

**PHILOSOPHY PROPOSING PASTORAL AVAILABILITY AS PANACEA TO THE
PROBLEM OF THE CRISIS OF FAITH IN NIGERIA**

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Abstract

Anyone who understands the history of religion in Nigeria will agree that Christianity in the country is on a crossroad. For instance, in the face of a debilitating economic hardship, there are many in the Church who feels that the clergy are just not only not living up to their prophetic callings but are colluding with corrupt politicians to impoverish the poor. Those who do not go as far as accusing the clergy of collusion still believe they are not doing enough to use their spiritual mandate to effect positive changes in the Nigerian leadership. The consequences is that some Christians while still in the Church are frustrated with the way things are going and may eventually leave the Church, while others, especially young people, who initially left the orthodox churches for Pentecostalism are now turning to paganism for succour. To forestall this state of affair, help the Church regain her past reputation and ensure the salvation of souls many well-meaning Christians have been diagnosing the situation and offering solutions to the problem. So far none of these efforts have stopped the disenchantment with the Church and mass exodus of especially young people from Christianity. This study identifies lack of pastoral availability as the root of the problem and recommends adequate formation in pastoral availability as panacea to the problem.

Introduction

The body of Christ in Nigeria is going through a phase of unprecedented crisis and predictions are that things are not going to get better any time soon (Ehusani, 2012). The old in the Church are increasingly frustrated with the way things are going. They are especially lamenting the moral decay and greed among both members of the laity and the clergy and remember with nostalgia the good old days of the missionaries when pastors are not just available to their flocks but are held to high esteem even among non-Christians because of their commitments and irreproachable moral probity. The young who initially left the orthodox churches in droves to join the Pentecostals in search of greener pastures are also fed up with a system they now accuse as being corrupt, rigged and a syndicate used by very selfish and self-seeking 'men of God' to defraud their brainwashed followers. This last point is corroborated by recent happenings where some youths under the leadership of Daddy Freeze have been mounting relentless social media assault on tithing, criticizing especially the idea that one would be poor if one does not pay one's tithes (Pulse.ng, 2017).

Nonetheless, these young people, fed up with the Pentecostals are not returning to the orthodox churches as that would have been some good news. The worst is that they are fundamentally losing interest in Christianity and returning to the idolatry their ancestors abandoned years ago. Are they to be blamed? The gospel of consumerisms which led them to

Pentecostalism, where they were promised an outright paradise on earth if only they would pay their tithes has turned out to be a hoax, and the orthodox churches are not offering them anything better.

To have a whole generation of young people lose interest in Christianity is truly a sign of gloomy days ahead and should be a source of acute worry for any true Christian. Unfortunately, many Christians, particularly the ‘mega pastors’ appear oblivion of these. Many are busy either flying or canvassing for tithes to buy their own private jets. This is not to say that there are no serious minded Christians who are aware and disturbed that things are no longer at ease with Christianity in Nigeria. These Christians who are ready to “stand in the gap”, as George Ehusani (2002, 3) describes them, are making serious efforts both spiritually and otherwise to decipher the causes and ways of salvaging this crisis of faith.

This study is these researchers’ contribution towards arresting the problem. The work proposes that the state of the church in Nigeria today is similar to the experience of the children of Israel when God through the Prophet Jeremiah promised them shepherds (Jer. 3: 15). God does not mean to say that Israel has no shepherds but indicates that these shepherds have failed in their responsibilities and therefore would be replaced with more responsible shepherds. The text also underscores two things. Firstly, the indispensable roles of shepherds in divine-human relationship and secondly, that effectiveness or its lack in religion is determined by the commitment of religious leaders.

This study assumes that the crisis of faith among Christians in Nigeria is the result of lack of commitment and pastoral availability by those entrusted with the care of souls. It will thus argue that proper pastoral formation will assist the church to navigate through the present crisis.

Clarification of Concepts

Pastoral Availability

Pastoral availability is a compound term comprising of, “pastor” and “availability”. Thus, understanding the concept would require the analysis of the two words that made up the concept. Etymologically, according to Oxford Advance Learners Dictionary, the word pastor derives from the Latin noun *pastor* which means shepherd. Shepherd itself is derived from another Latin verb, *pascere* – “to lead to pasture, set to grazing, cause to eat” (Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary Online). Consequently, the journey of the word into the English Language and its present usage is rooted in the Biblical metaphor of shepherding.

The Hebrew Bible uses the Hebrew word רעה (*ro'eh*), which can be used both as a noun and as a verb. As a noun, it means “shepherd”, and as a verb it is rendered as “to tend a flock” ([www. Blueletterbible.org](http://www.Blueletterbible.org)). It occurs 173 times in 144 Old Testament verses and relates to the literal feeding of sheep, as in Genesis 29:7. In Jeremiah 23:4, both meanings are used (*ro'im* is used for “shepherds” and *yir'um* for “shall feed them”). “And I will set up

shepherds over them which shall feed them: and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall they be lacking, says the LORD.”

English translations of the New Testament usually render the Greek noun ποιμήν (*poimēn*) as “shepherd” and the Greek verb ποιμαίνω (*poimainō*) as “feed”. The two words occur a total of 29 times in the New Testament, most frequently referring to Jesus. For example, Jesus called himself the “Good Shepherd” in John 10:11. The same words in the familiar Christmas story (Luke 2) refer to literal shepherds. From a Christian context therefore, a pastor is an ordained minister or a spiritual leader who has the care or who is in charge of a congregation. Different Christian denominations use different names for their pastors but linguistically these renditions refer to the same thing, a church leader. Bishops of various Christian denominations often bear a formal crosier in the form of a stylized shepherd’s crook as a symbol of their pastoral/shepherding functions.

Availability on the other hand is an English word that is used to denote possibility, location and presence. Thus, to say that someone or something is available is to say that it is possible to reach the person or thing or that the person or thing is present in a certain place at particular time. Cambridge Dictionary gives these two definitions of availability with examples:

The fact that something can be bought, used, or reached, or how much it can be: e.g., the ready availability of guns has contributed to the escalating violence. Abortion rates are high because the availability of contraceptives is limited. The fact of someone being free to speak on the phone, work, etc., e.g., I shall check the availability of my staff for that date (<https://cambridge.org/dictionary/english/availability>)

In a nut shell therefore, availability means the quality of a person or an item to be present or able to perform its function when required.

Consequently, pastoral availability is the ability of a pastor not only to be present but also to perform his function as a pastor whenever it is required. It means caring for the person in a holistic way, one which acknowledges the unique physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual needs of each individual. More importantly, it is an approach which always holds in mind man’s final end, which is, being in union with God. This notion of union with God as the final end of the human person finds more ancient roots in Christian tradition also, as in the *cor inquietum* of St Augustine of Hippo, (2003, 1), “for you have made us for yourself and our heart is restless until it rests in you.” Again, Augustine described a pastor’s job and availability in these immortal lines:

Disturbers are to be rebuked, the low-spirited to be encouraged, the infirm to be supported, objectors confuted, the treacherous guarded against, the unskilled taught, the lazy aroused, the contentious restrained, the haughty repressed, litigants pacified, the poor relieved, the oppressed liberated, the good approved, the evil borne with, and all are to be loved (2011, 271).

To this end, pastoral availability in this study refers to all the concerns and care that the pastor, as a shepherd of his flock and the sacrament of Christ's redemptive presence on earth gives to those entrusted to his care aimed towards an eternal union with God.

Crisis of Faith

Faith as a very complex term is hard to define. However, without going into the controversy the concept has generated over the years, the term is used here to represent a set of beliefs which inform individuals' actions and values. Seen this way, faith is what determines how people behave and see reality; what they consider important or unimportant. But faith as a believe system does not dangle aimlessly in the air; it is always faith in somebody or something. Rudolf Bultmann, in his famous distinction between religion, morality and faith endorsed this understanding. He explains that:

Although faith is connected with morality and religion, and is always at the same time a human attitude, it is nevertheless differentiated from them by its being a particular faith, faith in an up againstness, in something beyond humankind. Faith is not religiosity, not a disposition of the soul to devotion, gratitude, reverence, and awe of the world and of life as a whole. On the contrary, it understands the world and life in the light of a reality lying beyond them, of a power lying beyond them, which is their origin and their Creator – that is, God (Bultmann 1955, 98).

Therefore, by faith, this study means the attitude of a life dedicated to a set of beliefs and values where these are informed by trust in that God that is revealed in Jesus Christ. Such faith has its source and end as God in and through Jesus Christ.

What then is crisis of faith? According to Joseph Walsh, and John J. Kirvan, (Walsh & Kirvan, 1965, 9):

A crisis can be defined as a time of decision for or against something. It refers to that point in time when it is decided whether something is to be continued, be modified, or be terminated; a turning, a decisive moment.

If Christian faith is a dedication to a set of values informed by trust in God as revealed in Jesus Christ, and crisis refers to a moment one has to take a stand on what he believes, inferentially crisis of faith arises when this belief is called into question. Agreeing with this definition, R. Bultmann (1955, 80), explains that "A crisis of faith... arises when this supra-mundane reality [God] has been called into question." It can therefore be said that a crisis of faith for a Christian occurs when the person is confronted by a crucial opposition to his believe in God.

A subtle distinction should be made here between crisis of faith and persecution. Both are challenges to faith, but while persecution is external – coming from sources outside the

person – crisis of faith is internal. It directly wells up from the person experiencing the crisis and this is why crisis of faith has by far, more reaching implications than persecution. Someone can come out of persecution and have his faith intact but no one comes out of crisis of faith with his faith untouched.

To this end, crisis of faith usually take three forms, it can be experiential, logical or both experiential and logical. It is experiential when the crisis is as a result of an existential occurrence contradicting the faith in the life of an individual professing it. It is logical when the problem arises from the inability of the believer to reconcile some rational deposits in his belief system. For example, Martin Luther's crisis of faith was both logical and experiential because it arises from the realization of his inability to lead a holy life on his own and the Christian call to a life of personal holiness. He was able to reconcile this logical impasse through his doctrine of justification by faith.

Generally what could be gleaned from the following analysis is that crisis of faith is a moment of decision. The individual in this state is required to take a stand: grow in the faith, become lukewarm in the faith; abandon the faith altogether or become antagonistic to the faith. It is also important to note that crisis of faith does not only occur at the individual level. Although, it usually begins on personal level but it can as it often does, grow to a certain level where it becomes a local problem and affects the members of a faith community. It is used in the context of Nigeria as problem facing the local Church in Nigerian.

Evidence of Crisis of Faith in Nigerian

This section will try to establish the central claim of this study, namely, that there is a crisis of faith in Nigerian Christianity. To do this, the section will rely on the personal experience of this researcher and the works of other researchers who have carried out empirical and objective study on the state of the Church in Nigeria.

Chigozie Mba is one of the researchers who have carried out extensive empirical study on the problems facing Christianity in Nigeria. In an article where he documented the outcome of some of the works he did using the simple survey and dialogic methods, Mba presented what he called key evidence demonstrating that Nigerian Christianity was not only dwindling but was also passing through a phase crisis of faith. Since the experiences of these researcher and the investigations of other researchers (Aihiockhai, 2005) verify Mba's findings, the findings will be presented and discussed here as evidence.

The Many Christians who Fall Back into Idol Worship

The first evidence Mba used to support his claims that Christianity in Nigeria is passing through crisis is the massive number of Christians who have left the Church since the white missionaries left Nigerians. According to Mba (2015, 26) the missionaries through their inimitable commitment to the Gospel had established Christianity as the religion of the people, especially among the Igbo of Old Eastern Nigeria "where the new faith in no time

supplanted idol worshipping.” This on Mba’s account was made possible by two factors. The first factor was education. The missionaries who came with education worked hand-in-hand with the colonial administration such that at a point almost every educated Nigerian was Christian. The second factor was nomadic nature of Igbo people who took Christianity to wherever their industry took them. This helped to plant the Church to all the nook and cranny of the country.

However Mba (Ibid. 28) through the analysis of the massive data he assembled from all over Nigeria showed that the number of those who have lost their faith in Christianity and gone back into idol worship has steadily grown over the years, especially from the years after the Nigerian Civil War. He lamented that lack of proper documentations and the increased number of births among Christian faithful within the same period of time prevented this loss from being very visible to none careful observers.

Some Christians who Become Lukewarm

The first category of Christians discussed above left the Church completely and went back to what Mba (Ibid. 29) calls “the gods of the hills and caves worshiped by their ancestors.” This second category did not leave the Church but at the same time they are not in the Church. They are the people who come to church during the day and sneak out under the cover of darkness to visit *dibias* or native doctors. Mba explains that most people in this group are not in the Church because they have come to accept the teachings of the Church but because the Church has become so inextricably linked with their social life that they need the Church for social validation. Giving the opportunity they would gladly go back to idol worshipping like those in the first category but they lack the moral courage to do that. Mba claimed based on his findings that they number of Christians in this second category is overwhelming.

Anti-Christianity Especially Among the Youths

On this point, Mba observes a growing trend of anti-Christianity particularly among Nigerian youths on social media. He observes that this can be seen not just in the increasing number of celebrities and self-acclaimed bloggers who have made attacking not just Christian pastors who they accused of materialism but the whole of Christianity their hobby, but also in the massive number of followers who cheer and endorse them.

Mba is of the opinion that this anti-Christian attitude is indicative that Nigerian youths have grown from running after Christianity which they originally see as the panacea to the problem of poverty inflicted on the country by the misrule to seeing Christian leaders as collaborators to this misrule. Thus, these youths come to see attacking or supporting those who attack Christian leaders as a part of their liberation struggle.

Causes of the Crisis of Faith in the Church in Nigeria

A number of factors have been identified as the causes of the crisis of faith in the Nigerian Church, including: lack of enculturation by the missionaries, scandals by priests and the bad influence of Pentecostalism.

Lack of Following the Principles of Inculturation by the Missionaries

Many researchers (M. M. Ndagoso & M. McGann, 2005, 30) attribute the crisis of faith in Nigeria to the bad influence of Protestantism on Christianity in the country. However, a careful and objective assessment of the situation by these researchers reveals that this attribution is at least partially incorrect. In the first place, it has to be realized that Christianity came to Nigeria wearing a European gab. What is more, the missionaries who brought Christianity to Nigeria did not make any effort to marry Christianity with Nigerian culture; they condemned almost every aspect of the culture as fetish and incompatible with Christianity.

These missionaries in condemning Nigerian culture also wrote off some of the basic ways the people solve some of the problems that arose in their environment. For examples, because of the dominance of patriarchy which allows inheritance and perpetuation of lineage only through male children, some Nigerian cultures practise what is called “female husbands and male daughters (Chukwuemeka, 2012)” This arrangement allow daughters to stay back in their fathers’ house or women to marry their fellow women to bear children in their place in situations where there are no males. Also, every culture in Nigeria has its traditional way of detection and dealing with crimes.

The missionaries condemned these and other practices without for example providing an adequate alternative through which a man without a male child can find a successor or how a society troubled by criminality can solve it. These were big challenges for the early converts to Christianity especially in an environment where having male children was a matter of life and death for men and their families. The consequences is that when problems bothering on these fundamental issues arise, individuals either abandon their Christian faith and go back into paganism or still remain in the faith without serious commitment.

The point here therefore, is that the very first crisis of faith that arise among Christians in Nigeria was the result of the inability of the missionaries to find, Christianise and adopt those good elements embedded in Nigerian culture. Thus, the inability of the missionaries to pay close attention to Nigerian culture in order to provide good alternatives for those elements which are truly incompatible with Christianity contributed to creating the first crisis of faith. It is that first crisis that made ways for most of the crisis that exist today.

Scandals by Pastors

Few, if actually any will contest the claim that the scandalous life of pastors has contributed to the present crisis of faith in the Nigerian Church. One of the prides of Christianity and the

attraction it has for non-Christians is the dignified, holy and self-giving life of Christian pastors. However, in recent years, the foundation of the Church in Nigeria has been shaken by series of scandals, including sexual abuses, embezzlements of Church funds, and all manners of immoralities involving Christian pastors.

For a religion where the pastor is everything, especially a role model, it is difficult to imagine the type of harm these scandals have done to Christianity in Nigeria. In the main, people generally believe that if this level of unfaithfulness can be found among the very people who claimed that they have given up everything for the sake of the kingdom what would an ordinary Christian do? (Anolue, 2006, 44).

The Bad Influence of Pentecostalism

Nigeria is one of the biggest contributors to the growth of the Pentecostal movement around the world (Gaiya, 2003, 3). Thus, the country flaunts some of the most numerous Pentecostal populations in the world. This growth accounts for the much talked about shift in Christianity from the Northern hemisphere to the South. For example, Kenneth L. Woodward (Woodward, 2001, 16) notes that:

In 1900, the beginning of what American Protestants christened as the ‘Christian century’, 80 percent of Christians was either Europeans or Americans. Today 60 percent are citizens of the Third World-Africa, Asia and Latin America.

This observation was corroborated by Andrew Walls (Ibid.), who stated that, “the centre of Christianity has shifted southward...”, and that, “The events that are shaping 21st century Christianity are taking place in Africa and Asia.”

However, this growth of churches in Nigeria has a serious economic undertone as Musa Gaiya (2003, 3), noted “The establishment of churches is one of the most lucrative businesses in Nigeria.” It is no surprising therefore that Nigeria has some of the highest number of billionaire-pastors around the globe.

The churches, especially the Pentecostal churches have exploited the hardship occasioned by bad leadership in the Nigerian polity to their advantage. Kenneth Woodward (2001, 17), again observed that:

...just as Europe’s northern tribes turned to the church after the decay of the Roman Empire, so Africans are embracing Christianity in face of the massive political, social and economic chaos. Plagued by corrupt regimes, crushing poverty, pandemic AIDS and genocidal wars – as in Rwanda and Sudan, Africans find the church as the one place they can go for healing, hope and material assistance.

Consequently, Nigerian Protestantism has turned Christianity into a very big business venture. The pastors have used not only their prosperity gospel to extort money from poverty stricken Nigerians but have been colluding with corrupt Nigerian politician to subjugate, extort and oppress the poor.

This particular trend has had a number of unwholesome influence on the Church in Nigeria. The first and most important is that it created a congregation in love with the gospel of consumerism or that sees the gospel/Christianity as a magic wand that makes people rich for instance through the paying of tithes. Such congregation has in turn created ministers including those who come into ministry for the sole purpose of enriching themselves. The blatant exhibitions of materialism by these pastors have led many to wonder if Christianity was not a kind of fraud used by these men to enrich themselves.

Evaluation and Conclusion

The Solutions that have not worked

As pointed out in the abstract part of this work, a number of suggestions have been offered as solutions to this crisis of faith facing the Church in Nigeria. One of these solutions is the call for revivals among Christian faithful. Those who make this advocacy such as the late Stephen Uche Njoku (2002) believe that we are living in a new dispensation of God's visitation and demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit. According to him, the Church cannot keep doing the same old thing and expecting a different result. It is time for the Church to storm the heavens by opening up her doors and allowing the Holy Spirit to bring about renewal within the members of the churches. Njoku did everything he could, including the establishment of Jesus Emmanuel Town, located in Emene, Enugu Nigeria to make this revival a reality.

Another solution offered by pundits who are privy to this religious crisis is the call for the establishment of charity foundations and financial empowerment programmes for Christian faithful. Advocates of this believe see a connection between the present crisis and the overall poverty in the land. Thus, they are of the opinion that if Christians are empowered they will not have any need to fall out of faith when they are in crisis which more often than not is financial. These advocates believe that this empowerment will give room for inculcating the precepts of the faith in Christians and in turn enable them to better understand that Christianity is compatible with the existence of suffering and difficulties. Obiorah Ike (2018) is an ardent proponent of this position. Some of his foundations are geared towards the type of empowerment discussed here.

Finally, there are those who think it would be wrong to see what is going on in Nigerian Church currently as a crisis. One of such advocates, Hassan Kukah (2012) believes present events are part and parcel of normal social evolution and historical processes. According to him, these events are not particularly man made and cannot be stopped by man. Nigeria is not the only country to experience what Christians in the country are going through currently. Many other countries have gone through the same experiences. Thus, Kukah cautions that the

occurrences should not be over dramatized. He is of the opinion that these things will come and go but the Church whose perpetuity is assured by Christ will outlive the current troubles.

It is good to underline that spiritual revival as advocated by Njoku is important. The Church cannot do without spiritual revival but it also has to be emphasized that spiritual revival, the type Njoku is advocating for cannot solve the current crisis because the crisis itself arose from an environment that claimed to offer such revival. There is the need to search for solution outside what is obtainable in the current wave of Pentecostalism. Also, Ike's economic empowerment cannot be written off easily. Many Christians in Nigeria are poor and there is no gain denying that getting funds will make both their lives and faith better. However, Ike has to realize that problem of faith most times are not coextensive with economic problem. If it is, then the rich countries of Europe and American will not have any crisis of faith. On the contrary economic empowerment sometimes exacerbates the crisis of faith. Kukah's submissions should not also be dismissed too. Nevertheless, it is good to point out that every social evolution and historical force is created by human actions. In order words, to fold one's arms in the hope that the present crisis will go the way it came would only end up producing unpalatable results. What then is the answer?

Pastoral Availability and the Crisis of Faith in the Nigerian Church

There are many causes of the crisis of faith in Nigeria as demonstrated in this study. However, a careful reading and thorough analysis would show that all these can be reduced to a single cause, namely: the lack of pastoral availability. This section shall show how these causes relate to pastoral availability.

The first cause is the lack of following the principles of inculturation by the missionaries. In explaining this cause, it was stated that the missionaries have an attitude that is anti-and-condemnatory of Nigeria culture and that is why there is no proper harmonization between Nigerian culture and the Christian gospel. Now pastoral availability as discussed above entails an attitude where the pastor/shepherd does not only care for his flock but is so much so involved in their lives to the extent that he is willing to lay down his life for them as Christ did. The implication is that the missionaries in evangelizing Nigerians were not properly pastorally available to the people in their culture. The taking on of human nature by Christ is the highpoint of inculturation and by this it is beholden on any pastor, who by his sacred ordination is the sacrament or the physical presence of Christ on earth to understand and bring a holy union between the gospel and the culture of his flock. The early missionaries failed in this aspect and one of the consequences is the current crisis of faith.

The second cause, the sexual scandals by pastors is also the result of the lack of pastoral availability. While the weakness of human nature is fully appreciated, these sexual abuses by pastors show first of all, that there is lack of proper integration of the pastors' sexual need as a human being. Second and most importantly, it also portrays the lack of understanding on the part of the pastor of his responsibility to his flock. Finally, the third cause is the bad influence from Pentecostalism. Why it has to be admitted that Pentecostalism is part of the

historical revolution in modern culture as Kukah pointed out. It is also well to acknowledge that the crisis of Christianity in Nigeria today is contributed by the rise in Pentecostal materialism. This is most visible in the area of pastoral availability. The majority of those who cause these abuses in the Pentecostal churches are from the orthodox churches that are not properly catechised. They went into Pentecostalism or form their own churches as businessmen not as pastors. These were all possible because pastors are not adequately trained in the pastoral availability and charity of Christ. If they were properly trained, those causing abuses out of ignorance would not because they would have been properly catechised.

Crisis of Faith in Nigeria and Pastoral Formation

As already suggested, proper formation is the solution to the crisis of faith in Nigeria. This is because the causes and resolutions of the crisis are intrinsically connected with the quality of pastors in the Church. In the light of this importance of formation, this study will make the following recommendations.

1. The Need for a More Rigorous Discernment of Vocations

The rising number and incidences of unwholesome practices and way of life of pastors in Nigeria today calls for serious concern. Therefore churches should look inwards and tighten their belts because a faithful pastor is worth much more than ten unfaithful ones. However, the formation programs common in many Nigerian seminaries where the primary focus is to weed-out candidates for the priesthood who are judged to be lacking in virtue or character should be avoided. One could argue that the very fact that there are so many candidates for priestly formation along with fewer resources to carry out holistic formation may be contributing to this model. But there are grave implications arising from this model. When second chances are not given to candidates under formation to learn from their mistakes, inauthenticity will logically become the way of being for those who desire to become priests at all cost.

2. Priestly Formation is the Responsibility of the whole People of God

Priestly formation is apparently not a seminary business alone. Both the dioceses and the seminaries have very vital roles to play. As the seminary imparts the principles and the theory of the priestly ministry and ensure a proper academic formation, the dioceses provide the enabling environment for the candidates to learn the appropriate practice of the priesthood.

3. Provision of Adequate Staff to the Seminaries

Sincere and concerted efforts should be made to adequately staff the seminaries. The situation we have today in some of our seminaries with huge number of students and few formators is discouraging and definitely does not make for formation. There is practically no way the formators can do a good job of formation with such an intimidating number of students in comparison to formators.

4. Training in the Art of Pastoral Availability

In addition to the Pastoral Theology and the normal pastoral work ordinands engage in during their training, there is need to introduce an additional course that will go by the name Pastoral Availability. This course which will have both theoretical and practical aspect will involve training ordinands on the value of self-giving and empathy for those who are suffering. The practical aspect of the course will include weekly visitation of hospitals to talk and share the experience of the sick, going to youth hostels to share the concern of the youths, their challenges and worries in life. The course would also encourage those under training to develop high degree of personal relationship with those in their environment.

5. Priests should be Exemplary to those in Formation

Priests should be good examples to those under formation in the Dioceses. They should learn to do what is right and recommended as approved by local traditions and regulations in their various Dioceses. The attitude of playing god-father to those in formation should be discouraged. The same should be said with regards to the attitude of witch-hunting formandeas for whatever reason. Ordinands on pastoral assignment should be treated with love and care, with maximum concern for their vocation and be positively exposed to the praxis of the ministry and life of the priest. The attitude of running down seminary programme of formation as inadequate and overly academic without enough attention to the practical realities of the pastoral realities in the parishes should be stopped. Every priest in the Diocese should be a Father and a Formator to any and all ordinands working with him or not. They should encourage and teach the ordinands to put into practice and implement the principles and theories they have been taught in the seminary.

6. Bishops Should Stop Encouraging Materialism in Priests

Among many priests there is usually the urge to quickly make a mark and be popular in; raising huge funds, developmental projects, acquire many wealthy friends, build a huge bank account and be financially independent, be known as a “powerful” priest in relation to healing ministry and occupy influential positions and offices in the Dioceses. These have led to the development of various methods; most of which are unwholesome, in meeting these urges. The consequence is that what they have learnt in the seminaries are shoved into the bookshelves and quickly forgotten in pursuit of personal and private agendas.

Touchy as this may be, it has to be admitted that some Bishops are not helping the situation. The fact that they are financial or otherwise; beneficiaries of the booty combed-in by some of these priests make them overlook their activities. Some of such priests are “promoted” to “juicy” parishes and given enviable responsibilities, whether they are ably suited for it or not. Ordinands observing these begin to scheme on how they may one day come to this level. So while they are going through formation, formation is not going through them or they are more open to the practical tutorial formation of these erring priests. Some of these priests who enjoy the implicit support of their Bishop, give some ordinands ungodly impetus, with the arrogant assurance of throwing their weight behind them should they have any problems with

the seminaries. The misguided ordinands in turn begin to see themselves and behave as “untouchable” among their peers and even before their formators.

Conclusion

Having come this far, it is only good to take the final pause to recapitulate the efforts invested in this study. On the whole, the work is an outing to find out the cause of the crisis of faith in Nigeria. It was discovered that the crisis of faith currently troubling Christianity in Nigeria is the lack of pastoral availability. Based on this, the work prescribed adequate priestly formation in pastoral availability as the solution to the present crisis. Nevertheless, it cannot be said that this paper is in any way exhaustive on the issues of pastoral availability, crisis of faith in Nigeria and formation. Thus, there is the need for further studies to revisit the issues, especially of formation of priests presented in this study as the panacea to the problem of the crisis of the Christian faith. However, the study serves as an eye-opener to the situation of our time and should to provoke serious considerations in arresting the situation before it gets uglier.

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