality of present circumstances in the universal church and its relevance to local needs.

The one and only Catholic Church subsists in the particular Churches. Even if formation for priesthood will normally take place in the context of a Diocese, or in the institutions to which the candidates belongs, the priestly ministry is open to the universality of the Church and, thus, carries within it an openness to the more pressing needs of other Dioceses²⁴

In the wake of the engagements of the Nigerian church in providing missionary activities to the rest, efforts should be made to make allowance in the formation of Seminarians who will eventually go for mission. This will from onset prepare everyone for the task ahead.

3. Review of Academic Programme towards Master's Degree

Another proposal that I am putting forward here is that our students be allowed to do professional courses in the relevant areas while they journey within these nine years only to earn first degrees. For instance, the University of Benin which All Saints and St. Albert are affiliated to has and granted opportunity to Ph.D programme in the last accreditation, should be a welcomed news to the Church of this region. The robustness of the relationship between the Seminary of All Saints

and now St. Albert contributed to the credit-worthiness that made the request pass for the University. Our students can receive Masters in relevant areas within their time in the seminary. In fact, the former HOD of the Department of Philosophy in Uniben has also discussed this possibility with me as he guaranteed that our materials are sufficient with a bit of adjustment at different levels. Let us be audacious here and make history for the progress of the Church of our region. For instance, in Europe and North America candidates for the priesthood spend less time but graduate with a master's degree. An upgrade of the academic programme will certainly be a great step forward. Besides, the new world order makes it mandatory even to have such a review in the programme.

4. Preparation of Seminarians towards Mission outside Nigerian shores

Just as I talk about the documents above, I believe our seminaries need some more professional touch to the training we give to Seminarians who become priests in our time and most of the time without any other training they go for missions outside the country. This will also help prospective formators who will come back to the seminary to teach others. I feel it is better to harvest when the grains are still very healthy and viable than to wait for them to lose all their sap. The principle of human formation will be enhanced if we pay more attention to particular area of interest and expose our seminarians to them while still in the seminary. The thinking might be 'do not give them too much' before they are ordained. It could even be that some might elope with such opportunity and the church is the loser. I think the time has come when we do not allow the fear of taking risk determine our decision that will lead to a vicious circle. We should take courageous risks and who knows the fruits that may come could be the solution to our problems.

How to Achieve these Goals

All these proposals need so much groundwork to be done and it will call for heavy financial commitment. Here, there are at least three groups that must be battle-ready: The people of God—lay-faithful, the formators and the Bishops who are proprietors of the seminary. The people of God are already doing a lot. But it is not possible to reach the state of equilibrium when it comes to commitment to the training of seminarians to the priesthood. It is also my conviction that if there were laudable project by the Nigerian church, the likelihood is there that our people will be up to the task of rising to the occasion.²⁵

On the part of the formators, we must be ready to step-up our effort to give more so as to be able to meet the need of the requirement that this new programme as proposed will be successful. In the same

vein, I address myself to those who collaborate with us in this task to help us with suggestions and resources needed to make this a reality and a pride to them. I am pleased that our Mother Institution on the academic part of formation is here represented. Furthermore, all our lecturers from the different institutions including the University of Benin also will agree with me that our students put in so much that our proposal is not overambitious.

The next is the proprietors; our Bishops need to constantly keep in view and respond consequently to the new world order. Seminarians today must be well prepared to face the challenges of the new evangelization which the pope refers to and required the bishops to do something urgently to address the issue. “While safeguarding the authority of the Diocesan Bishop, the *Ratio Nationalis* seeks to harmonise the priestly formation across the country, in this way facilitating dialogue between bishops and formators, to the benefit of both seminarians and seminaries.”²⁶ This is the rationale behind the Joint Seminaries Commission meetings and the various Governing Councils. These are veritable organs, but there is need to give them more lease of life in the wake of present circumstances. The Pope further stresses this point.

Seminarians should receive a more extensive interdisciplinary, and not merely doctrinal, formation in the areas of engagement and marriage. Their training does not always allow them to explore their own psychological and affective background and experiences. Some come from troubled families, with absent parents and a lack of emotional stability. There is a need to ensure that the formation process can enable them to attain the maturity and psychological balance needed for their future ministry. Family bonds are essential for reinforcing healthy self-esteem. It is important for families to be part of the seminary process and priestly life, since they help to reaffirm these and to keep them well grounded in reality. It is helpful for seminarians to combine time in the seminary with time spent in parishes. There they can have greater contact with the concrete realities of family life, since in their future ministry they will largely be dealing with families. “The presence of lay people, families and especially the presence of women in priestly formation, promotes an appreciation of the diversity and complementarity of the different vocations in the Church”²⁷

There is also need for a National body to coordinate the activities of the seminaries on a regular and active basis.

Prospects

Nigerians are already making the nation and church proud abroad. My visit to US and participation in the conferences referred to above give me a first-hand experience to testify to the wealth of our Nation.

Maximizing the gains of what we have and adding a bit of flavour to our present system will only put us at a comfortable position. This I believe because, as good and interesting the stories I heard during my sojourn in America, it was clear too that there are cases of casualties as a result of adjustment problems. A review of what is there and a conscious creation of a column for such programmes in the Seminary will go a long way to bettering the chances of good adjustment experience for our seminarians and their readiness to face the work of evangelization at home and abroad as missionaries. There is already a programme of re-entering after a period of missionary activities by Nigerian priests and religious. It will be appropriate to also have a programme of exit for such prospective missionaries. What might be useful is teaching the candidates for the priesthood the need to understand the various cultures of people in different continents and cultural experiences.

Conclusion

Permit me take a clue from the words of *Pastores Dabo Vobis* once again. ... that in the face of crisis of priestly vocations 'the first answer which the Church gives lies in a total act of faith in the Holy Spirit. We are deeply convinced that this trusting abandonment will not disappoint if we remain faithful to the graces we have received.' To remain faithful to the grace received! This gift of God does not cancel human freedom; instead it gives rise to freedom, develops freedom and demands freedom.²⁸

Besides, therefore, all of us need to open our hearts to decision that will help build on the progress the Church has made in the training of her candidates to the priesthood

Endnotes

1. Edith Stein, *Collected Works; Woman 2*. P. 130
2. *Ibid*, 130.
3. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, no. 51....
4. *New Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacrodotialis* P. 10
5. *New Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacrodotialis* P. 97
6. Peter EGBE, *Harmony A Philosophical Investigation, From Phenomenology to Metaphysics*, Rome, 2008. 26.
7. UNO President Muhammadu Buhari's Speech at the UN General Assembly,
8. Citymirrornews.com/index.php2017/09/19; consulted on the 3rd of October, 2017.
9. Remarks by President Trump to the 72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly. United Nations New York, www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/09/19; consulted on the 3rd of October, 2017.

10. Maija Kule et.al., ed. *Dilema of Values and Contemporary Life-world*, Latvia-Riga, 2007. 37
11. Pastores Dabo Vobis. 58
12. New Ratio Fundamentalis, no. 130
13. A Communique issued at the End of Second Plenary Meeting of the Catholic Bishop's Conference of Nigeria
14. (CBCN) at St. Charles Borromeo Pastoral Centre, Jalingo, Taraba State, 7-15 September, 2017
15. Gaudium et Spes, 7 December, 1965. No. 8.
16. Gaudium et Spes, 7 December, 1965. No. 10
17. Vat. II., *Gravissimum Educationis*, 28th Oct. 1965. No. 3
18. *Laudato Sí*
19. Etienne Gilson, *God and Philosophy*, Yale Nota Bene Copy, 2002, P.21].
20. *The New Ratio*, no. 152.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid no. 3 & 8.
23. Ratio Fundamentalis no 7
24. Willard Van Orman Quine, *From a Logical Point of View*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2003. 13-15.
25. Donald Davidson, *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2009. 84-88.
26. Ratio Fundamentalis no. 126
27. Pastores Dabo Vobis. No. 68.
28. New Ratio, p. 16. No. 6.
29. Amoris Laetitia 203.
30. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, no. 1