

IGWEBUIKE AS AN IGBO PHILOSOPHY OF MUTUAL RELATIONS BETWEEN DIOCESAN PRIESTS AND CONSECRATED PERSONS

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Abstract

The working relationship between some Priests and Consecrated Persons in most Catholic Dioceses within our clime would reveal a history of both positive and negative experiences. Often times, the reasons for these negative experiences (which dominates this history) stem from a lack in the collaborative spirit that should exist among them, undue prejudice against each other, feelings of superiority and intolerance, amongst others. As expected, these experiences pose a scandal to the mystical body of Christ which demands otherwise from them. These negative experiences also militate against the effectiveness of the Evangelising Mission of the Church. Thus, this piece is poised to share some thoughts on how Consecrated Persons and Diocesan Priests can work together more effectively, so that together, they can lead the people of God on their journey to Heaven. It employs the principles of Igwebuiké philosophy as a theoretical framework. The principles of Igwebuiké remind us that we need each other, because to be, is to live in solidarity and complementarity, and to live outside the parameters of solidarity and complementarity is to suffer alienation. To be, is to be with the other, in a community of beings. Thus, if Diocesan Priests and Consecrated persons harness their energies towards a common project, need and desire, they can constitute an insurmountable force in pursuing their collective vision.

Keywords:

Introduction

A critical examination of the working relationship between some Priests and Consecrated Persons in most Catholic Dioceses within our clime would reveal a history of both positive and negative experiences. Often times, the reasons for these negative experiences (which dominates this history) stem from a lack in the collaborative spirit that should exist among them, undue prejudice against each other, feelings of superiority and intolerance, amongst others. As expected, these experiences pose a scandal to the mystical body of Christ which demands otherwise from them. These negative experiences also militate against the effectiveness of the Evangelising Mission of the Church. Thus, this paper is

poised to share some thoughts on how Consecrated Persons and Diocesan Priests can work together more effectively, so that together, they can lead the people of God on their journey to Heaven.

Consequently, the paper will discuss some of the factors that have led to these negative experiences between Diocesan Priests and Consecrated persons. This is in a bid to learn from such experiences, to correct them and to forgive whatever mutual misgivings they may nurse against each other. In doing so, the paper would employ the Igbo complementarity philosophy of Igwebuiké as a paradigm of the sort of relationship that should exist between them, hoping that they would become better collaborators (Aliba, 2016).

The Igwebuiké Philosophical Thought

The word *Igwebuiké* is an Igbo word. It is a composite word made up of three dimensions. Therefore, it can be employed as a word or used as a sentence: as a word, it is written as *Igwebuiké*, and as a sentence, it is written as, *Igwe bu ike*, with the component words enjoying some independence in terms of space. The three words involved: *Igwe* is a noun which means number or population, usually a huge number or population. *Bu* is a verb, which means *is*. *Ike* is another verb, which means *strength* or *power*. Thus, put together, it means 'number is strength' or 'number is power', that is, when human beings come together in solidarity and complementarity, they are powerful or can constitute an insurmountable force (Kanu, 2017).

Igwebuiké is a principle that is at the heart of African thought, and in fact, the modality of being in African ontology. As an ideology, *Igwebuiké* rests on the principles of solidarity and complementarity. Thus, to be, is to live in solidarity and complementarity, and to live outside the parameters of solidarity and complementarity is to suffer alienation. To be, is to be with the other, in a community of beings. This is based on the African sense of community, which is the underlying principle in African philosophy and religion, and as such, the unity of African philosophy. In this case, to be with the other becomes the modality of being in African ontology. This is anchored on the African cosmology which Iroegbu describes as being characterized by a common origin, common world-view, common language, shared culture, shared race, colour and habits, common historical experience and a common destiny (Kanu, 2014).

As an indigenous African philosophy, Igwebuiké philosophy gives an understanding of the human person as a being who is in relation with the other in the world. It establishes that there exists a common link between human persons and that it is through this relationship that every other person realizes himself/herself. Igwebuiké philosophy is the capacity in Igbo-African ontology for the expression of complementarity, solidarity, compassion, reciprocity, dignity and harmony for the purpose of building and maintaining community. It celebrates in a deep cultural and philosophical modality our relatedness, our inter connectedness, our common humanity, our common responsibility towards each other and for each other.

The philosophy of Igwebuiké is a complementary philosophy which understands life as a shared reality. Life is a life of *sharedness*; one in which another is part thereof. It is a relationship, though of separate and separated entities or individuals but with a joining of the same whole. It is a relationship in which case the two or more coming together makes each of them a complete whole; it is a diversity of being one with each other. Thus, Mbiti classically proverbializes the community determining role of the individual when he writes, "I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am" (Kanu, 2017).

Reflecting on the African idea of life as a shared reality, and in which complementarity is observed, Kanu avers that it presupposes a tailor-made cloth, measured, cut and sewn to fit into the curves, contours, shape and size, peculiarities and particularities of a being. Thus, every being has a missing part and is at the same time, a missing part.

Ekwulu (2010), therefore, writes that:

"If the other is my part or a piece of me, it means that I need him for me to be complete, for me to be what I really am. The other completes rather than diminishes me. His language and culture make my own stand out and at the same time, they enrich and complement my own. In the presence of his language and culture, the riches and poverty of my language and culture become clear and I see that his own and my own when put together form a richer whole when compared to any of them in isolation."

He further opines that the self is not only completed in relating with the other, but that it attains self-realization in the other: I realize myself in the other because

it is in the 'Thou-ness' of the Thou that my 'Is-ness' is realized. I am 'I' because you are 'You'. Without Thou there is no I. We are 'We' because they are 'They', and without 'They', there is no 'We'. Therefore, in the contention of Asouzu as quoted by Kanu (2017): "It is within this ontological context (of life as sharedness) that all questions of meaning can be handled adequately and fully within the context of mutual complementarity of all possible relations."

Diocesan Priests in Perspective

A Priest is a man who has received the Sacrament of Holy Orders, which confers on him certain powers of Christ, principally the power to consecrate bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, and the power to forgive sin in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. When he does these things he acts in the person of Christ.

Furthermore, Diocesan Priests are ordained to serve souls in a particular Diocese. This is their main work, although some are engaged in other ministries as well. At their ordination as deacons they incardinate (affiliate) with a particular Diocese or Archdiocese. At this time they make a promise to obey their Bishop who has been placed by Christ as the head of that Diocese. The Diocesan Priest serves in collaboration with him in the Parishes and Institutions within the Diocese. They administer the sacraments, they are responsible for the instruction of their people, they are close to them in their lives and trials, they counsel, forgive and serve constantly, heroically and patiently (Aliba, 2016).

The term "secular clergy" is also used to refer to Diocesan [Deacons](#) and [Priests](#) who are not [Monastics](#) or members of a [Religious Institute](#). While Religious Priests take [religious vows](#) of [chastity, poverty, and obedience](#) and follow the rule of life of the institute to which they belong, Diocesan Priests take vows of Chastity and Obedience, and they live among the people they serve, and not in a religious institute.

In the [Latin Church](#), among other regulations, Priests are obliged to observe perfect and perpetual continence for the sake of the kingdom of heaven and therefore are bound to celibacy and to carry out the [Liturgy of the Hours](#) daily. They are also forbidden to assume public offices which entail a participation in the exercise of civil power. All clerics, once ordained, are forbidden from marrying or remarrying. (Aliba, 2016).

Consecrated Persons in Perspective

Consecrated persons according to Kanu (2015) are the members of Religious Institutes and Societies of Apostolic Life. The Code of Canon Law (1983) teaches that they are lay persons or clerics who assume the evangelical counsels by means of a sacred bond, and become members of an Institute of Consecrated life according to the law of the Church. They totally dedicate themselves to God with the goal of pursuing perfection in Charity by faithfully embracing the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. In this sense, consecrated persons respond freely to the invitation of the Holy Spirit to follow Christ the poor, the celibate the obedient son, more closely, thus becoming in this life a sign of the life to come.

The very first paragraph in the 1996 Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* sets the scene for a current understanding of Consecrated life. It states that: "The Consecrated Life, deeply rooted in the example and teaching of Christ the Lord, is a gift of God the Father to his Church through the Holy Spirit. By the profession of the evangelical counsels the characteristic features of Jesus – the chaste, poor and obedient one – are made constantly 'visible' in the midst of the world and the eyes of the faithful are directed towards the mystery of the Kingdom of God already at work in history, even as it awaits its full realisation in heaven." Thus, Consecrated Life is not an appendage to the Church, nor an optional extra, it is part of the living breathing Church.

Noteworthy, is the very idea of Consecration as explained by Kanu (2015). It is derived from the word 'holy' or 'holiness'. In Hebrew it is *qadosh* and in Greek *hagios*; these are translated to mean 'to consecrate' (cf. Leviticus 15:31; Ezekiel 14:7). In Numbers 6:5-7, 12, the Nazirites were referred to as consecrated because of their vows to God. This makes the person holy, a consecration that separates the person from others. Thus the word consecration implies a setting apart or a separation. This separation does not imply superiority, or complete severance from those the consecrated are called to serve. *Lumen Gentium* (1964) says "The state which is constituted by the profession of the evangelical counsels, though it does not belong to the hierarchical structure of the Church, nevertheless, undeniably belongs to the life and holiness of the Church" (No. 44).

From the foregone, it is pertinent to state that the use of the term "Consecrated persons" within this piece is meant to refer to three categories of persons which are: the Lay Consecrated Life (lay people who though consecrated, remain "in

the world” and often exercise careers while giving a priority in their lives to prayer, witness and service), Female Religious (who consecrate themselves to God through promises of poverty, chastity and obedience, and often times live and work in their various communities) and the Male Religious who may be either Priests or Brothers. While the Religious Priest receives the sacrament of Holy Orders, the Religious Brother does not. However, they are both under the authority of their own superiors and serve the local diocese through the works of their Order or Congregation located there (Aliba, 2016).

Consecrated Persons and Diocesan Priests: The Experience So Far

As stated in the introductory part of this piece, the history of the relationship between Consecrated persons and Diocesan Priests working in a Diocese is one that is punctuated with some negative experiences.

Right from the beginnings, the use of the term "secular" to designate the Diocesan Clergy and "Consecrated" to designate Religious persons and Priests has in no small measure affected the good working relationship that should exist between them. This designation lead to a sort of supremacist mentality between the duo and also to the unofficial but popular opinion that one is "higher", "better" or "holier" than the other. Also, the designation of vows taken by consecrated persons (poverty, chastity and obedience) as opposed to the promises made by both the Religious and Diocesan Priests at Ordination (to pray the Liturgy of the Hours daily, to obey his Bishop/Superior and to live a celibate life) further fuels this sense of supremacy that is held by some school of thoughts (Aliba, 2016).

Furthermore, experience reveals that some diocesan Clergy uphold that most Consecrated persons display a care free attitude in matters that affect the pastoral and administrative life of the diocese. Their loyalty and attention is primarily given to their various orders, congregations and superiors, thereby giving a secondary attention to matters of the Diocese in which they work in. As expected, this affects the collaboration that should exist between the two. However, same experience also reveals that some Diocesan Priests tend to be autocratic, take Pastoral and Administrative decisions alone, and do not give enough room for collaboration to Consecrated Persons working in such a place (Aliba, 2016).

Experience also shows that there is often a lack of common planning, dialogue, mutual appreciation, sharing of responsibilities, and mutual accountability between Consecrated persons and Diocesan Priests. In some places, there is no clear contract between Dioceses and Religious Superiors and therefore the hierarchical authority proper to the bishop and / or Priest is abused without adequate and respectful dialogue (Aliba, 2016).

All these, and many other negative experiences (which does not undermine the positive experiences they also share) punctuate the working relationship between Consecrated Persons and Diocesan Priests in our local Churches and is a scandal that harms and affects the Mission of the Church in our modern world. This anomaly demands due and urgent attention, if the Evangelising mission of the Church is to remain relevant.

Towards A Stronger/Fruitful Collaboration in the Spirit of the Igwebuiké

From the foregoing, one can posit that a possible solution to these negative experiences between Diocesan Priests and Consecrated Persons lies in the understanding and employment of the merits of Igwebuiké. Igwebuiké enunciates a principle of collaboration aimed towards a unified and greater existence. Therefore, collaboration in the spirit of Igwebuiké is a way out of these conflicts that punctuate the relationship between Consecrated persons and Diocesan Priests in our local Churches.

However, before now various resource persons/Churches in the past have written and discussed extensively on the subject matter of Collaborative ministry in our local Churches. Thus, the idea of a move towards a stronger and fruitful collaboration between Consecrated persons and Diocesan Priests is aimed towards offering practical steps that should help to solidify the tie that should exist between them, after the need to forgive and forget past hurts.

According to Ngahy (2015), it is an undisputable fact that collaborative ministry does not just happen because people work together or cooperate in some way. Collaborative ministry is a gradual and mutual evolution of new patterns, new attitudes and new self understanding, which do not happen by accident. It begins from the fundamental desire to work together not only because we are all called by the Lord to be a company of disciples but an understanding of the human person as a being who is in relation with the other in the world as expressed by Igwebuiké. Hence, there exists a common link between human

persons and that it is through this relationship that every other person realizes himself/herself through a unity of purpose.

Nevertheless, it must be stated that this collaboration in the spirit of Igwebuiké grows through a mutual process of conversion and formation especially within the human community. It also requires a willingness to face and work through conflict because of the attraction and value of a common good, supported by an awareness of participating in the work of the Spirit in the Church. This means; conflicting situations or misunderstandings can also be an opportune moment when our collaboration would be ironed out objectively and positively in order to solidify it as we grow. The Igwebuiké ideology does not rule out the possibility of a conflict of interest or misunderstandings. However, such conflicts of interest and misunderstandings are sacrificed on the altar of the common good, so that together we achieve a greater good.

Collaborative ministry is a way of relating and working together in the life of the Church which expresses the communion which the Church is given and to which it is called. It is a way of working in which the quality of relationships developed is as important as the task in which we are engaged. In fact, it is an ecclesial activity, implying that it is not a private affair of a consecrated person, a clergy or a laity. As an ecclesial activity it brings together into partnership, people who, through baptism and confirmation, as well as ordination and marriage have different vocations, gifts and offices within the Church. It does not blur the distinctiveness of each vocation or gift. Rather it enables the identity of each to be seen and expressed more fully.

Hence, it is safe to state that Ministry is a service given by different people according to their different gifts and talents in the name of God for the good of the people of God so as to further Christ's mission. In a very broad way, ministry is the variety of ways that Christians in all walks of life carry on Christ's compassionate presence in the world. Collaborative ministry is cooperating and uniting our gifts in the service of the people of God. It is the identification, release and union of all the gifts in ministry for the sake of the greater good. Therefore, consecrated persons and Diocesan Priests in our local Churches must of necessity, be willing to uniquely harness their charisma, gifts and talents for the furtherance of the Evangelising Mission of Christ through the Church. It should be done in such a manner that no one should claim to possess a more superior gift, charisma or talent, knowing that each is given a manifestation of the spirit for the common good (1. Cor. 12:7).

Furthermore, in a bid to achieve a stronger and a more fruitful collaboration in the spirit of Igwebuiké, consecrated persons and Diocesan Priests should be willing to come together and dialogue over old issues. Conversion and change of attitude is indispensable for collaborative ministry. For us to work effectively in collaborative ministry, mutual prejudices against each other must be put aside as we allow the spirit of co-existence and cooperation to animate us. This would entail the creation of forums to listen to one another, share our visions and discuss openly the obstacles that we have to overcome if we want greater and more authentic collaboration. Also, commitment and honest dialogue, willingness to grow in the dynamics of cooperation, open exchange of information and better understanding among the various Religious Orders and Congregations working in a particular diocese are all ways which might help us collaborate better and thus realize more effectively the mission that has been entrusted to us as Church.

Local Ordinaries are encouraged to welcome and esteem the Charisms of the Consecrated life, and to give them a place in the Pastoral plans of the Diocese. They should have a particular concern for Institutes of diocesan right, which are entrusted to the special care of the local Bishop. A Diocese which lacks the presence of Consecrated persons would not only be deprived of many spiritual gifts, of suitable places for people to seek God, of specific apostolic activities and pastoral approaches, but it would also risk a great weakening of that missionary spirit which is characteristic of the majority of Institutes.

Religious Congregations and their competent members should be more involved in the Pastoral planning of the Diocese, since by the very nature of the Church, they are not strangers or aliens in the local Church. Thus, all Religious and Consecrated persons have the duty, each according to his proper vocation, of cooperating zealously and diligently in building up and increasing the whole Mystical Body of Christ and for the good of the particular Churches. In the same vein, Superiors of religious houses should ensure that Religious brothers, sisters and Priests are adequately trained so as to competently and effectively participate in the Pastoral mission of the Church.

Better collaboration will result from greater reciprocal knowledge. Thus, it is recommended that the theology and the spirituality of the Consecrated life be part of the theological preparation of Diocesan Priests, and adequate attention to the theology and the spirituality of the Diocesan Clergy be included in the formation of consecrated persons. This will help a great deal in reducing the

mutual prejudice they both share. Furthermore, Consecrated persons and Diocesan Priests working in a particular local Church can create avenues and opportunities to socialize together where they could have periodic common meals, games, informal discussions, etc. This would help to neutralize possible tensions that may arise in their working relationship and further strengthen the bond that exists among them. It would also help curtail occasional conflicts and mutual suspicions.

Conclusion

Having discussed some of the reasons for the negative experiences that punctuate the relationship between Consecrated persons and Diocesan Priests, and also proffering practical steps towards overcoming this anomaly, it is pertinent to re-affirm that, if the duo are not willing to forgive and forget past hurts, they may scarcely make head way. The principles of Igwebuiké reminds us that we need each other, because to be, is to live in solidarity and complementarity, and to live outside the parameters of solidarity and complementarity is to suffer alienation. To be, is to be with the other, in a community of beings. Thus, if Diocesan Priests and Consecrated persons harness their energies towards a common project, need and desire, they can constitute an insurmountable force in pursuing their collective vision.

Also, if Diocesan Priests and Consecrated persons would come together in a unity of hearts, heads and hands, which is a correlative and complementary solidarity, (a 'we' relationship) there is scarcely any challenge that they cannot surmount in their evangelizing mission. But, when they slight each other, look down on each other, segregate each other and reject the contribution of each other, in the contention of Ireogbu (1994), is to commit the ontological evil of alienation, and thus become a *homo hipus homini*, which is a scandal to the world.

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