

## CHAPTER 13

### **CATHOLIC KNIGHTS AS LIGHT TO THE WORLD: AN IMPETUS FOR A NEW EVANGELIZATION AMONG THE YOUTHS OF THE DIOCESE OF AUCHI**

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#### **Introduction**

Growing up as a young boy in my community, Ivhianokpodi, I used to confuse the word 'KNIGHT' with the word 'NIGHT', particularly because of the way I saw the knighthood then. I feared them when I confused the two words above and because of their elaborate dress: the sword, the 'cap' and even due to the many misconceptions and negative connotations that seemed to associate the Knighthood with something Secret rather than Sacred. Thus, there was no doubt in my mind, then, that they were actually 'NIGHT'. But as I improved in my knowledge of the Catholic Faith, I began to understand that the institution of the Knighthood has a rich sacramental root. It stems from the Holy Orders and was established in the middle ages. The knights were predominantly very helpful during the crusades and inquisitions; they helped to defend the Holy Land from Islamic invaders, ensured the safety of pilgrims and the sick and furthered the battle for Christianity. This indeed gave a new colouration to my outlook on the knights. I have merged my old way of thinking with my new insights about

knights. Thus, knights should not be Night as I regarded initially, but they are Lights considering what I know about them now. Therefore, Catholic Knights Must be light to the World.

Today, the quest for noble men and women: men of faith and valour, women of virtue and noble demeanour have become more than a necessity. This is because far from defending the Holy Land from invaders and guiding the pilgrims, the knights of today have a more urgent and spiritual task: to defend and guide Christians to the Holy Land; Jerusalem which is our heavenly home and rather than only guiding pilgrims on a pilgrimage they are to guide them to become true pilgrims to heaven. Thus, the task of knights has become even more spiritual than temporal; this is because “we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers in high places” (Eph 6:12). This is visible as our world continues to present challenges to our Christian faith; the craving for sin, irreligious practices, abortion, same-sex marriage, invitro-fertilization, contraceptives, corruption, bribery, heretical doctrines, Pentecostalism, poverty and suffering and other affronts to our Christian faith. This now constitutes the new domain, of which the Knight should endeavour to seek out and reach out to people to help them against the onslaughts of the present age which presents more challenges, especially among the youths of the Diocese of Auchi.

No doubt, Catholic Knights are like a city built on a hilltop which cannot be hidden. They must thus be the light and salt to their fellow Christians and even Non-Christians. This is because Knighthood is a call to service. Therefore, not only by words are they to carry out their duties, but by an outstanding lifestyle patterned according to the person of Christ. Since they occupy an enviable position in the life of the Church, they have to constantly bear in mind that to whom much has been given, even much more will be expected. Therefore, like the biblical astute steward, they are not to bury their talents but to use them for the greater glory of God (*ad Majorem ad gloriam*) and the salvation of souls (*Salus animarum*).

In light of the above, this paper is aimed at looking closely at Knighthood in the Church of Auchi and how it can provide the enabling

opportunity and forum for our young men and women to be part of the New Evangelization in our time and age in the diocese.

### **The Nature of the Church**

The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council are aware that the Church is theandric (i.e. divine and human), instead of defining the Church, they rather described the Church through some images drawn from the Scriptures. In the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* LG (1964), the members described the Church as Sheepfold of Christ (John 10:1-10); the flock of God with Christ as Shepherd (Ezek 34: 1ff; John 10:11-15); God's field (Rom 11, 16-22); God's building (1 Cor 3,9); God's household (1 Tim 3,15); Temple (1 Pet 2,5); bride (Rev 19,7; 21, 2; 22,17) and finally as the sacrament of salvation, people of God and communion.<sup>1</sup> However, John Paul II (1983) was to affirm clearly that, "Foremost among the elements which express the true and authentic image of the Church are the teachings whereby the Church is presented as the People of God and its hierarchical authority as service and further teaching which portrays the Church as a communion...."<sup>2</sup>

The Church as People of God implies common lineage and consanguinity emerging from the cross and side of Christ and the waters of baptism. This image is used in both the description of the diocesan family (canon 369; 837,1); the parish (canon 515) and extends to the validly baptized or received persons into or in full communion with the Church (canons 11; 205; LG 12) and solicitude, those outside the faith or in partial communion with the Church<sup>3</sup>. The Church as Communion emphasises the image of an organic bond and demands unity which is sealed by the Eucharist. This later image of communion helps us in discerning the full membership of the Church; engenders spiritual solidarity in both the personal, structural and administrative relationships, and finally, the even participation and co-responsibility of all members within the rank and file of the Church, especially concerning the apostolate. This communion is needed for full membership in the Church (canon 205), for office in the Church (can

149) and assumption and exercise of offices (canons 380; 833; 675), for the participation of the laity in the Church Councils (canon 512), for the operation and removal of Pastors (canons 529, 1741), and so on.

### **The Composition and Indispensability of the Laity in the Church**

This Church as both people of God and communion is composed of clerics, religious and laity. The clerics are the Bishops, Priests and Deacons, while the Religious are drawn from both the clergy and the laity (can 207) but marked with a unique identity of vows or promises of evangelical counsels of obedience, poverty and chastity<sup>4</sup>, and the laity are those who are not clerics<sup>5</sup>. The lay members of the Church constitute about 99% of those that make up the Church. As already indicated above, the laity is those who are not clerics.<sup>6</sup>

In the Church, through the sacrament of baptism, they enjoy the status as physical persons (can 96), members of the people of God (canon 204), equal in dignity (canon 208), with rights and privileges to all other members (canons 96; 208-223) and specific to their state (canons 224-231). In the decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, (AA) the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council (1964) reiterated that “the Christian vocation is the vocation to the apostolate,”<sup>7</sup> and as such the lay members through baptism are configured to Christ, share in the common priesthood of all the baptised and given the responsibility to participate in their way and according to their condition and office in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ and mission of the Church (canon 204, 208, 759; 774; AA 10). Just as Pope Pius XII, in his address to the Second World Congress of the lay Apostolate observed: “It would be a misunderstanding of the nature of the Church and her social character to distinguish in her, a purely active element, the ecclesiastical authorities and on the other hand a purely passive element, the laity”<sup>8</sup>. It is, therefore, out of place to consider the laity as visitors to the Church or for the laity to consider the Church as *Uka Fada* (i.e. Church of the Clergy).

All members, clergy, religious and laity are called to the apostolate and the vineyard of the Lord although at different times and

for different functions but for one unique prize, eternal life and union with God. On this basis, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council were explicit in their words in various places on the indispensability of the Laity and their apostolate in the Church and beyond viz: “Indeed, the Church can never be without the lay apostolate; it is something that derives from the layman’s very vocation as a Christian.”<sup>9</sup> And emphatically, the Church is not truly established and does not fully live, nor is it a perfect sign of Christ unless there is a genuine laity existing and working alongside the hierarchy. The gospel cannot become deeply rooted in the mentality, life and work of a people without the active presence of lay people. Therefore, from the foundation of the Church, very special care must be taken to form a mature Christian Laity. The lay faithful belong fully both to the people of God and civil society.<sup>10</sup> The lay members of the Church are therefore citizens of the Church and Society. They are open to the apostolate of the Church and her mission both as individuals and within their groups.<sup>11</sup> The laity operates both individually and in Group Apostolate. Knights are among the lay faithful of the Church. Who is a Knight?

## **Knighthood**

The desire for honours is prevalent in human societies and also in the Church. Knighthood is of ancient origin. It is always a reward for both civil and military services. It is within the context of recognition for distinguished services and as a means of rewarding loyalty rendered that the Catholic Church considered it expedient to appropriate within the ecclesiastical circle what was of secular origin. In the Church, we have Knights of Papal and diocesan/local status. They are lay members who are outstanding in their defence of faith and the Church. Hence, the knights enjoy enormous respect in both the Church and civil communities.

The dress and investiture of the knight are very beautiful, symbolic and resplendent but above this physical outlook, they are called to, “put on the whole armour of God, that in the evil day, you may resist and stand your ground, making use of all your weapons.

Take truth as your belt, justice as your breastplate, and zeal as your shoes to propagate the Gospel of peace. Always hold in your hand the shield of faith to repel the flaming arrows of the devil. Finally, use the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, that is, the Word of God. Pray at all times as the Spirit inspires you. Keep watch, together with sustained prayer and supplication for all the brothers” (Eph 6: 13-18).

This shows that they have become an extraordinary group among the laity, who because of their zeal for the Lord and their outstanding contribution to Christian witness were raised to the noble status as Knights. Many of you, if not all, are the foundation members and resource persons for the emergence of both Catholic Christianity in their community and have contributed much to the growth of the Church and the society at large and Knighthood in the Church, both at the Regional and National levels.

This is true when we take cognizance of the fact that the first recipients of Papal Knighthood, the establishment of both the Knighthood of St Mulumba (KSM) in 1953 and Knighthood of St John’s International (KSJ) in 1976 were through the committed involvement of lay persons from the Eastern region. The inaugural ceremonies for the above-named two orders were also performed in the same region. For KSM, it took place at Owerri on June 14, 1953, through the late Bishop Joseph Whelan of Owerri, while for KSJ it was on Pentecost Sunday, June 6, 1976, at Enugu through Late Bishop G. M. P. Okoye, CSSp.

### **The Identity and Typology of Knighthood in the Church - History**

“In the heart of every man and woman of all ages, cultures and societies, there is a genuine craving for honour, dignity and respect. This for the most time is translated into names and titles. In many societies there exist titles of roles and functions. There are also titles of honours or decorations”. In Nigeria, especially in Etsako, we see these trends, cravings and syndrome for traditional titles like; Royal

Highness with their peculiar designations, Chiefs with different title names, Okphe Ukpi, Oduevbo; and ecclesial titles of honours, awards, recognitions that ensure social esteem and prestige.

Knighthood is not of ecclesiastical origin, but of secular medieval feudal society as seen in its etymology: “The word Knight in English is equivalent to French Chevalier or German Ritter, which is a title of honour, bestowed for variety of services, but originally in the European Middle Ages a formally professed cavalryman.”<sup>12</sup> According to Webster’s Encyclopaedia Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language (1989), a knight is “a mounted soldier serving under a feudal superior”; “a man usually of noble birth”; “a man upon whom a certain non-hereditary dignity corresponding to that of the medieval knight is conferred”<sup>13</sup>. With the above meaning, The New Webster’s Dictionary of the English Language (1995) added that a knight is “a man given the rank of knighthood by the British Monarch in recognition of merit”<sup>14</sup>, esp. in public service. He has the titles ‘Sir,’ his wife having the title of ‘Lady’.

It is within the context of recognition for distinguished services and as a means of rewarding loyalty rendered that the Catholic Church considered it expedient to appropriate within the ecclesiastical circle what was of secular origin. In the Church, the Holy See grants Papal Honours to deserving members of the Church, i.e. the Clergy, Religious and Laity. These honours include for instance for secular priests: Chaplain to His Holiness, Prelate of Honour to His Holiness, Apostolic Protonotary Supernumerary and so forth; for Religious Men and Women: Benemerenti Medal, Cross Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice; and for Lay Persons: Plain Order (Collar Chain, Grand Cross), Order of St Gregory the Great (Grand Cross, Commander with Plaque, Commander, Knighthood), Order of St Sylvester (Grand Cross, Commander with Plaque, Commander, Knighthood), Benemerenti medal and cross Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice etc.

In essence, Knights are principally Christians and adult male members of the Church. They belong to the lay members of the Christian faithful. They enjoy this status because of baptism, corroborates thus: Born into the Church not by natural generation, by

status or desire but by the only divinely established means of this spiritual birth namely baptism (canon 96). It is that sacrament that confers on the baptized his ecclesiastical personality, a subject of ecclesial rights and duties. Possession of these rights and duties is however in degrees. By Baptism, the knights are identified as physical persons (canon. 96) and members of the people of God (canon 204) and enjoy fundamental equality in the Church (canon 208) and with their marriage partners (canon 1135). Knights occupy privileged positions in the Church and due to their status in the Church, they are also recognised in traditional and civil settings.

**Papal awards of knighthood:** This belongs to those coveted honours given to the lay members of Christ's faithful people. It is granted directly by Pope himself out of his own will (*motu proprio*), or at the request of the Diocesan Bishop or Vicar Generals.

## 1. The Identity of Knights in the Church

With the authority of the Bishop who are ordinaries in law (canon 134, 479). The request or petition should be accompanied by the curriculum vitae of the candidate (age, profession, family and social situation, and an accurate description of the award requested and those earlier received from the Holy See) and sent to the Apostolic Nunciature for the necessary '*nihil obstat*'. This will be sent to the Dicastery (Congregation for the Evangelization of People) whose duty it is to transmit the information to the Secretariat of State for final approval. To be qualified for presentation for the award especially of Papal Knighthood, one should have "demonstrated the highest ideals of the Christian faith by exemplary living in their families and various endeavours. In other words, they are to be practical Catholics". A knight should be marked by the love of God and the Church and one who is zealous and committed in fidelity to the Church and Christian witness.

For Cardinal Agostino, a knight is "a man who intends to place himself at the service of a noble and difficult cause, a pure and arduous

ideal; fighting evil, promoting good, defending the weak and the oppressed against injustice. Becoming a Knight does not merely mean receiving the title of honour, even though it is well deserved, it presupposes a solemn commitment.”<sup>15</sup> The identity of the Catholic Knight is further seen in the tribute of Francis Cardinal Arinze, to Mr William Onuchukwu the very first group of Papal Knights in Nigeria who he described as “a faithful father of the family, lover of his fellow man, truly believing Christian, a sign of perseverance amid trials, a man of dignity in good times and in bad, in poverty and riches.”

In ancient times especially for persons directly involved in the defence of the Holy land from Islamic invasion, we have Knights of Malta or Knights of Hospitallers Order of St John of Jerusalem and the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem. There are some of those ancient Knighthoods that still exist and some that do not exist any longer. We can distinguish between Pontifical and Diocesan Orders of Knights and awards. The latter may have both national and international characters and outreach. Concerning the first group, we can distinguish two forms of Papal awards, viz: (a) Pontifical Order of Papal Knighthood with different titles: The Supreme Order of Christ, The Order of the Golden Spur, The Order of Pius IX, The Order of St Gregory the Great, The Order of St Sylvester (b) Award of Papal Medalist and other Papal Decorations: Pro-Ecclesia et Pontifice, Benemerenti, The Golden Rose, Gentleman of His Holiness, The Stewards of St Peter, The Pontifical Academician and The Lay Assistant to the Throne. And for the Second Group, we have the Knights of the Order of St Columbus; Knights of the Order of St Mulumba, Knights of the Ancient and Noble Order of St John’s International and Knights of St Christopher. But in recent times, the most common ones especially in the Nigerian Church are as follows:

## **2. Typology of Knights in the Nigerian Church**

### **2.1. Papal Knighthood**

#### **2.1.1. Papal Knights of the Order St Gregory**

The Papal Knights of the Order of St Gregory was founded by Pope Gregory XVI on September 1, 1831, with two divisions of civil and military classes. It was instituted to honour Pope St Gregory the Great and also to reward men of outstanding fidelity to both the Holy See and the Prima Sedes (first See/Supreme Pontiff) and indeed those persons marked by the fame of their virtue, their social standing, their brilliant accomplishment, their administrative ability and enjoy very good esteem among honest people (Bull, 1982). It was originally arranged into four classes but later on May 30, 1834, reduced to three viz: The Knights of the Great Cross, Knights by Commendation and Simple Knights. They have unique insignia/regalia.

#### **2.1.2. The Papal Knights of the Order of St Sylvester**

The Papal Knights of the Order of St Sylvester was founded by same Pope Gregory XVI on October 31, 1841, to replace the ancient Order of the Golden Spur. Just like Knights of St Gregory, it is in three Classes with unique insignia/regalia. Nigerians witnessed the first presence of Papal Knights in 1956 of William Onuchukwu, Paul Anaekwe and Joseph Odogwu.

### **2.2. Other Knighthood Orders in the Church**

#### **2.2.1. The Order of the Knights of St Mulumba**

The Order of the Knights of St Mulumba is linked with Rev Fr Anselm Abraham Ojefua (1912-1988), a Nigerian priest and monk who founded the order and served as the first Supreme knight of the Order. With his experience of the services rendered by Knights of St Columbus that existed since October 1881 in America (through the

agency of Fr Michael J. McKinney), he decided on his return to Nigeria to form a similar institution to help lay Catholics defend and practice their faith with outstanding solidarity and confraternity. Fr, Ojefua writes,

“This great priest discovered to his dismay that great numbers of Catholics drifted away from their faith. The reasons are not far-fetched, secret cults or societies like freemason, Amoc, Ogboni, and lodge, among others, were being used against them in politics, commerce and industry,”<sup>16</sup> The Order was named after Matthias Kalemba Mulumba who with many others (many of them youths) suffered martyrdom in Uganda during the time of King Mwanga. Mulumba was outstanding in his courage, zeal and steadfastness to Christian principles and sexual morality. They suffered martyrdom and were canonized as the first African martyrs by Pope Paul VI in 1964. Thus, with the blessings and approval of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria in 1953, the Order was formally inaugurated at Owerri on June 14, 1953, by Bishop Joseph Whelan with 23 foundation members among them was Dr George Akabogu.

### **2.2.2. The Ancient and Noble Order of St John International**

The Ancient and Noble Order of St John’s International was founded in 1048 at Naples in Italy. It emerged in New York, USA in 1886. It made inroads into Nigeria through the committed effort of Mr Kevin N. O. Ejiogu who entered the Order in 1961 while domiciled in Monrovia, Liberia. He introduced it in Nigeria in 1976 after preliminary blessings and approval from the then Bishop of Enugu, Rt Rev G. M. P. Okoye, CSSp. The formal inauguration took place at Enugu on Pentecost Sunday, June 6, 1976, with 25 foundation members.<sup>17</sup>

### **2.2.3. Knighthood Order of St Paul**

This knighthood Order began in February 1990, when the then Bishop of the Diocese of Benin City, Bishop Patrick E. Ekpu, now Archbishop

Emeritus of the Archdiocese of Benin City, invited a hundred and twenty men and women from across the length and breadth of the diocese to the Chancery. The original idea was for successful candidates to be admitted into the Knights of St Peter Claver/Ladies Auxiliaries of the USA, who were to be invited into the diocese to establish a branch of their order outside the United States of America. Since that did not materialise; after due consultation and clearance from the Vatican, Rome, the then Bishop Patrick E. Ekpu promulgated the decree establishing the Order of St Paul, to tap the great treasury of talents and skills, enthusiasm and dedication of eager members of the lay faithful for more active participation in the mission of the Church. The first intake of 34 members, made up of 18 Knights and 16 Knighted Ladies were formally admitted into the Order on Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> June, 1991, during the Solemnity of Corpus Christi during a concelebrated Mass at Holy Cross Cathedral Benin City presided over by the founder himself.<sup>18</sup>

## **The Rights and Challenges of Catholic Knights**

### **1. The Rights of Knights in the Church**

Rights are generally entitlements due to a person which he can demand. It can be natural (deriving from the very nature of the person as a human being); Legal (attributed to the person based on legislation) and Acquired (belonging to the individual on completion of acts that confer a title). Our concern will be with legal rights.

Rights, Responsibilities and obligations are considered two sides of the same coin. “The exercise of rights in the Church is regulated by the common good of the Church, the rights of others and the obligations to others”. (canon 223, § 1). The rights of the Knights are drawn from the general presentations of the bill of rights specified in the new Code of canon law (canon 208-222); the Right to equality (canon 208); Right to means of holiness and spiritual assistance (canon 210; 213; 276, §2, 2<sup>o</sup>; LG 39, 33); Right to spread divine message of salvation (canon 211; 204); Right to freely establish and direct

associations (canon 215; 278) or initiate apostolic actions (canon 216); Right to Christian education (canon 217; 279) and freedom to research (canon 218; GE 10; GS 62); Right to petition (canon 212, §2 & 3) and to due process (canon 221); Right to good reputation and privacy (canon 220; LG 28); and finally Right to immunity from any kind of coercion in choosing a state of life (canon 219; 214; 748, §2; GS 26, 29).

## **2. The Challenges of Knights in the Church:**

**2.1. The Faith Encumbrances:** We still hear that some are still tied to traditional religious options that are antithetical by having protective medicines, belonging to secret societies and cults, going to fortune tellers, women marrying women, prosecuting cases to idols, participating in traditional festivals and practices contrary to the Christian faith, engaging in ritual purifications by the individual concerned or under the directive or instigation of others or some perform such rites on behalf of the member of the family whether with his or her consent or not and sending food to idols to pacify or in compliance with ancient directives, or believing that someone real or imagined has tied their fortunes and successes etc. The prophetic message especially that of the prophet Jeremiah, is hard on those who choose other deities instead of the Almighty and Powerful Lord. Shun the worship of idols (1 Cor 10:14), so St Paul told the people of Corinth. Knights are called to a life of complete dependence and worship of the living and true God.

**2.2. The Church exists to proclaim the Gospel in season and out of season** (2 Tim 4:1). Knights are challenged to speak against unjust social order and not be guilty of conspiracy of silence. “One cannot compromise principles or be silent about the injustices, without risking being branded as an accomplice in them”. We are currently challenged to preach the gospel in the context of our culture. What understanding do we give to our culture? What understanding do we give to our

cultures? The missionary documents especially the fathers of the Second Vatican Council emphasize dialogue between the gospel and culture of our people in these words:

By her activity, whatever good is found sown in the hearts and minds of men, or in the rites and cultures proper to various peoples, is not only saved from destruction but is also healed, ennobled and brought to perfection, for the glory of God, the confusion of devil and the happiness of men....<sup>19</sup>

**2.3. Experience of spiritual attacks on the Christians, poisoning and evil wishes:** The life they are called to embrace is a difficult one which is often associated with envy and jealousy, prayer is the only weapon before us within our environment crowded with conflicts between principalities and powers. It is the divine armour that endows us with the required resources to hold our ground and resist negative influences on our calling to authentic Christian lives (Eph 6:12). The life of Jesus and the Apostles were always in prayer. Jesus taught the disciples “Our Father” (Matt 6: 7- 14; Luke 11:1-4; Mark 11:25-26) and invites us to pray always (Luke 18:1) to ask and it shall be given unto us (Matt 7:7; Mark 11: 24).

The Church has offered us essential means to reach our God in prayer. The primary prayer and means of worship remain; the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and the adoration of the Most Holy and Blessed Eucharist. Others include The Rosary, the Stations of the Cross, Private and Public Devotions and of course our Prayer meetings in most religious and pious societies.

**2.4. Challenges of Love in the Church and Family:** They have no option but to love the Church and the visible ecclesiastical authority. This is a noble challenge since you were selected because of your dedication and obedience to church affairs and welfare. Jesus Christ has assured us of the continued existence of the Church amid many

tribulations through his prayer of Peter (Matt 16:16-20). There is no need for signs of separation and disunity among one another. The Eucharist, which we receive, invites us to show the love with which Christ loved us even unto death. Let us not defile the Eucharist by leading scandalous and sacrilegious lives and thus behaving amid our brothers and sisters be it within the same faith, the same family, kindred, village, town and other Churches. We should endeavour to be at peace with ourselves, our brothers and our sisters. “Tear your heart and not your garments,” says Prophet Joel (2:13). Live in peace with one another. The Psalmist (132:1) exclaim “How good and how pleasant it is, when brothers live in unity;” and Ben Sirach (25:1) added: “There are three things my soul delights in and which are delightful to God and men: concord between brothers, the friendship between neighbours and a wife and a husband who live happily together.”

**2.5. Quest for Social Justice:** Finally, we are currently faced with the realities of social injustice and the need for social transformation. But as Kukah (2002) remarked very truly, It is very difficult now to encourage Nigerians about the values of democracy. The causes of our frustrations are many: deceit of the political class, betrayal by the military, deepening persistence of poverty, display of greed and conspicuous consumption etc. “Christ did not remain indifferent in the face of the vast and demanding imperatives of morality nor could the Church. In the spirit of the Church, which is the spirit of Christ, and relying upon her ample and solid doctrine, the Knights are called to intervene in social and political matters on behalf of the Church.”<sup>20</sup>

It is both natural, a right and a duty for the Church to be involved in social transformation as Pope Paul VI (1971) exhorts, “action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appears to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel or in other words of the Church’s mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.”<sup>21</sup> The jurisdiction of the laity extends to both the Church and the social milieu. This is the position of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, the New Code of Canon Law and the

articulated exhortation to the Catholic Laity of Nigeria by the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II in 1982: Having been called by Christ Himself, you are his chosen partners in evangelization. As lay people you know that your special apostolate is to bring Christian principles to bear upon the temporal order, that is to bring the spirit of Christ into such spheres of life as marriage and family, trade and commerce, the arts and the professions, politics and government, culture and national and international spheres.<sup>22</sup>

There is also pressure on them from a tradition to marry more wives, coupled with the issue of frequent contributions for various reasons that may be a hindrance to some who may be having financial setbacks at a certain time and as such may not have the financial muscles to settle dues accruing to them. There are many other challenges confronting Knights in the Church regularly.

In all these areas, lay people must play their distinctive roles. In the larger society, knights are called to be the leaven for Christ, to witness to Christ in the school, in the government office, in the town development union, in age grade meetings, in the university, in the market, in the trade union, in politics and everywhere. Hence the CBCN exhorts:

In this critical period of our history, we exhort all our followers to rededicate themselves to the principles of our Catholic faith and morals. We must all take on the challenge of personal holiness, which must show itself in positive active involvement in the world around us. Jesus calls each of us to be a light in the darkness, salt of the earth and a leaven of goodness in our corrupt society.<sup>23</sup>

### **The Functions of Knights Today**

1. The heartbeat of the knighthood is service: they are to use their wealth to serve the poor, their influence to raise charity for the

less privileged and other units which encompass, the Church, the Family, the Community and the youth.

2. They are to contribute to the support of their pastors: Since as Papal knights, they are called to lead men and women among the laity, assist your pastors in carrying out the work of evangelization within and outside the parish, catechesis, teach and instruct the faithful in sound faith and doctrine and assisting the priest with relevant information and services, thus they are to become good collaborators with their pastors.
3. They are called to be Pro-Family, Pro-Life and to become a leaven in the world using their positions to sanctify the temporal order and to help people come closer to God in whatever vocation of life they find themselves
4. The Knights could be heads of various committees in the parish or the dioceses, helping in various pious groups, like devotion to our Mother Mary and major commissions such as Finance, land, JDPC etc., seeking the growth and development of all.
5. The knights are called to a Holy life to be examples worthy of emulation to the Christian fold.

### **Catholic Knighthood and Youth Involvement in Evangelization in Auchi Diocese**

The world in which we live is being rocked by crises of various kinds. Young people are open to corruption, diseases, cultism, alcoholism, sexual perversion, unemployment, drugs, etc., in their search for meaning, and end up with such substitutes which lead them ultimately to despair rather than to happiness.”<sup>24</sup>

Many youths are involved in drug addiction, political thuggery, cultism/demonism, unemployment/educational admissions and fallen

standards, sexual immorality (premarital sex, teenage pregnancy, prostitution, trafficking for the sex trade, abortion, venereal diseases, HIV/AIDS, Covid pandemic, trial marriage, sexual abuse, immodest dressing, pornography, homosexuality, masturbation etc), smuggling, drunkenness, exam malpractices, armed robbery, faking and forgery (419 syndrome/ scheme), religious riot (jihad), foreign visa Madness, Quick wealth syndrome, alienation from one's root, family, emotional disorder, depression, ruined future and suicide, Pentecostalism, Practical Atheism, Alienation from their traditional roots, etc.<sup>25</sup>

To have the audacity and courage to be involved in these aforementioned crimes that are prevalent in Nigerian society, Afemhailand is not an exception in this regard, many young people go into cultic groups of all kinds, that pervade the various villages and towns that constitute what is now known as Diocese of Auchi today. These groups assure them of security, protection, spiritual strength, wealth, prosperity, good health of mind and body, employment opportunities, and exalted positions within and outside these groups.

These promised incentives by these cultic groups have lured many young people into varied cultic groups domiciled in Afemhailand. This trend has remained unabated to date. Since it has been on the rise among the youths, the Church has a divine duty to stem the tide to avoid calamitous and devastating effects on the people that make up the diocese of Auchi. One of the ways of doing this is to enlighten all Christ's faithful, especially the youths on the importance of using their God-given talents, treasures and time for spreading the good news in all the nooks and crannies of this particular Church. They should be reminded that this is paramount, not just because of public praise and recognition, but that through it, the Church grows. This attitude of giving for the growth of the Church can better be enhanced by being members of the various knighthood in the Church, who on their own ensure the growth of the Church by protecting her and contributing to her growth in their different orders. It is also noteworthy that profundity, tenacity and consistency in this act of giving for the growth of God's kingdom can also be rewarded with the award of Papal medals and Knighthood of the various orders.

It is also given, that generosity and availability in giving to the Church are a means of evangelization and salvation.<sup>26</sup> Some go for the mission by going, while others go for the mission by giving to the work of the mission. In the words of Roderick Davis, “Love is the root of the mission while the sacrifice of anything is the fruit of the mission.”<sup>27</sup> On the strength of the above dictum, our youths should redirect their energies to becoming members of the various knighthood orders in the Church and other lay apostolate groups, which help to build and edify the Church, rather than making themselves available for occult groups that are dangerous and inimical to their well-being and salvation.

This paper, therefore, invites parents (husbands and wives; fathers and mothers) to love and take care of one another and their young ones so as not to be led astray by the devil and all his agents in destroying our land and the world at large. This consciousness of becoming Knights and working as a means of holiness, salvation and being rewarded by the body of Christ here on earth- the Church should be inculcated and promoted among our youths to enhance the work of the mission and evangelisation among them to bring salvation to the young and the children to whom Christ averred that the kingdom of God belongs.

Lay faithful that are already knights need to be conscious of the lure of sin at all times especially the ones of the four evils of idolatry, occultism, polygamy, and the issue of incessant periodic monetary dues and contributions. These evils tend to deter many young couples from becoming Knights and Ladies. On various occasions, the author has in the past made several attempts at encouraging and sponsoring younger couples at becoming knights, but most times they point to these four evils which tend to portray some knights as living a life of double standards. The discipline of avoiding and watching the occasions of these multiple evils will go a long way in encouraging young couples to contribute to the onerous task of evangelisation and witnessing through the Knighthood Orders.

## Conclusion

All of us Christians are given the mandate to preach the Gospel and to witness to our faith amid these evil days and times. The Lord himself enjoins us to “Go and preach” to all peoples and all creatures (Matt 28:18-19; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:14; Acts 1:8; 9:13; 28:28; John 20:17). St Paul Continued: I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths. (Cf.1Tim.4; 2)

Finally, in all, Christ’s faithful should try to serve God and the human person in their various capacities, they have been given the mandate to be the voice of the voiceless, God’s instrument of peace in a broken world, a beacon of hope and joy to the downtrodden, a light amidst the darkness of the world and salt amidst the insipidity of hopelessness that has often led the human person to despair. The youths should be enlightened and conscientised to be part of this crusade for a more robust and active knighthood that will bring about vitality, vibrancy, renewal and accelerated growth in the Church – the spouse of Christ here on earth for the salvation of all, for Christ and his Kingdom.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Vatican Council II, 1964: *Lumen Gentium* 6, 9, 1, 7, 13, 48.

<sup>2</sup> Vatican II Council, *Lumen Gentium* 2.

<sup>3</sup> Canons 383; 771; 755; 844; 529; LG 13-17.

<sup>4</sup> John Paul II, 1983: canons 573-575; 598-602; 607; 673)

<sup>5</sup> Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium* 31.

<sup>6</sup> *Lumen Gentium* 31; canon 207.

<sup>7</sup>Decree on the Apostolate of the Lay People, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (AA) August 9, 2012, no.2.

<sup>8</sup>Pope Pius XII, “Guiding Principles of Lay Apostolate,” Address of His Holiness to the Second World Congress of the Lay Apostolate, October. 5, 1957.

<sup>9</sup>Decree on the Apostolate of the Lay People, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (AA) August 9, 2012, no.1.

<sup>10</sup>*Ad Gentes* 21.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. AA 15-22.

<sup>12</sup>Knights in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/knight-cavalryman> accessed on the 6th January, 2023

<sup>13</sup>Knight, *Collins English Dictionary*, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/knight> accessed on the 6th January, 2023.

<sup>14</sup>Knighthood, Cf. *New Webster Dictionary of English Language*, <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/awards-and-accreditation/content/103372>, accessed 6th January, 2023.

<sup>15</sup>Cardinal Agostino, Knights, file:///C:/Users/USER/Downloads/66315-Article%20Text-133423-1-10-20110517%20(3).pdf. Accessed 6<sup>th</sup> January, 2022.

<sup>16</sup>Cf. Romanus Unegbu, *Knighthood in Nigeria: Brief History of Christian Knighthood with guiding Words of Wisdom and Prayer*, (Enugu: Nwotite Obioma Press, 2002)

<sup>17</sup>Cf. Romanus Unegbu, *Knighthood in Nigeria: Brief History of Christian Knighthood with guiding Words of Wisdom and Prayer.....*

<sup>18</sup>I got this historical background from *Knighthood Order of St Paul, Members Directory*, published by the Knighthood Order of St Paul.

<sup>19</sup>Vatican II, 1964: LG 17, see also SC 37.

<sup>20</sup>Mathew Hassan Kukah, *Religion, Politics and Power in Northern Nigeria*, (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd, 1993), 260.

<sup>21</sup>Pope Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens*, May 14,1971, No.6.

<sup>22</sup>Gabriel A. Ojo, *Twenty Five Years of Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria*, (Abuja: Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria, 1998), 60.

<sup>23</sup>Peter Schineller, S.J. (Ed.), *The Voice of the Voiceless: Pastoral Letters and Communique of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria, 1960-2002*. (Ibadan: Daily Graphics Nigeria, 2002), 284.

<sup>24</sup> Anthony B. Chiegboka & Elizabeth O. Ezenweke, ‘The Identity, Rights and Challenges of Catholic Knights in the Church’ file:///C:/Users/USER/Downloads/66315-Article%20Text-133423-1-10-20110517.pdf accessed on the 7<sup>th</sup> January, 2023.

<sup>25</sup> Anthony B. Chiegboka & Elizabeth O. Ezenweke, “The Identity, Rights and Challenges of Catholic Knights in the Church.....”

<sup>26</sup>Cf. Luke 6:38, 2Cor. 9:6-9.

<sup>27</sup>Compilation by Howard Cubertson at Open Education Resource Site, <http://www.snu.edu> accessed on the 7<sup>th</sup> of January 2022.