

The New *Ratio Fundamentalis* (2016), the Rite of Priestly Ordination, and the Formation of Priestly Identity

Victor Usman Jamahk

Abstract

There is no doubt that the times are changing and that the times have changed. As the value systems of society changes, so do the value systems of those who are in it. Incidentally, those who are to become priests are also products of society. If the value system of society is “changing” does the value system of the priesthood change too? This question of balance between the “urge of society” and the “identity of the priesthood” has been addressed clearly in the *New Ratio Fundamentalis* (2016) which urges that the basis for evaluation of seminarians for the ministry of Presbyter is that they acquire what it calls, “Priestly Identity”. This is nothing new, because a look at the present Rite of Ordination which goes back to the Apostolic Tradition, ca. 300AD, shows that the acquisition of this “Priestly identity” is taken for granted. Given that there is no other time, more than ever, that the acquisition of this “Priestly identity” is to be sought than ours, this paper seeks to sting us to consciousness in this regard.

1. Introduction: The “Age-long” problem of balance between “The urge of Society” and “Priestly identity”

The problem of what should constitute the character of those to be received into the priestly ministry has always been part of the Church. Although they are always to be taken from among the people, right from the time of the Apostles, in fact, even from prefigurations in the OT, the aptitude and expectations of those who take up this ministry has been specified to the extent that the Pastoral Letters of St. Paul dedicate some considerable time to this cause. This problem is not immune to our present society except that it seems that what constitutes this aptitude today for us is beclouded by many prejudices. Priests are to be products of their times, yet removed from this time because what they represent is timeless. This much has been the preoccupation off the *New Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* which reiterates points of reference for priestly formation and ordination which are essentially presumed by the Ordination Rite. Articulating these points is the subject matter of this paper.

2. The New *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*

2.1 Background to the Document

The present *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* (Hereafter: *Ratio*) released on the 8th of December, 2016 is the second revision of the document since it was issued for the first time on the 6th of January 1970; the first revision had been in 1985. While the first issue and the first revision were carried out by the Congregation for Catholic Education, this present edition has been issued by the Congregation for the Clergy. The impetus for this is to be found in the principles of *Ministorum Institutio* of Benedict XVI (2013) which modified the Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus* of John Paul II by transferring the responsibility of caring for seminaries from the Congregation for Catholic Education to the Congregation for the Clergy, implying as demonstrated in this present *Ratio* that there is a close continuity between life as a seminarian and life as a priest. The text had been in process since 2014 when the first draft was prepared, going through a verbose process of scrutiny which included sending the text “to various Conferences of Bishops” in order to broaden the scope of reflection and consultation so as to include countries in which the *Ratio* will be applied. (*Ratio*, 7) In the first paragraph, therefore, which deals with application, the document states clearly that the norms of the *Ratio* is normative regarding the “General Plan of Studies” for those countries under the competence of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples into which Nigeria falls. It states further that “each Conference of Bishops is required to prepare its own *Ratio Nationalis* on the Basis of this *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*”. (*Ratio*, 3; 6-8) This in itself is a very significant task for the Nigerian Church which would really have to pay attention to vocation, formation and selection, while we still have a boom.

2.2 Its Immediate Sources

The immediate sources of the new *Ratio* are identified by the *Ratio* itself, often on its pages, but more so in the Footnotes. Chief among these are the previous two *Rationes Fundamentales* of 1970 and 1985, the Decree on the Training of Priests of the Second Vatican Council, *Optatam Totius*, the Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, *Presbyterium Ordinis*, the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, and more recently, the Directory for the Ministry and Life of Priests issued by the Congregation for Catholic Education in 2013.

2.3 Fundamental Points on Priestly Formation

The fundamental points raised on priestly formation by the New *Ratio* is predicated on the principle that priestly formation is one big and long journey that begins, not on the day that one is ordained a priest, but on the day one decides to answer the call to the priesthood by becoming a seminarian. This is

the reason that informs the transfer of the responsibility of formation of seminarians for the priesthood from the care of the Congregation for Catholic Education to the Congregation for the Clergy. As a result of this, ongoing formation, which comes after priestly ordination, is regarded by the *Ratio*, only as the second part of priestly formation or the formation of priestly identity where the first part is what has been designated as, “initial formation” – that is, what takes place in the seminaries. In fact, the *Ratio* stipulates clearly, that the long-term preparation for ongoing formation – as a necessity for priestly life – should be a part of seminary training (*Ratio*, 56), something which could also be used as a parameter to evaluate the readiness of a seminarian to take up the priestly vocation. While the Church rejoices in hope and begins to count its fortunes from the day a seminarian is admitted, she also watches out to decipher the conformity with the identity of the priesthood on the part of the seminarian to the extent that the attainment of formation objectives is not necessarily tied to the time spent in the Seminary or studies completed but to the maturity attained according to the aims of the various stages.

In this paper, I shall concentrate only on what has been called, “the initial stage of formation”.

2.3.1 The Basis and Purpose of Priestly Formation: the formation of Priestly Identity

The New *Ratio Fundamentalis* does not mince its words regarding what the aim and purpose of priestly formation is. In fact, apart from the fact that the terminology “Priestly identity” occurs *verbatim* in 4 paragraphs of the document (*Ratio*, 30, 58, 68 and 81), paragraph 30 is explicitly dedicated to “The Formation of Priestly identity” as the basis and purpose of priestly formation. This is apart from several other cognates like priestly life (*Ratio*, 13, 43, 53, 54, 55, 89, 131, 142, 148, 152 and 157), priestly spirituality (*Ratio*, 34, 97, 157), priestly heart (*Ratio*, 55), priestly maturity (*Ratio*, 58), priestly perfection (*Ratio*, 87) and priestly formation (*Ratio*, 6, 9, 43, 59, 62, 63, 90, 94, 112, 119, 148) which essentially point to the same reality. In a world and society that is increasingly individualistic and subjective, this, indeed, is a very bold statement and the statement is this: that there is a specific pattern of character acquisition, a specific pattern of thought, that is necessary for the priestly life and should be aimed at and looked-out for in the process of formation to the priesthood.

2.3.2 What constitutes, “Priestly identity”?

One of the easiest “get-away” of our present generation is to opine that the demands placed upon people by the Church, especially candidates for the priesthood, are unrealizable and unattainable because they are out of this world. Some people even say that it is like the authorities want people to be “sinless” or flawless in order to qualify for the priesthood. Is this what is

required by the New Ratio? What does the Ratio mean when it talks about “priestly identity”?

When the Ratio speaks of priestly identity, it does not mean “sinless identity” but an integrated personality acquired through configuration to the person of Christ; an interior maturity which does not limit itself to demonstrating a veneer of virtuous habits or a mere formalistic obedience to abstract principles, but the acquisition of interior freedom and a life without divisions or contradictions. (Ratio, 41) Interior freedom comes when one realizes his mission and has so internalized the principles of this mission that one acts in conformity with the mission not in any compulsive or sporadic manner but in an integrated and constructive manner. As such, like *Pastores Dabo Vobis* before it, and drawing from the New Testament (Mt 28:20; 1 Pet 5:1-4; Tit 1:5-9) and the Fathers like Gregory Nazianzen (Oratio II: PG 35,27) and St. Thomas Aquinas who stated that “Grace does not supplant nature but elevates and perfects it” (Summa I, q, a. 8 ad 2), the *Ratio* places human formation over and above the other dimensions of formation. *Pastores Dabo Vobis* had prescribed four dimensions that interact simultaneously in the *iter* of formation in the life of a priest: *the human dimension*, the necessary and dynamic foundation of all priestly life; *the spiritual dimension*, the shaper of the quality of priestly ministry; *the intellectual dimension*, which provides the rational tools needed in order to understand the values that belong to being a pastor and to integrate them into daily life and *the pastoral dimension*, which makes a responsible and fruitful ecclesial service possible (43-59). As such the Ratio teaches “a correct and harmonious spirituality demands a well-structured humanity” (97), one which is balanced. Such humanity is one which does not glorify weakness or exalt strengths but is committed to working humbly and ceaselessly on oneself with an honest awareness of ones limits and abilities. Such humanity is one that is open to growth through processing life's experiences and not the one, as is most common with the children of our generation, which reviles in the erroneous and narcissistic principle of “I am who I am” or “This is me”! A well-structured humanity is one with interest in health, nutrition, physical activity and rest; one which focuses on the constitution of stable personality characterized by emotional balance, self-control and an integrated sexuality; and one which, morally, requires that the individual arrives at the development of a well-formed conscience. A well-structured humanity means the cultivation of humility, courage, common sense, magnanimity, right judgement and discretion, tolerance and transparency, love of truth and honesty; all these are central because no one has ever been adjudged as holy, who has not cultivated such traits.

2.4 How does one arrive at this “Priestly identity”?

The *Ratio* is clear that the formation of priestly identity is a life-long process. This is why, unlike it had been viewed in the past, what used to be called

“seminary formation”, if I am to infer from the proposition of the *Ratio*, is now properly called “priestly formation” because seminarians are not in training to be seminarians but in training to become priests! As such, the time in the seminary constitutes the first stage of priestly formation while life after ordination constitutes the completing stage. However, even in the first stage which has been called “The initial stage of formation”, the attainment of priestly identity is supposed to be reached according to the aim of this stage and according to the aims of the various stages of this initial formation and this is the only condition under which the reception into orders takes place. According to the various designations of these stages, what is expected to have been achieved at each turn is demonstrated: the propaedeutic stage, the philosophical stage or stage of discipleship, the theological stage or stage of configuration and the pastoral stage or stage of vocational synthesis; all these are to facilitate the configuration to Christ. Let us look closely at the various stages and what they seek to bring out in the candidate for the priesthood, because, like what the human dimension is to integral formation, initial formation is the foundation and soul of priestly formation.

2.4.1 Propaedeutic Stage

The propaedeutic stage is what we call “the spiritual year” in Nigeria. The *Ratio* is clear about this stage that it is not definitive that all who come to it proceed in view of the priesthood. (*Ratio*, 59) Its aim is given as that of providing a solid basis for the spiritual life and to nurture greater self-awareness for personal growth. What this means is that evaluation at the end of this stage—which should be done carefully—should be centered, not necessarily on the actual talents or “full” maturity of the candidates, but on the latent talents and openness to learn and to grow.

2.4.2. Philosophical Studies (Discipleship)

The aim of this stage is “to root the seminarian in the *sequela Christi*”, that is, in listening to his word, keeping it in his heart and putting it into practice: in simple words, learning the ways and will of Christ. This is what disciples do. Special attention is given to human formation and a systematic work on the personality of the seminarian in openness to the Holy Spirit. The seminarian at this stage is meant to be educated in the truth of his being, in freedom and in self-control. The criteria by which the success of this stage which also includes the study of philosophy and the human sciences is judged, is the conviction of those charged with formation to ascertain that the intention of the candidate, marked by the required qualities, has reached sufficient maturity. In other words, what was identified at the propaedeutic stage as latent must now have been made potent. The display of inner freedom and human maturity is fundamental to proceeding with theological studies because in essence, receiving one into theological studies means receiving him into the preparation

for orders. This is why the petition is received at the successful completion of this stage. Entering the stage of theological studies, therefore, is a big statement on the part of authorities responsible for formation and the seminarian in training himself. If there is anywhere that thorough evaluation should take place on the whole journey, therefore, it must be here.

2.4.3 Theological Studies (Configuration)

The reason why human maturity is fundamental to going into the third stage is because at the third stage, formation now centers on the configuration of the seminarian to Christ; in other words, human maturity is given a priestly orientation in a more specific manner. What this means is that by the time one is in theology, the priestly identity which is being talked about should begin to take form. One should think, act, and behave according to the identity of what one intends to undertake. (Ratio, 69) This is the stage where the balance of the life of the seminarian should be checked: balance between human and spiritual maturity; between action and inaction; between the life of prayer and intellectual understanding. Furthermore, this maturity must be reflected in the seminarian's ability to work with others, relate well among the brothers and above all within the ambit of obedience to constituted authority. (Ratio 71) Ministries of Lector and Acolyte are to be conferred based on the maturing of each individual candidate. With regard to the reception of the diaconate, it is very axiomatic that the *Ratio* puts this, "at the conclusion of this stage or during the following one", that is, at the conclusion of theological studies or during the pastoral stage. What this means is that the practice of ordaining deacons and sending them back to school is actually not foreseen by the *Ratio* and there are actually so many disadvantages to this practice from a formation point of view. To show how important it is that the person received into orders should have acquired this "priestly identity", the *Ratio* makes it clear that even at this stage which is oriented toward the conferral of Holy Orders, the right kind of accompaniment may reveal that the call which the young man believed that he had received, although recognized during the first stage, was not truly a vocation to the priesthood or that it may not have been cultivated sufficiently. It behooves on the seminarian himself or the authorities concerned that the journey of formation be interrupted. (Ratio, 72) Very clearly then and in many places, the *Ratio* shows that it is against the practice of evaluation which is simply based on the serial and orderly completion of the stages of formation without an attendant sufficient and sincere questioning of whether the person concerned had acquired the qualities needed for ministry or not. Moreover, unlike the other previous two periods which were given time frames, the theological stage has none.

2.4.4 Pastoral Stage (Vocational Synthesis)

This stage is defined as "the time from leaving the seminary until the

subsequent priestly ordination which obviously is brought about by the conferral of the diaconate. (Ratio 74) All through the writing on this stage, the *Ratio* addresses the candidate as “seminarian” which further buttresses the fact that it is not foreseen by the *Ratio* that one is ordained a deacon while still in the seminary. In fact, in number 75 the *Ratio* states explicitly that the pastoral stage, “will normally take place outside the seminary building”, which means there should be some reasonable time between the completion of seminary training and the admission into orders. This is due to the aims of this period which are: the introduction to the pastoral life with gradual assumption of responsibilities in a spirit of service and making a suitable preparation, with the help of *specific* accompaniment, in view of the priesthood. The idea is to have the seminarian prepare *directly* for the priesthood and ministry in a lived pastoral condition of a parish or specific apostolate and under the accompaniment of a particular pastor (parochus), having completed the stages of seminary formation. As one who is into formation, the dividedness that one sees among final year seminarians these days – dividedness which comes from being in the seminary while at the same time preparing for diaconate or priestly ordination – is addressed by this period.

2.5 Roles of the Agents of Formation

The *Ratio* proposes a synergy in this regard between several indices in the process of formation. The seminarian himself who is the protagonist of his vocation, the diocesan bishop, the presbyterate, the community of formators, the professors, the specialists, the family, the parish, the consecrated life and the laity. While all these have specific roles to play, the roles of the seminarian, the bishop, the presbyterate and the community of formators stand out because the aforementioned are to conduct their duties in this regard keeping in mind that the good of the Church and pastoral charity is paramount in their roles. As such we have the Bishop who in his relationship with the team of formators must be diligently attentive not to exercise his authority in such a way as to undermine the Rector and other formators in the discernment of the vocation of candidates and their preparation (Ratio, 128); the priests who ought to work generously with the community of seminary formators by an open and concrete dialogue (Ratio, 129); the seminarians who are bound both individually and as a group to demonstrate – and not only in their external behavior – that they have internalized an authentically priestly way of life (Ratio, 131); and the community of formators which must offer a coherent and eloquent witness to the values that belong to the priestly ministry. (Ratio, 132) I particularly like the way that the *Ratio* formulates the role of all involved in the formation and evaluation of a seminarian in 201:

...Seminarians must be reminded and, at the same time, it must not be kept from them, that “the desire alone to become a priest is not

sufficient, and there does not exist a right to receive sacred ordination. It belongs to the Church to discern the suitability of him who desires to enter the seminary, to accompany him during his years of formation, and to call him to holy orders if he is judged to possess the necessary qualities.

And the necessary qualities are clear: priestly identity.

3. The Rite of Priestly Ordination

Incidentally, what the *Ratio Fundamentalis* calls “the acquisition of priestly identity” is also presumed by the Rite of Ordination. In fact, all the Rites of Ordination: the diaconate, the presbyterate and the episcopate, presume the acquisition of the identity of what one is to receive—at least to a certain extent—before one receives it; or, at least, the willingness to exercise the ministry in a way that is concordant with the dictates of the ministry itself. I have shown elsewhere, while dealing with the Apostolic Tradition, that even the process of baptism took this same sequence in the early centuries of Christianity (Jamahh, 2016). A reflective look at the rites suggests nothing less.

3.1 Brief History of the Present Rite

So that we know the antiquity of this quest for priestly identity, it is pertinent to state here that the present rites of ordination which are contained in the Roman Pontifical could be traced as far back as to the Apostolic Tradition of the 3rd or 4th century. In fact, a cursory look at the present Prayer of Consecration of a Bishop (ICEL, 1991) reveals that it is almost verbatim with the Latin version of the Prayer in the Apostolic Tradition (Bradshaw, et al, 2002). The official codification and acceptance of these prayers, however, did not come until the publication of the First Edition of the Pontifical in 1595 on the authority of pope Clement VIII who, however, acknowledged the works of previous editions before the official *Pontificale Romanum* in 1595 (Puniet, 1932).

3.2 The question of “Priestly identity” in the Ordination Rites

Although the prayers in the Apostolic Tradition do not contain any clause or phrase as to the selection of candidates for the presbyterate, there are such clauses in the selection of both bishops and deacons. While it is said that the bishop be ordained, “having been chosen from the whole multitude and being without sin”, the deacon is to be chosen according to those things that have been said in the choice of a bishop, an injunction which has been attributed also to those to enter the presbyterate. (Bradshaw et al, 2002) These would not have been unconnected to the injunctions laid down by the Pastoral Letters concerning the choice of people into ministry (Cf. 1Tim 3:1ff and Tit 1:7ff). By this text, and more so, because of the discrepancy in the applications of the words *presb,teroj* and *evpi,skopoj* in the New Testament to what seems like

the same people with different functions (Santantoni, 2000), we can conclude that the same requirements are made of the candidates for the priesthood.

The character of what constitutes this “priestly identity” and the implication of acquiring it, is demonstrated in the Rite of Election and the Admonitions. Although the Rite is not explicit enough, one could glean from some construction and injunctions in these, the furtherance of such identity. Moreover, we know through Puniet, that the assent asked of the congregation during ordination is a kind of confirmation given by the faithful to the election of candidates which had to have been done before hand. In fact, he informs us that the Rite of Election represents and sums up the canonical scrutiny or examination of candidates (221). While this “scrutiny” could directly refer to carrying out the injunctions of can. 1033-1039, it also is concerned with the dictates of can. 1026-1032 which deal with the acquisition of this identity as mentioned.

3.2.1 At the Election

All of the ordination Rites including that of the priesthood which is our focus here have a Rite of Election. As regards that of the priesthood, it is designated, in the reformed rite after the Second Vatican Council as, “Election by the Bishop and Consent of the People”, in order to demonstrate the role of the Bishop who is the one who literarily calls the priest to sit beside him and assist him in his ministry (Puniet, pp 223-224). Ascertaining the worthiness of the candidate as is the case in the rite has little or nothing to do with the person's standing before God, *as such*, which no human can claim, but with the candidates' eligibility according to the human-sacramental-ecclesiastical standards that have been established. This is why the presenter of the candidates does not answer the question regarding the worthiness of the candidate posed by the bishop on the basis of any criteria other than that of “inquiry among the people of God and those responsible for his training”, which is not unconnected with the requirements of can. 1029 which states that:

Only those are to be promoted to orders who, in the prudent judgement of their own bishop or of the competent major superior, all things considered, have integral faith, are moved by the right intention, have requisite knowledge, possess good reputation, and are endowed with integral morals and proven virtues and the other physical and psychic qualities in keeping with the order to be received.

This is also corroborated by can 1052. It is only after such a testimony from the human-sacramental-ecclesiastical perspective – although this must also have been under the guidance of the Holy Spirit – that reference is made “To the help of the Lord”, which tells us that one cannot or should not replace the other

because essentially, it is through this juridical act of “election” that a candidate is deemed as truly “called” by God in the Holy Spirit for ministry, what has been designated as “*vocatio externa*” because it is God himself, who through the human-sacramental-ecclesiastical dimension, chooses the candidates for ministry (Meßner, 2001).

3.2.2 At the Admonition (Homily)

Although Santantoni is of the opinion that this part of the rite is an “introduction” (242), Puniet dealing with the rite in the Pontifical prior to Vatican II (the 1596 edition of Clement VIII revised by Benedict XIV in 1725) shows that the admonitions were already present in the 10th century *Ordines romani* (222). As it is today, the first part of the admonition focuses on the readiness of the candidate to work in cooperation with the bishop, the visible high priest, who has the fullness of the priesthood. In the second part, the admonition addresses the readiness of the candidate to grow in the imitation of Christ to the extent that the candidate is asked to know what he is doing and to imitate the mysteries which he celebrates. One sees the assumption that the conformity and configuration to the person of Christ is assumed and taken for granted by the rite in the portion where the rite addresses the candidate: “Do your part in the work of Christ the Priest with genuine joy and love, and attend to the concerns of Christ before your own.” In fact, the examination that takes place after the admonition and the taking of the vows of celibacy is a formal and juridical act that is done in the assumption that the candidate is talking from the point of view of the “priestly identity” mentioned above. This point is supported by the provisions of can 1040-1049 which deal with Irregularities and impediments to ordination.

3.2.3 The Laying on of Hands and the Prayer of Consecration

The Laying on of Hands and the Prayer of consecration is the central act which makes and seals the ordination to the priesthood. Notice here, that I have taken these two together. This is because in the Christian Tradition unlike in the prefiguration of the laying on of Hands in the OT (technically called the *s^cmikah*: hkms) as found in Num 11:24ff; 27: 15-23 and Deut. 34:9, the substance of the gesture of Laying on of Hands is confirmed by the words which accompany it. Technically, there is a bond between the Litany, the Laying on of Hands and the Prayer of Consecration as the three flow into one another. As a rule, the essence and functioning of the Laying on of Hands and the content of the ministry to which one is called is always transmitted in the Prayer of consecration. In the ordination of a priest, the substance of this prayer is the motive – which repeats itself over and over again in the anamnestic as well as in the epicletic parts of the prayer – that the priest is the helper of the bishop in his ministry to Christ and the people of God. This is something which we have observed according to the *Ratio* that the candidate for the priesthood is supposed to have been able to

internalize. As such, the prayer pleads that the spirit of holiness, which is presumed to have been received at the diaconate is renewed—*innova in visceribus eorum Spiritum sanctitatis*. It is through this that the message of Christ will reach the ends of the Earth.

4. Synthesis and Résumé

I am of the opinion that the present crisis of faith that we find in the priesthood today is the result of admitting to the priesthood several people who, in keeping with the pull of society, entered the ministry for many other reasons apart from the love for God, his Church and the priesthood, such that when the currents grew, because of the lack of a clear identity as priests—currents which have not hit us as hard yet in Nigeria because of the high level of illiteracy of the people we lead and the economic penury we live in—they all started caving in and supporting everything else but the priestly which should be their identity. While it is hardly possible that one is able to completely checkmate this trend with regard to our situation in Nigeria, the New *Ratio* provides a guide to how the system could assist in the selection of candidates that have acquired the virtues which are anticipated by the Rite of Ordination. To this effect, the following are observed:

4.1 Selection of Candidates for training as Priests

Now that it has become clearer that initial formation is a part and parcel of priestly formation, the need to take the selection process of candidates for the seminary seriously becomes even more expedient. The era of taking, “Trial candidates” is over. Apart from the fact that most young men are becoming less familiar with the ways of the faith despite belonging to Christian homes (*Pastores dabo vobis*, 62), there are also various ulterior reasons today, given the general tendency to avoidance of commitments, why young men may chose the priesthood. These are the areas that must be discerned. As Pope Francis has said, we are in need of priests and vocations are lacking; despite all these, however, the development of a vocation must be well studied! This must begin with the families and peer-groups of the candidates. In Nigeria, where vocations are in their thousands, only the best prospects should be taken in order to give the chance for the best development, at least, from the human-sacramental point of view which we have mentioned repeatedly.

4.2 Evaluation of the various stages of formation

The evaluation of the various stages of formation is highlighted by the *Ratio*. How much this is undertaken in the country and in seminaries and dioceses is another question. Evaluation is indeed no small process. However, most times, seminarians just proceed from one stage to another, gliding through, without a formal evaluation where one is made to know areas of growth and areas to watch. This is even more common among the diocesan clergy. Sometimes, even

reports from Apostolic Works are lacking because many don't want to be responsible for adjudicating over another's life which contradicts the human-sacramental dimension which is at the heart of formation. This is rather unfortunate because as the *Ratio* observes, as long as the seminarian keeps moving from one stage to another, he presumes that all is well in his formation since they often consider each stage as a consequence and continuance of the previous one. In fact, most seminarians just want to finish and get-on with the ministry regardless of whether they have acquired the spirit for that or not. This is unacceptable. Moreover, one wonders if our in-house philosophy and theology seminary system helps this evaluation on the part of formators or makes it more difficult.

4.3 The undermining of the Pastoral stage or the stage of synthesis

The Pastoral stage is a stage which is entirely in question in Nigeria. In fact until very recently when some dioceses have begun to adopt and practice it, it has been customary that seminarians are ordained deacons—half-way through their final year. They practice the diaconate in the seminary and are ordained immediately after graduation in July or August, or September. My experience of this is that seminarians are distracted and do not concentrate on the last year of their stay in the seminary. Moreover, there arises a feeling among the seminarians—being clerics—that they should have some privileges which is not entirely wrong, but which, however, is constrained by the fact that they are still in formal formation. All these rob them of the experience which this period is supposed to gift them with and also rob the diocesan authorities of the opportunity to evaluate the real pastoral perspectives which they have acquired in the seminary before their reception to orders and this could be counterproductive. Out of the 52 dioceses in Nigeria, and from the information I got, 25 dioceses, especially from Owerri, Onitsha and Calabar Ecclesiastical Provinces do not ordain their seminarians during training, while 24 dioceses mostly in the northern parts of Kaduna, Jos and Abuja Ecclesiastical Provinces still ordain while seminarians are in training. In fact in the Kaduna province, apart from the diocese of Kafanchan, all others ordain. As for Jos province, it is a 100 percent case. This definitely goes beyond what is anticipated by the *Ratio*. All these have consequences, which includes the fact that our people hardly know the difference between deacons and priests because deacons are almost always transitional and are in school most of the time. This does the mystagogy of the Church no good in the long run. Long and short of this is that the pastoral stage of formation should be made compulsory in all dioceses and that seminarians be ordained to the diaconate after the completion of their seminary training so that they could practice their roles as deacons among the people. This, in fact, is the very reason why the diaconate was established in the first place: for pastoral ministry among the people. The episode of the selection of deacons in Acts 6:1-6 and the functions as allotted to deacons in the early

church to announce the intentions of the Prayer of the Faithful and to direct the actions of the faithful during liturgical functions are all products of this vision and indicate the pastoral origin of the diaconate.

4.4 Preparation of *Ratio Nationalis*

The previous point brings me to this one. The need for a *Ratio Nationalis* which articulates the principles of formation as accommodated to our own peculiar environment (which is quite different!). This, according to the *Ratio*, is not supposed to be an individual thing but something which is prepared for the dioceses of the country taking into consideration the underlying truths that binds our situations together. The importance of such a document which addresses the lacunae which usually exists between what is done by dioceses and what is done by seminaries is really needed. This will go a long way to give a sharper direction and coordination to the process of formation which already of itself is no easy task.

Conclusion

Formation of priestly identity as anticipated by the New *Ratio Fundamentalis* and as presumed by the Rite of ordination has never been as expedient as it is today. Challenged by secularization, hemmed in by materialism, tempted by vainglory and surrounded by a narcissistic society, the Church despite her urgent need for ministers must always seek for quality rather than quantity. If the situation of the declining Christian regions is anything to go by, where most of the clerics themselves, obviously out of a dissatisfaction with a vocation which they freely chose, are in the fore-front of seeking a change to this priestly identity, it tells us nothing other than that the Church should be more careful with the way she calls people to ministry. Again in the words of Pope Francis,

We are in need of priests, vocations are lacking. The Lord calls, but it is not sufficient. And we... have the temptation to take without discernment the young men who present themselves. This is bad for the Church! Please, the development of a vocation must be well studied! You must examine well if it is from the Lord, if the man is healthy, if the man is balanced, if the man is capable of giving life, of evangelizing, if the man is capable of forming a family and of giving this up to follow Jesus. Today we have so many problems in so many dioceses, because of this error... of taking those who come sometimes expelled from seminaries or religious houses just because they need priests. Please! We must think of the good of the People of God. (Pope Francis).

REFERENCES

- Bradshaw, P. F., Johnson, M E., and Philips, L. E. (2000) *The Apostolic Tradition*. Attridge, H.W. ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Daughters of St. Paul. (2017). *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation: New Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*. Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa
- Gregory Nazianzen, Oratio II: PG 35, 27
- Pope Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter issued Motu Proprio Whereby the Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus* is modified and responsibility for seminaries is transferred from The Congregation for Catholic Education to the Congregation for the Clergy *Ministrorum Institutio*. AAS 105 (2013) 130-135, 828-833.
- ICEL, *The Rites of the Catholic Church, Vol II*. (1991) Collegeville Minnesota: Liturgical Press.
- Jamahh, V. U. (2016) The Role of the Liturgy in the Formation and Sustenance of Christian Cultural Memory in the Family: An Impulse From Early Christianity for the New Evangelization. In *The Family and the New Evangelisation*, L. Ijezie, S. Audu and A. Aicha, eds. 545-565. Lagos: CATHAN Publications
- Messner, R. (2001) *Einführung in die Liturgiewissenschaft*. Paderborn et al.: Ferdinand Schöningh.
- Pope John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the formation of priests in the circumstances of the present day *Pastores Dabo Vobis*. AAS 84 (1992) 657-804.
- Pope Francis, Address to the Plenary of the Congregation for the Clergy. (3 October 2014) In: *L'Osservatore Romano* 226 (4 Octobe 2014).
- Pierre de Puniet, D. (1932) *The Roman Pontifical: History and Commentary*. London, New York and Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co.
- Santantoni A. (2000) Orders and Ministries in the First Four Centuries. In Chupungco, A. J. ed. 193-203 *Handbook on Liturgical Studies*. Collegeville Minnesota: Liturgical Press.
- Santantoni, A. (2000) Ordination and Ministries in the West. In Chupungco A. J. ed. 217-252. *Handbook for Liturgical Studies Vol IV*. Collegeville Minnesota: Liturgical Press.