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INTEGRAL PRIESTLY FORMATION AS THE NECESSARY  
PRECONDITION FOR EFFECTIVE PASTORAL MINISTRY

BY

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## INTRODUCTION

Today more than ever, there is great need to talk about priestly formation for it is the lever on which the pastoral ministry hinges. There are lots of challenges facing the pastoral ministry that the minister needs to be grounded in right discipline and conduct in order to wade through these turbulent waters of our day. Many today are wounded by the economic, political and social situation of the world, especially our country Nigeria. Many also have gone to various places in search of solution. The truth is that only Christ the Good Shepherd can heal our wounds. Christ does this healing through the pastors (priests). This is why an integral formation of these pastors is necessary for the healing and sanctity of the society.

In this paper, we are going to reflect on integral priestly formation as the necessary precondition for effective pastoral ministry. Before I proceed, I will like to point out that this article is a fruit (brain child) of a talk delivered to the priests of Orlu Diocese on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2021 during the priests' monthly recollection at St. Joseph Catholic parish Umuna, Orlu L.G.A. Imo State.

This reflection divides into four main parts. The first part deals with the Church as the mystery of vocation and the matrix of every vocation. The second part focuses on the three main loci of priestly formation. The third part examines critically the fundamental

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question of priestly formation, whereas the fourth uses the parable of the potter and the clay to illustrate the role of God and the role of the members of the Church in the formation of future priests

## 1. THE CHURCH AS THE MYSTERY OF VOCATION

The name “Church” is the English rendition of the Latin “ecclesia” which is borrowed from the Greek “ekklesia” meaning “assembly” or “congregation”. The Greek substantive “ekklesia” in turn derives from the Greek verb “ek-kaleo” which means “to call out from.” According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church “Ekklesia is used frequently in the Greek Old Testament for the assembly of the Chosen People before God, above all for their assembly on Mount Sinai where Israel received the Law and was established by God as his holy people. By calling itself ‘Church’, the first community of Christian believers recognized itself as heir to that assembly. In the Church, God is ‘calling together’ his people from all the ends of the earth.”<sup>2</sup> Hence the Church is by nature both the “mystery of e-vocation” (mysterium ex-vocationis) and the “mystery of con-vocation” (mysterium con-vocationis). The Church as the “mystery of vocation” (mysterium vocationis) is the cradle of every vocation.<sup>3</sup> Priestly vocation is a gift of God to the Church and in the Church. In fact the New *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* published by the Congregation for Clergy in 2017 bears the title: “The Gift of Priestly Vocation.” This latest document on Priestly formation underlines among other things the supernatural origin of priestly vocations. It is a must read and an instrument of work (instrumentum laboris) for all Catholic priests. We shall come back to it later.

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The Second Vatican Council affirms that ‘the duty of fostering vocations falls on the whole Christian community, and they should

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<sup>2</sup> Catechism Of The Catholic Church: Vatican City:1994, #751.

<sup>3</sup> Second Vatican Ecumenical Council: Decree on Priestly Formation, *Optatum Totius*, Vatican City: 28<sup>th</sup> October 1965, #2

discharge it principally by living full Christian lives.”<sup>4</sup> The first responsibility for the pastoral work of promoting priestly vocations lies with the Bishop, who is called to be the first to exercise this responsibility.<sup>5</sup> As the father and friend of his Presbyterium, it falls primarily to the Bishop to be concerned about giving continuity to the priestly charism and ministry, bringing it new forces through priestly ordinations. He will be actively concerned to ensure that the vocational dimension is always present in the whole range of ordinary pastoral work, and that it is fully integrated and practically identified with it. It is his duty to foster and coordinate various initiatives on behalf of vocations.<sup>6</sup> The Church recognizes three special environments for the formation of future priests, viz. the family, the parish and the seminary. Let’s look closely at each of the three.

## 2. THE THREE LOCI OF PRIESTLY FORMATION

**THE FAMILY:** The Christian family by virtue of the Sacrament of Matrimony shares in its own unique way in the educational mission of the Church, *Mater et Magistra*. Pope John Paul II in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day writes: “The Christian family, which is truly a ‘domestic church’ (Lumen Gentium #11) has always offered and continues to offer favourable conditions for the birth of vocations. Since the reality of the Christian family is endangered nowadays, much importance should be given to pastoral work on behalf of the family, in order that the families themselves, generously accepting the gift of human life, may be

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<sup>4</sup> Second Vatican Ecumenical Council: Decree on Priestly Formation, *Optatam Totius*, Vatican City:28<sup>th</sup> October 1965, #2.

<sup>5</sup> Second Vatican Ecumenical Council: Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church, *Christus Dominus*, Vatican City:28<sup>th</sup> October 1965, #15.

<sup>6</sup> Second Vatican Ecumenical Council: Decree on Priestly Formation, *Optatam Totius*, Vatican City:28<sup>th</sup> October 1965, #2

‘as it were, a first seminary (Optatam Totius #2) in which children can acquire from the beginning an awareness of piety and prayer and of love for the Church.’<sup>7</sup> Scientific studies in Anthropology and Psychology reveal that early family relationships constitute the core of the human self. The love, respect and security experienced in the family offer the anthropological and psychological foundation for one’s self-identity and self-worth. The experience of unconditional love in the family predisposes and preconditions the child for the future moulding of his or her personality. Hence, the Holy Mother Church recommends that more efforts should be made to educate the family of the candidate to know and play its role in the process of nurturing and discerning the priestly or religious vocation of their son as soon as he indicates his intention to become a Catholic priest.

**THE PARISH COMMUNITY:** The Parish community constitutes another locus of Priestly formation. It is the cradle of every priestly vocation. It is here too that the continuous discernment of priestly vocations must take place. It is more broad-based and objective than the family. It involves the Parish Priest and the lay faithful. First and foremost, let us consider the role of the Parish Priest and secondly the role of the lay faithful.

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**THE ROLE OF THE PARISH PRIEST:** A grave responsibility is entrusted to every Catholic priest as “promoter” of priestly and religious vocations in the Church.<sup>8</sup> At this juncture some questions arise: Are priests still conscious of this onerous responsibility of promoting vocations to the Priesthood and religious life? What are they doing individually and collectively to carry out this duty efficiently? How are they guiding and mentoring the seminarians posted to them on apostolic work and those who are indigenes of the Parishes where they are working? The Holy Mother Church

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<sup>7</sup> Pope John Paul II: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Vatican City:1992, #41.

<sup>8</sup> Congregation For The Evangelization Of Peoples: Pastoral Guide for Diocesan Priests in Churches

Dependent on the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, Vatican City: 1989, #5. Cf. also CATHOLIC

Bishops’ Conference Of Nigeria: *I Chose You: The Nigerian Priest in the Third Millennium*, Lagos:2004, p.23.

demands from her priests as collaborators in the formation of future priests, careful mentorship and the responsibility of bringing worthy ministers for Christ and His Church. The first demand of the Second Vatican Council in its Decree on Priestly Formation *Optatam Totius* says: “All priests should show their apostolic zeal by fostering vocations as much as possible, and should draw the hearts of young men to the priesthood by the example of their humble, hardworking and happy lives, as well as by their mutual charity and fraternal cooperation.”<sup>9</sup> this demand calls priests today to personal examination of conscience: Am I personally interested in fostering Priestly vocations in my Parish, in my Pastoral Region and in the Diocese at large? Is my Priestly life and ministry a help or a hindrance to those aspiring to the Catholic Priesthood? Do I teach seminarians by example? Take it or not: Christianity is not a doctrinal religion, it is the life of Christ. Christ has no doctrine. If he taught any, it was his life. The second demand of the fathers of the Second Vatican Council reads: “Seminary superiors and professors should be chosen from among the best and should receive a careful preparation in sound doctrine, suitable pastoral experience and special training in spirituality and teaching methods.”<sup>10</sup> Last but not least, the Holy Mother Church demands that “All priests should regard the seminary as the very heart of the Diocese and give it their willing support.”<sup>11</sup> The Council Fathers used the metaphor of the heart to inculcate in us our co-responsibility in the formation of future priests. We know from Biology that the heart is not only a major organ of the human body that pumps blood through the arteries and veins but also the center of the human person. Again here, some soul-searching questions are inevitable viz. Do I really see the seminaries in our Diocese as the heart of the Diocese and as the powerhouse of evangelization? Like it or loathe it: what happens in our seminaries affects the pastoral ministry in our Diocese. In other words: the quality of Priestly formation in our seminaries determine the quality of the pastoral work in the parishes. Further: Do I sensitize and mobilize my parishioners to support the seminary when it is their turn to do so? Apart from this annual obligation, do I willingly send some material

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<sup>9</sup> Second Vatican Ecumenical Council: Decree on Priestly Formation, *Optatam Totius*, Vatican City:28<sup>th</sup> October 1965, #2.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, #3.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

and financial support from time to time to our seminaries to encourage and to motivate the staff and the seminarians? Instead of “monetizing” the offerings brought by the people of God especially during and after the Christmas and Easter period, do I give some to the seminaries?

If the seminarians eat well, they will pray well, study well and behave well. Let’s wake up to this grave responsibility of supporting the seminaries in our Diocese and in our Province materially, financially and otherwise. We should not leave the burden of funding and maintaining the seminaries both minor and major to the Bishops and the seminary authorities alone.

The lay faithful also, have great importance in the pastoral work of promoting Priestly vocations. With regard to diocesan and parish communities, the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* recommends that “special appreciation and encouragement should be given to groups which promote vocations, whose members make an important contribution by prayer and sufferings offered up for Priestly and religious vocations, as well as by moral and material support.”<sup>12</sup> This Papal exhortation inspired Bishop Gregory Ochiagha of blessed memory to inaugurate the Vocation Interest Promoters’ Association (VIPA) and charged it with the responsibility of supporting the work of the formation of future priests in Orlu Diocese. Following in the footsteps of his venerable predecessor, Bishop Augustine Ukwuoma reconfirmed and reconsolidated the VIPA for a more efficient and effective promotion of priestly vocations. The Vocation Interest Promoters’ Association operates both on the diocesan and parish levels and has a priest as director. Every priest should enlighten the lay faithful about the important role of the VIPA in promoting priestly vocations so that those interested can enroll as members.

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**THE SEMINARY:** Etymologically, the word seminary stems from the Latin word *seminarium* meaning “seed-ground” or “seed-plot.” It originated from the practice of farmers who nursed and nurtured seeds in temporary grounds in view of transplanting them to their permanent growing grounds. Similarly, the seminary is a special environment set apart by the Church for the nurturing and the

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<sup>12</sup> Pope John Paul II: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Vatican City:1992, #41.

fostering of priestly vocations in view of deployment in the pastoral ministry. Historically speaking, it was the Council of Trent that instituted the seminary as a “house of priestly formation” with the decree *Cum adolescentium aetas* of 15th July 1563. The Second Vatican Council reaffirmed the necessity of both the minor and major seminary as “seed-beds of priestly vocations.”<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the Council Fathers recommended that each nation or rite should have its own program of priestly formation. This program should be drawn up by the Episcopal Conference and should be revised and updated at regular intervals and approved by the Holy See.<sup>14</sup> Following the guidelines of the Second Vatican Council, the Holy See promulgated on 6th January 1970 the first general norms of priestly formation known as *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*<sup>15</sup> and mandated countries and Episcopal Conferences to adapt the general norms to their local conditions in the form of *Ratio Nationalis*. It took the Nigerian Catholic Bishops’ Conference thirty-five good years before it published the first *Ratio Fundamentalis* for the formation of future priests in Nigeria. This *Ratio Nationalis* published in 2005 is yet to be revised and updated for approval by the Holy See. Furthermore, the Bishops of Onitsha and Owerri Ecclesiastical Provinces in the document **The Igbo Catholic Priest**, mooted the idea of a *Ratio Regionalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* for the formation of future priests as well as for the “permanent formation” of the indigenous clergy of the particular Churches of Igbo speaking area.<sup>16</sup> This “wonderful episcopal idea” remains platonic till today. Like a lone voice crying in the wilderness, Rev. Fr. Prof. Bernard Ukwuegbu in a paper delivered at the seminar on the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*

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<sup>13</sup> Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Priestly Formation, *Optatum Totius*, Vatican City:28<sup>th</sup> October 1965, # 3 & 4.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, #1

<sup>15</sup> Pope Paul VI: *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*: AAS 62 (6.1.1970), PP.327-384.

<sup>16</sup> Catholic Bishops’ Conference Of Igboland: *The Igbo Catholic Priest At the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, Enugu:1999, #21.

organized by the Bishops of Owerri Ecclesiastical Province for formators at the Seat of Wisdom Seminary Owerri in 2007, raised serious questions about the relevance of the current *Ratio Fundamentalis* and recommended to the Church in our Province to effect some changes in the present seminary structure and program of formation.<sup>17</sup> We are yet to heed and hearken to this prophetic voice. Meanwhile, the Congregation for the Clergy with the approval of the Holy See has published the New *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*<sup>18</sup> in 2017 as a revision and update of the first *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*. The Holy See has also mandated countries and Episcopal Conferences to adapt the general norms of the New Ratio to their local conditions. Who knows when the Nigerian Hierarchy is going to update the *Ratio Nationalis* of 2005 in the light of the New *Ratio Fundamentalis* of 2017? Certainly, Rome is not the problem, our problem is the lack of courage and vision to dare the *aggiornamento* of priestly formation recommended by the Holy See.

### 3. THE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION OF PRIESTLY FORMATION

Let us now consider the main question which the Church of every time and clime must pose to herself regarding the work of discerning and fostering priestly vocations. Pope John Paul II in his ground-breaking Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation to the Bishops, Clergy and Lay Faithful on the Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day *Pastores Dabo Vobis* formulated the fundamental question of priestly formation as follows: “How can we form priests who are truly able to respond to the demands of

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<sup>17</sup> Ukwuegbu, Bernard: “The 2005 Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis: Reality and Relevance”, in: Oche-Amamihe Wisdom Journal of Theology and Philosophy, Vol. 2, #2 (2010), pp. 51-75.

<sup>18</sup> Congregation For The Clergy: The Gift of Priestly Vocation: New Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis, Vatican City:2017



our times and capable of evangelizing the world?”<sup>19</sup> The saintly Pope not only raised the question but also tried to proffer the answer by enumerating and enunciating the four dimensions of priestly formation viz. the human, the spiritual, the intellectual and the pastoral formation. In fact, this Magisterial document is a landmark in the history of the Catholic Church so that one can talk about Priestly formation before and after *Pastores Dabo Vobis*. Before *Pastores Dabos Vobis*, the program of Priestly formation was three dimensional viz. the spiritual, the doctrinal and the pastoral formation (cf. *Optatam Totius* #8) with little or no emphasis on human formation. The situation changed with *Pastores Dabo Vobis* of Pope John Paul II. Not only that he added the human formation to the traditional tripartite structure of Priestly formation, he enlisted it first and made it the foundation of priestly formation. Hence he intimates: “The whole work of priestly formation would be deprived of its necessary foundation if it lacked a suitable human formation... The priest, who is called to be a ‘living image’ of Jesus Christ, Head and Shepherd of the Church, should seek to reflect in himself, as far as possible, the human perfection which shines forth in the Incarnate Son of God and which is reflected with particular liveliness in his attitudes towards others as we see narrated in the Gospels.”<sup>20</sup> The New *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* follows the enumeration and the enunciation of the four dimensions of priestly formation by Pope John Paul II in *Pastores Dabos Vobis*. However, it goes beyond *Pastores Dabo Vobis* by underlining the importance of integrating the four dimensions in view of the integral and integrated formation of future priests. Hence it explicates: “During the process of formation for the ministerial priesthood, the seminarian is a ‘mystery to himself, in which two aspects of his humanity, that need to be integrated, are intertwined and exist side by side. On the one hand he is characterized by talents and gifts that have been moulded by

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<sup>19</sup> Pope John Paul: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Vatican City:1992, #10.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, #43.

grace; on the other he is marked by his limits and frailty. The task of formation is to help the person to integrate these aspects, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, in a journey of faith and of their gradual and harmonious maturity, avoiding fragmentation, polarization, excesses, superficiality or partiality.”<sup>21</sup> Consequently, priestly formation must strike a balance between “the strengths” and “the weaknesses” of the *formandus* who according to the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* “is a necessary and irreplaceable agent of his own formation.”<sup>22</sup> Hence the principle of formation enunciated by Pope John Paul II: “all formation, priestly formation included, is ultimately self formation.”<sup>23</sup> Therefore, seminarians should be co-responsible for their own formation. Nevertheless, this personal responsibility does not exclude other agents of formation.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, the human formation leads to and finds its completion in spiritual formation which is an extremely important element of a priest’s education. The essential content of spiritual formation specifically leading towards the priesthood is well expressed in the Second Vatican Council’s Decree on Priestly Formation: “Spiritual formation should be conducted in such a way that the students may learn to live in intimate and unceasing union with God the Father through his Son Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit. Those who are to take on the likeness of Christ the priest by sacred ordination should form the habit of drawing close to him as friends in every detail of their lives...”<sup>25</sup> The intellectual formation has its own characteristics but it is also

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<sup>21</sup> Congregation For The Clergy: The Gift of Priestly Vocation: New Ratio Fundamentalibus Institutionis Sacerdotalis, Vatican City: 2017, #28.

<sup>22</sup> Pope John Paul II: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Vatican City:1992, #69

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Catholic Bishops’ Conference Of Nigeria: Ratio Fundamentalibus Institutionis Sacerdotalis, #46.

<sup>25</sup> Second Vatican Ecumenical Council: Decree on Priestly Formation, *Optatam Totius*, Vatican City:28<sup>th</sup> October 1965, #8.

deeply connected with, and indeed can be seen as a necessary expression of both the human and spiritual formation. It is a fundamental demand of human intelligence by which the human being “participates in the light of God’s mind” and seeks to acquire a wisdom which in turn opens to and is directed towards knowing and adhering to God.”<sup>26</sup> The Holy Mother Church recommends for the intellectual formation of future priests the study of Philosophy which is followed by the study of Theology. The goal of the study of Philosophy, to borrow the words of the Angelic Doctor Thomas Aquinas, is not just to know the opinions of individual philosophers but to know the truth about reality. The former is called philo-doxia (love of opinions), while the latter is called philo-sophia (love of wisdom). Similarly, the goal of the study of Theology is not just to know the doctrines of the Church and the opinions of individual theologians whether orthodox or not but to deepen the mysteries of the Christian faith in order to cultivate a more living and loving filial relationship with God the Father through the Son Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. The human, the spiritual and the intellectual formation are all directed to a specific pastoral end. This pastoral aim ensures that the human, spiritual and intellectual formation has certain precise content and characteristics. It also unifies and give specificity to the whole formation of future priests. The whole formation imparted to candidates for the priesthood aims at preparing them to enter into communion with the charity of Christ the Good Shepherd. In the words of the Second Vatican Council: “The whole training of the students should have as its object to make them true shepherds of souls after the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, teacher, priest and shepherd.”<sup>27</sup> Just as the pastoral charity of Jesus Christ was the principle and driving force of his salvific action, likewise, thanks to the outpouring of the Holy

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<sup>26</sup> Second Vatican Ecumenical Council: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, Vatican City: 7<sup>th</sup> December 1965, #15.

<sup>27</sup> Second Vatican Ecumenical Council: Decree on Priestly Formation, *Optatum Totius*, Vatican City: 28<sup>th</sup> October 1965, #4.

Spirit in the Sacrament of Holy Orders, it should constitute the principle and driving force of the priestly ministry.

#### 4. THE PARABLE OF THE POTTER AND THE CLAY

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This parable is inspired by the second account of creation which narrates how God formed the human being from the dust of the earth and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and he became a living being (cf. Gen 2:7). The second account of creation is known as the “Yahwist narrative”, whereas the first is known as the “Priestly narrative”. According to recent biblical scholarship, it is older than the first account of creation which was written after it to mitigate its anthropomorphic conception of the Judaeo-Christian God. The biblical metaphor of the potter and the clay was later used by the Sapiential writers (cf. Sir 33:13; Wis 15:7) and by the prophets (cf. Jer 18:1-6; Is 29:16, 41:25, 45:9, 64:8) to describe the formative relationship between God and his people. But in case of the Prophet Jeremiah, it was a “dramatic revelation” from above: “The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: Come, go down to the potter’s house, and there I will let you hear my words. So I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was working at his wheel. The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter’s hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him. Then the word of the Lord came to me: can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as the potter has done? Says the Lord. Just like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel” (Jer 18:1-6). The parable of the potter and the clay is not only a precise and incisive biblical metaphor for illustrating God’s formation of his people but also for understanding God’s formation of the shepherds of his people. In the light of the foregoing, the potter is God the Father who promised his people: “I will give you shepherds after my own heart” (Jer. 3:15). Hence God is not only the creator but also the formator of human beings. In short, God the Father is the perfect artist. The clay is the human being who is the subject of formation. The form or the paradigm is the eternal High Priest Jesus Christ. The water for kneading the clay and the fire for baking the clay-pots

of different shapes and sizes are biblical symbols of the Holy Spirit who is also the power that configures the subject of formation to the one and the great High priest of the new and eternal Covenant. Furthermore, the pottery is the Church as the primary locus of priestly formation and the members of the Church are the potter's instruments for kneading the clay and for shaping and re-shaping the clay pots as He likes. Consequently, the work of fostering and discerning priestly vocations in the Church must be a theandric synergy. What is theandric synergy? Theandric synergy is the collaboration between God and man in the work of Redemption and the prototype of this synergy is the God-Man Jesus Christ. In fact, the principal agent in the work of Redemption is not the human nature of Christ, but the divine person of Christ who is the second person of the Blessed Trinity. The human nature of Christ is only an *organon* (instrument) used by the Son of God to accomplish the work of Redemption. Similarly, the members of the Church are only instruments in the hands of the "divine potter" who is the primary and principal agent of Priestly formation. Unfortunately, the human being refuses to accept the truth that he is "from clay"<sup>28</sup> and is and remains "clay" in the hands of the "divine potter." He even dares to invert the roles thereby provoking the prophetic question: "Shall the potter be regarded as the clay?" (cf. Is. 29:16). This inversion constitutes the anthropological origin of idolatry and atheism which are sins against the worship of the One and Only God. In idolatry the relation of the potter and the clay is reversed. The human being becomes "the potter" who moulds gods/idols from clay. Idolatry, therefore, includes both the making of gods/idols from clay, copper, silver and gold (cf. Wis 15:7-17, Ps 115:4-7) as well as the worship given to them. *In simili modo*, modern atheism reverses the relation of God and the human being. In fact, the father of modern of modern atheism, the German Philosopher Andreas Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872), argued in his most influential work **Das Wesen des Christentums**<sup>29</sup> that it is not God that created the human being in

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<sup>28</sup> The Latin word "homo" is a contraction of the Latin expression "ex humo" which means "taken from the soil".

<sup>29</sup> Feuerbach, Andreas Ludwig: *The Essence of Christianity*, Chapter Two, 1841.

his image as the Bible narrates (cf. Gen 1:26), but the human being that created God in his image. For Feuerbach, God is nothing else but a human projection. The human being projects unto an imaginary external being what he is without knowing. He is alienated from himself. He must come back to himself and re-discover his divinity. Hence the secret of Theology, Feuerbach averred, is Anthropology. The human being is God unto himself (*homo homini Deus est*). This is the root of the rejection of God that characterizes our time.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

In the light of the foregoing elucidation of how best to form future priests in Nigeria and in tandem with the guidelines of the Holy Mother Church, I hereby recommend as follows:

1. The 2005 *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* approved by the CBCN for use in Nigerian seminaries is no longer up to date. There is urgent need to revise and update it in the light of the 2017 New *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* of the Congregation for the Clergy in order to form future priests in Nigeria/Igbo land in the circumstances and challenges of the digital age.
2. There is urgent need to adopt the integral and integrated approach to priestly formation as enunciated and enjoined in the *Nova Ratio Fundamentalis* in view of the holistic and wholesome formation of “future priests of integrity” for the evangelizing mission of the Church in the 21st century.
3. We should also integrate the socio-cultural and religious challenges of the African/Nigerian/Igbo worldview (*Weltanschauung*) in the curriculum of studies of the seminary as masterly elucidated and exfoliated by Rev. Msgr. Prof. Theophilus Ibegbulem Okere of blessed memory in the epoch-making paper entitled “The Challenges of an African Worldview to an integral Priestly Formation” which he presented to the Rectors of major

- seminaries during the RECOWA/CERA0 meeting held at the Seat of Wisdom Seminary Owerri, 3rd-7th March 2014.
4. Minor and major seminaries in Nigeria/Igbo land are underfunded. There is urgent need to improve the welfare of the formators and formandi by increasing the funding of the seminaries as recommended by the Rectors of Nigerian seminaries during the National Seminaries' Committee Workshop on "Formation and Funding of Seminaries" held at Blessed Michael Iwene Tansi Major Seminary, Onitsha, 4th-7th May 2016.
  5. A Master's or Doctorate Degree in Philosophy and/or in Theology is not enough to qualify a priest to be appointed as a formator in the seminary. There's urgent need to train future formators in the "art of priestly formation" before sending them to the seminaries.
  6. Above all, we must rediscover in faith and prayer the work of priestly formation as a "theandric synergy", a mysterious interplay between God and human beings, wherein God is "the principal and primary agent", whereas the human beings are **only** "instrumental agents".

## EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

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The four dimensions of Priestly formation as enumerated and enunciated by Pope John Paul II in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* and as reviewed and reaffirmed by the *Nova Ratio Fundamentalibus Institutionis Sacerdotalis* stand and fall together. They can be likened to the four canonical Gospels which are four versions of the one and unique story of Jesus the Christ and the four cardinal virtues upon which the whole of human nature was supposed to hinge. We should not emphasize one dimension to the detriment of the others. In conclusion, the four dimensions of Priestly formation constitute an intrinsic unity without prejudice to their diversity. Hence the principle of unity in diversity underlies the work of priestly formation in view of the integral formation of "future

priests of integrity” as envisioned and enjoined by the *Nova Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*. This holistic and wholesome formation of “future priests of integrity” according to the mind of Christ and His Church is the *conditio sine qua non* for effective pastoral ministry in the Church.