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Simon Ahiokhai

University of Portland, ahiokha@up.edu

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Priestly Formation and Sexual Abuse in The Roman Catholic Church: In Dialogue with The Nigerian Church

SimonMary Asese Ahiokhai, Ph.D.
University of Portland

Abstract: Reading the signs of the times today cannot be done legitimately without a critical look at the current sex abuse crisis perpetuated by the clergy of the Roman Catholic Church. To deny the fact that the Church has a crisis on its hands is to trivialize the pain and sorrow experienced by all in the Church, and most especially by the victims of the crisis. This work provides an x-ray vision of some of the factors shaping this crisis and boldly offers some interventions that can help the Church to navigate its way out of the crisis. There is an intentional focus on a critique of the Church's theological anthropology with the intent to explore more inclusive visions of the human person that explore human sexuality as a gift. Finally, this work enters into dialogue with the Nigerian Church by seeking ways to enrich the current seminary formation program operative in that national church.

Keywords: anthropology, clergy, church, ethics, formation, homosexuality, laity, Nigeria, seminary, sexuality theology, anthropology.

Introduction

What began as isolated cases of priestly sexual abuse in North America has become a global wildfire as Roman Catholics all-over the world are realizing that there is a dark side of their church that they were prevented from knowing by ordained men tasked with the responsibility to minister to the people of God in their respective dioceses and parishes. At first, the cases focused solely on priests and deacons. Rarely were bishops accused. But as I pen these lines, the narrative is fast changing. Not only are bishops being accused and found culpable of endangering the lives of children, men, and women who trusted them as their pastors, but higher-up ecclesiastics are now being exposed and found guilty as well. Notable among these are the now infamous Cardinal Pell of Australia who has been sentenced to serve time in jail in his home country and the defrocked Cardinal Theodore McCarrick of Washington, D.C. One can confidently say that these events may be the litmus test for a second reformation of the Church,

one that will radically reshape how to be church for the 21st century and beyond. This radical reformation will definitely lead to drastic changes in ecclesiology, ministerial roles of the ordained and the laity, and definitely, the formation of candidates for the ordained state,

While Europe, North and South America, parts of Asia and the Pacific regions are in grave distress as a result of these priestly sex abuse scandal, Africa seems to have been off the raider with only few incidents that have been brought out to the open. To think that Africa does not have such problems will be a grave blind-spot for the one making such conclusions. Such arguments that tend to present the priestly sex abuse crisis as a Western problem and linking it to homosexuality need to be abandoned because research shows otherwise.¹ Sexuality is a human reality and sexual abuses are themselves part of the human reality that knows no geographical boundaries. In this work, I intend to do the following; shed light on some of the trends of the emerging sexual abuse cases and present a critical analysis of the formation styles within Nigerian seminaries with the intent to articulate a new vision of priestly formation that will help the Nigerian Church in particular and other national churches both in Africa and other parts of the world to prevent future scandals, while properly training the men who present themselves to be trained for the ordained state.

Trends of Current Abuses

A critical question must be asked, one that demands an honest response. Does the Church have a sexual ethics problem, one that may be inadvertently contributing to the issues it is faced with today? I am convinced by the multiple evidence available that the response is in the affirmative. The ongoing ideological struggles between experts in the social and natural sciences tasked with investigating the human mind, gender and sexuality on one hand, and church experts and theologians who argue for various theological positions on human sexuality on the other hand, demonstrate the point being made here. The dust seems not to have settled but many in the Church's hierarchy are impatient with the perceived 'slow' analysis of the sciences and would rather prefer a particular reading of religious texts that preferences their own personal biases. It might be important to offer a quick note of caution;

¹ See James Martin, "John Jay Report: On Not Blaming Homosexual Priests," *America*, May 17, 2011, <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2011/05/17/john-jay-report-not-blaming-homosexual-priests>

science can be a gatekeeper of truth for the Church. When healthy relations are built with the scientific community, the Church's doctrinal positions will be greatly advanced and best address the demands of the signs of the times. Findings in cultural studies are today teaching us that gender binarism is a limited and sometimes a confusing way to speak of the breadth of our human condition.² How is the Church's theological anthropology responding to this new discovery? Is the Church's preference to appeal to biblical texts to buttress a particular type of anthropology an intentional resistance against these research findings?

Again, gender binarism is being challenged by new scientific discoveries in the area of intersex realities.³ Based on scientific discoveries, it is now common knowledge that there are "over 70 sex chromosomal" expressions within the human population.⁴ Thus, even language needs to be adjusted to account for such breadth of sex expressions in human population. Male and female gender identities are at best labels of erasure that simplify the complex expressions of human genders. They truncate the dynamic expressions of gender that science is exposing us to. Ignoring all these discoveries and simply upholding what is termed traditional views on gender binarism as was recently done by the Vatican dicastery, Congregation for Catholic Education in its recently released document on gender theory is problematic.⁵ The document states:

The Christian vision of anthropology sees sexuality as a fundamental component of one's personhood. It is one of its mode of being, of manifesting itself, communicating with others, and of feeling, expressing and living human love. Therefore, our sexuality plays an integral part in the development of our personality and in the process of its education: 'In fact, it is from [their] sex that the human person receives the characteristics which, on the biological,

² See Judith Lorber, "BELIEVING IS SEEING: Biology as ideology," *Gender and Society* 7, no. 4 (1993): 568 – 581.

³ See I. A. Hughes, "Intersex," *BJU International* 90, no. 8 (November 2002): 769 – 776. See also, U. S. National Library of Medicine, "Intersex," *Medical Encyclopedia*, accessed June 17, 2019, <https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001669.htm>

⁴ Christine E. Gudorf, *Body, Sex, and Pleasure. Reconstructing Christian Sexual Ethics* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1994), 4.

⁵ See Congregation for Education, "Male and Female He Created Them" *Towards A Path of Dialogue on The Question of Gender Theory in Education*, June 10, 2019, https://www.lifesitenews.com/images/local/CONGREGATION_FOR_CATHOLIC_EDUCATION_EN.pdf.

psychological and spiritual levels, make that person a man or a woman, and thereby largely condition his or her progress towards maturity and insertion into society'.⁶

The document fails to address the fact that Christian anthropology is not constructed outside of a cultural locus with all the biases that play out in such a locus. What the document calls "right season" as the defining marker of the Church's position on what it means to be human must be engaged critically for what it is.⁷ Reason is always culturally determined. The argument proposed in the document is to reject any "separation of sex from gender."⁸ The Jewish and Greco-Roman cultural influences on how the Church reasons and its vision of what it means to be human ought to be acknowledged as such. The Church's position does not exhaust the issue at hand. While the Church uphold a Greco-Roman metaphysical grounding of human sexuality, there are also legitimate arguments to be made based on other ways gender expressions are more fluid that are not grounded in metaphysics. Examples of non-metaphysical views of human sexuality can be found among the "Berdache in North America and the Fa'afafine in the Pacific, and the Kathoey in Thailand."⁹ Furthermore, if culture is the place where the divine-human drama is fully experienced, then cultural differences that define gender fluidity as found in different human communities should not be dismissed easily simply because they differ from those that have shaped the Church's views. Rather than a rigid vision of what it means to be human, these differences can become the possibility for embracing a richer vision of what it means to be human in a culturally diverse world.

The cautionary note from the American Jesuit theologian, James Martin that "the document is mainly a dialogue with philosophers and theologians, and with other church documents; but not with scientists and biologists, not with psychologists, and certainly not with LGBT people, whose experiences are given little if any weight" is something that should make everyone to be very concerned.¹⁰ To have an informed

⁶ Ibid., 4

⁷ Ibid., 1.

⁸ Ibid., 8.

⁹ World Health Organization, "Gender and Genetics," *Genomic Resource Centre*, accessed August 27, 2019, <https://www.who.int/genomics/gender/en/index1.html>

¹⁰ As cited by Philip Pulella, "Vatican Condemns Gender Theory as Bid to Destroy Nature," *Reuters*, June 10, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-vatican-gender-idUSKCN1TB20E>

opinion on an issue demands a deliberate and holistic engagement with all factors shaping it. To simply dismiss an aspect of the process and uphold views that are at best one sided and/or incomplete constitutes an irresponsible approach, especially given that it hails from the the teaching office of the Church. Conclusions like those expressed in the curia document on gender theory hurt people who are already at the margins of society and the Church. Perhaps, the following cautionary insight is helpful in shedding light on what is at stake here; "it is important to emphasize that although heterosexuality operates in part through the stabilization of gender norms, gender designates a dense site of significations that contain and exceed the heterosexual matrix. Although forms of sexuality do not unilaterally determine gender, a non-causal and non-reductive connection between sexuality and gender is nevertheless crucial to maintain."¹¹ Here, Judith Butler calls attention to the inherent political agender that heteronormativity invokes even though gender itself is fluid in its expressions.

Shifting focus, most of the research done on the priestly sex abuse scandal in the Church have been done in the western world. To conclude from that, as some Africans sometimes do, that priestly sex abuse scandal is not an African problem, is itself problematic Sex abuse is not a Western problem. It is a human problem. Thanks to the social sciences, we are more knowledgeable about how human conditioning plays out even in the most private aspects of our lives, our sexual preferences.¹² Again, even though no current study has been done in the context of Africa, the churches of Africa can also learn from the insights and experiences of those in the Western world. It is on that note that I intend to call attention to some insights found in the recent study done on the sex abuse crisis in the United States of America.

In June 2002, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops approved the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People. This charter formed the National Review Board that had the responsibility to commission a study of the factors shaping the priestly sex abuse scandal in the United States' Roman Catholic Church. The National Review Board collaborated with the John Jay College of Criminal Justice of the City University of New York to determine the scope and

¹¹ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter* (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2011), 182.

¹² Gudorf, *Body, Sex, and Pleasure*, 5.

factors shaping the sex abuse scandal in the Church.¹³ The report on their findings has come to be known as the John Jay Report. The report focused its studies of sexual abuse in the Church between 1950 and 2002. It showed there were over 10,000 sexual abuse allegations brought against priests and deacons working in dioceses in the United States. It also showed that 4392 priests out of 109, 694 priests were accused of sexual abuse of minors and adults. Percentage wise, 4% of the number of priests working in the country were accused of sexual molestation of minors. I should be clear here by stating the obvious; the report was not extensive enough. It did not study the members of the hierarchy and members of lay religious orders. Recent revelations have shown that the scandal is not just limited to priests or deacons or even to male members of the Church with leadership roles. Female religious communities have had their own share of the scandal as well.¹⁴ The sex abuse scandal is one that affects every aspect of the Church, ordained and lay.

The John Jay Report offers some interesting profiles of the abuses and the abusers that may be of use to those interested in revamping priestly formation in the twenty-first century. Grooming tactics were prominent ways the abusers used in carrying out their illicit sexual contacts with their victims. For example, the abusers took time to build a trusting relationship with their victims and then threatening them should they betray their confidence and reveal what abuses were occurring. The age profile of the abusers is also telling. Half of those accused of abuse were below the age of 35 when they first abused their victims. Less than 7% of the abusers were themselves victims of sexual abuse as minors. 19% were also dealing with alcoholism. 70% were formed in seminaries under pre-Vatican II seminary formation programs; when issues related to sexuality were not usually addressed as part of seminary formation.

¹³ See *The Nature and Scope of Sexual Abuse of Minors By Catholic Priests and Deacons in the United States 1950-2002. A Research Study Conducted by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice The City University of New York* (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2004)

¹⁴ Carol Kuruvilla and Jessica Blank, "Women Sexually Abused by Catholic Nuns Speak Up: She Told Me It Was 'God's Love,'" *HuffPost*, April 11, 2019, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/nuns-sexual-abuse-catholic-church_n_5c76f9bae4b0d3a48b563001; Isabel Vincent, "Inside the Horrifying, Unspoken World of Sexually Abusive Nuns," *New York Post*, February 16, 2019, <https://nypost.com/2019/02/16/inside-the-horrifying-unspoken-world-of-sexually-abusive-nuns/>

Formation Styles and Lessons to be Learned

It is important to note the importance of viewing formation as a process that must be holistic; one that ought to engage the different aspects of human life if it is to have any transformative impact on the ones being formed. It is in view of this fact that in 1992, Pope John Paul II gave to the Roman Catholic Church a post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (I will give you shepherds – Jer. 3:15). In this document, John Paul II articulates the need for formators of future priests to take seriously the need to tailor their education to meet the needs of our times. He called for a clear understanding of holistic formation that accounted for the four integral aspects of formation: human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral. It is worth pointing out the bold claim made by John Paul II, who argued for human formation as the core of all holistic formation on which the other three aspects of formation hinge.¹⁵ His vision of the human person is conditioned by what he calls “affective maturity.”¹⁶ In his words, “Affective maturity presupposes an awareness that love has a central role in human life... We are speaking of a love that involves the entire person, in all his or her aspects - physical, psychic and spiritual – and which is expressed in the ‘nuptial meaning’ of the human body...”¹⁷ By referencing the body as having a “nuptial meaning,” the pope is stating that even in the celibate state, the body of a priest is a body meant to enter into relationships with others. The priest is a “man of communion” with others.¹⁸ Following the release of this document, many houses of formation in the western world and in Africa began the much needed conversation to figure out how to revamp their formation programs to allow for a clear understanding and expressions of these four aspects of formation.

Furthermore, to show how much work still needs to be done even by the religious communities that want to make a difference, it is proper to share an incident that occurred in 1996, during my senior year as a philosophy student in the seminary, a course on human sexuality was introduced as an elective. I happened to have signed up for it. During our first week of class meetings it dawned on me that what was needed was not just a course but a total re-education of priests and seminarians

¹⁵ John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: Pastores Dabo Vobis*, March 25, 1992, 43, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_25031992_pastores-dabo-vobis.html.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

for their seemingly lack of training in the area of human sexuality due to what occurred in one of the class meetings. The instructor kept referring to Origen, the great theologian of the Early Church, as someone who had 'cut off his third leg,' a euphemism for castrating himself. When I pushed further by asking the instructor to explain how humans mutated from having three legs to now having two, I was made to know that such types of questions were not going to be entertained by him. From this experience, I realized that the issues at stake were deeper than just taking a class on human sexuality. The anthropological vision that has defined how we perceive ourselves as sexual beings, our comfort level with our own sexual conditioning, our linguistic comfort in carrying out such discourses all needed to be critiqued deeply and if necessary, transformed radically if the vision of Pope John Pail II was to be realized for the Church, particularly in the Nigerian context. I am not alone in making this observation. Kevin T. Kelly's analysis of sexual ethics comes to a similar conclusion. He writes; "[the] reason why renewal and transformation are constantly needed is the fact that our knowledge of reality is constantly increasing and changing and this inevitably affects the way we live our lives. For instance, it makes an enormous difference if our understanding of homosexuality changes from regarding those who engage in same-sex behaviour as either deviant or sick 'heterosexual' persons to seeing them as persons whose fundamental orientation attracts them to persons of the same sex."¹⁹

Let me repeat an earlier question I posed, does the Church have a sexual ethics problem? Perhaps the common experiences of some Nigerian priests may help address this question. Many of them, prior to 1993, never had any form of sexual education during their formative year for the priesthood during their time as minor seminarians going through the adolescent stages of their lives or as senior seminarian studying philosophy and theology. They were simply left alone to figure out the biological changes occurring in their bodies without any guidance on how to address their questions about their sexuality. Unfortunately, the situation does not seem to have changed that much since the 1990s. Efforts being made to embrace new forms of formation that are conducive to current realities of our times are being done in piecemeal. There are still many seminaries in Nigeria that are yet to take seriously ways of articulating formation programs that address the four pillars of formation articulated in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*. Persons are assigned to

¹⁹ Kevin T. Kelly, *New Directions in Sexual Ethics. Moral Theology and the Challenge of Aids* (London and Washington: Geoffrey Chapman, 1998), 25.

formation houses that ought not be forming others because they have their own psychological struggles themselves. Some do not have any training as formators except the credentials of being ordained men. This is a costly reality that the Nigerian Church ought to take serious steps to address if it is to avoid its own tsunami of sex abuse crisis in the future. Nigeria, like many other countries in Africa, is fortunate to have young vocations. Minor seminaries are flourishing. But it is important to state clearly that with this gift of vocations comes the responsibility of providing proper formation programs that would help seminarians to become persons with healthy self-image and appreciation for healthy boundaries.

Before transitioning to the next section of this work, I would like to call attention to a key aspect of priestly formation that formators of future priests ought to address honestly if they hope to authentically address the sex abuse scandal that faces our Church. This has to do with the philosophy behind our formation programs. Let me pose it in the form of a question. Why do we have priestly formation programs? The establishment of formal structures for priestly formation came from the Council of Trent's attempt at curbing ideas it had deemed injurious to orthodoxy.²⁰ Men who were to serve the Church were to be trained clearly in ways that the radical ideas of the times could be curtailed.²¹ Interestingly, the psychological background for this approach and attitude is intricately linked to a somewhat problematic attitude toward all things that do not fit perfectly well with the stated goals of *raison d'être* for seminaries.²² Issues dealing with human sexuality would necessarily be seen as suspect, especially in a church with a strong Manichaean heritage; one that frowns on the sensual, and considers the sexual as the pathway for tempting and corrupting the purity of the soul.

No one denies the fact that the establishment of structured priestly formation has yielded some positive results. Intellectual formation has been a great success for priests over the centuries. Lovely spiritual practices have been developed through the quasi monastic settings of seminaries. A strong sense of community among the future members of the clergy is developed during these formative years. However, with regard to sexual formation, the outcome has been very poor, if we are to be honest with ourselves. Having junior seminaries where young boys

²⁰ H. J. Schroeder, *Canons and Decree of the Council of Trent. Original Text with English Translation* (St. Louis, MO/London, 1941), 175 – 179.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 175.

²² *Ibid.*

are formed before their adolescent years, and are never taught the ways they can form healthy relations with themselves, the opposite sex, and persons of the same sex is recipe for disaster. As reputable psychologists would opine, dating is part of holistic human formation.²³ Through the dating game, a young man or a young woman begins to learn how to negotiate appropriate boundaries for themselves and for those they may have feelings for. They begin to learn to appreciate the fact that consent must be clearly given and sustained always, otherwise it is not consent. As these young men and women attain adulthood, their affective maturity is expected to align itself also with those of the spiritual and intellectual. When one listens carefully to all the traumatic stories of the sex abuse cases involving ordained men in the Roman Catholic Church, one thing is common: these accused have no sense of what healthy affective boundaries entail. Even with the level of intellectual education they have attained in life, their poor social skills, manipulative personalities, puerile tricks at luring their victims to enter into a relationship of trust speak to a disconnect between the different levels of their formation. It is as though one of the four integral pillars of formation (affects) is not properly aligned with others. I am of the opinion that this is not an accidental reality. A formative process that does not account for proper affective formation would logically lead to such a crisis as is the case with the Church Strategically, the Church has developed a negative attitude towards all that would threaten its expectations for a somewhat puritanistic state of being. Rather than explore the broad nature of human sexuality as an essential condition for priestly formation for men whose ministerial duties will entail relating with other humans through the breadth of their human affects, a form of spiritualizing of the affects has come to replace that which needs to be addressed in a more pragmatic and concrete manner. Celibacy and chastity are spoken of using the spiritual motifs of the heavenly bride. Canonically, the Council of Trent during its twenty-fourth session decreed in Canon 10 that anyone who would teach that the married state was better than the celibate state was to be anathematized.²⁴ A huge mistake on the part of the Church is not to take seriously new fields of knowledge, especially in the social sciences that deal with the

²³ See W. A. Collin, et al., "Adolescent Romantic Relationships," *Annual Review of Psychology*, 60, (2009): 631 – 652; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "Healthy Dating Relationships in Adolescence," *HHS.gov*, accessed August 27, 2019, <https://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/adolescent-development/healthy-relationships/dating/index.html>

²⁴ Schroeder, *Canons and Decree of the Council of Trent*, 182.

sexualized being. It is on that note, that I want to offer some concrete interventions to help articulate a more robust priestly formation program for the Nigerian Church and other local and national churches that may be facing similar problems.

Envisioning A New Formation Paradigm

Priestly formation is not for its own sake. It is for the good of the Church's work in God's world. Those who chose to respond to the call to serve in the ministerial priesthood are chosen from the community of the baptized in churches located in particular cultures and societies. Understanding these facts is fundamental in helping to build up a formation program that is relevant for the times. Thus, any seminary formation today in the Church, be it in Nigeria or anywhere in the global north, must take seriously the reading of the signs of the times. The Church of the twenty-first century is not going to be similar to that of the twentieth century. We currently live in the age technology. Different types of communities are springing up globally that go beyond previous understandings of that term. New notions of ecclesial structures are being formed. A broader understanding of ecclesial leadership is fast becoming the norm. The laity is becoming very educated theologically and sometimes more informed theologically than the ordained as seems to be the case in the western world. Nigeria is not immune from these changes. The existential and ultimate questions being asked by the young are conditioned by the totality of their experiences in more globalized and pluralistic contexts. With the above in mind, I offer the first of four interventions to help articulate new formative programs for the future members of the clergy in Nigeria; priestly formation in Nigeria today should begin with a serious reflection on the signs of the times in the country. What does it mean to be church in today's Nigeria, where religious and cultural pluralism are key components of the lived experiences of the people? What and how does it mean to be church in an era when Nigeria is positioned to become the largest economy in Africa and may become a prominent player in the global economy? How and in what ways can the Church be relevant to a society where women are rightly reclaiming their roles in society? How and in what ways can the Church minister to the people of God when sexual rights are being called for by members of the LGBTQ+ communities in Nigeria and beyond? Simply reciting old arguments to address new discourses is inadequate..

To read the signs of the times is to position the Church for its role as an agent of the new evangelization. This new evangelization ought

not be focused solely on making Christians out of people. Rather, it ought to go beyond that. It must help people appreciate who they are as sexualized beings. Today, we live in an era of full self-expressions. This is the era of the #METOO Movement. This is the era of #BlackLivesMatter Movement. This is the era of the celebration of the Pride Movement that has secured some universal recognitions for members of the LGBTQ+ community. The Church in Nigeria cannot function as though it is isolated from these global social movements. It should also resist the temptation to want to appeal to simplistic catechesis that offers shallow answers to complex issues. Human sexuality is a complex matter; one that must not be seen anymore from the locus of the problematic. Making the hermeneutical shift that moves from the problematic to the locus of giftedness can help the Church to see possibilities of hope and new knowledge it may not have been capable of seeing previously. Stated differently, " a Christian theology of creation means that we accept the whole of reality, ourselves included, as given and gift. The task of human freedom is to become who we are and we cannot do that without continually trying to understand better who we are. This is a never-ending process."²⁵ Thus, reading the signs of the times is itself a form of prophetic response to the call of discipleship that is relevant to our era. The Church must be seen and must also see itself as an instrument of God's mercy. Pope Francis has made his pontificate a reflector of this theological and ministerial stance. There is beauty in such a strategy. For too long, the Church has embraced a rigid normative approach to human sexuality that is defined radically by Western notions of natural law, which, of itself, is culturally conditioned. A legitimate question the Nigerian Church must respond to is this: are there no cultural insights from Nigeria that can help the Church to embrace a more humanistic, personalistic, and holistic understanding of human sexuality that are not radically limited by the dualisms of good and evil or right and wrong that seem to have defined Western understandings of sexual identities and expressions? This question calls for Nigerian theologians and the members of the Church to take seriously their responsibilities as educated members of the Church to articulate an Afro-Nigerian theology on human sexuality that speaks to what it means to be human in the Nigerian and African contexts.

²⁵ Kelly, *New Directions in Sexual Ethics*, 28.

Let me offer a second intervention. Christianity's Achilles heel has always been a bias for a dualistic vision of the human person. Question three of the Penny Catechism begins by asking in whose image and likeness humans are made. The corresponding answer is that it is in God's image that humans are made. Then the next question asks categorically if the likeness of God is "in your [one's] body or in your [one's] soul." The response is telling. "This likeness to God is chiefly in my [one's] soul."²⁶ For centuries, many Christians have recited these lines and have never stopped to question the theological rationale behind such a glaring dualistic anthropology. If the soul is what "chiefly" represents the divine likeness in us, one is thus compelled to ask the question, what then does the body represent? Christian theology has a rich and yet very sad history of depicting the body and all that it represents as a pathway for temptations and the corruption of the soul. What does this mean in light of sexual ethics today? I would say, everything. The sexual crisis the Church faces today can be traced to this paradoxical dualism inherent in its theological anthropology. Not being able to see the human body with all its embodied affectivity as epiphanic gifts of God's encounter with creation reduces the Church's capacity to mediate a rich narrative of how God works in and with us in the concreteness of our embodiment. God did not become human "chiefly" in our soul. Rather, the incarnation speaks of a God who chose to become fully one with us in all that we are except sin. In the incarnation, all dualistic arguments are rendered invalid. God became not just a human being but a sexualized being. It is important that theologians take this seriously. The sexualized God-human experienced all the emotions attached to sexual self-discoveries and these include all the hormonal realities that play out in a sexualized person. I recall a conversation I had with a fellow theologian some years ago when I made the comment that the adolescent Jesus must have had wet dreams and thought constantly of the persons he had 'crushes' on as do typical adolescents who are going through puberty. I could see my colleague almost having a nervous breakdown. He just could not conceive of his Jesus as being described in such 'dirty' terms. For him, sexuality is a dirty thing and at best sinful. The key word here is experience. The theologian, Christine Gudorf makes the following observation: "Though experience is always open to fallible interpretation, the bottom line is that experience is, and always has

²⁶ *The Penny Catechism: A Catechism of Christian Doctrine* (Charlotte, North Carolina: TAN Books, 2012), 1.

been, the most reliable source for discerning God's will."²⁷ It is not the abstract postulations of reason as though reason has its own embodiment different from its unity with the body.

The Church is in urgent need of a holistic approach to human sexuality, one that must move away from beginning the conversation from fallenness, sinfulness, and evil to a starting point that stresses the beauty, sacredness, and fulfilling nature of being a sexualized being. There is too much shame in the current theological discourse on human sexuality. The Church needs to move to a place of pride in addressing what it means to be fully human. This responsibility must begin with the actual formation of future ministers of the Church. One wonders how those who are called to mediate the fullness of God's life to the church and world and who are trained to see a fundamental aspect of that divine-human life as innately sinful can themselves be effective in their callings. Are they not being set up to fail even before they begin their ministry? The challenge for seminary formators today is to address the following questions: How comfortable and healthy are the discussions around human sexuality in the curriculum? How matured are the candidates for the priesthood to express who they are as sexual beings, and what concrete ways do they embrace to ensure that their affects are nurtured while also embarking on the formation of the other aspects of their lives? I do not think the Church is capable of bringing about this transformative move on its own. This leads me to offer a third intervention that may be helpful to the Church as it addresses the lacunae present in its vision of the human person.

Human collective wisdom has given us many angles for viewing and understanding our world. Groundbreaking research continues to be carried out in different fields. Disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, psychology, neurobiology, and many more continue to enrich our collective understanding of what it means to be human in the totality of our embodiment. Indeed, the natural sciences continue to help us to understand how our affects and decision-making processes continue to be shaped by the chemical makeup of our bodies. All these discoveries are a wealth of knowledge that can help the Church to continue to grow in its theological articulation of what it means to be human. May I offer a very direct critique of a strand in the theological tradition of the Church and maybe it might help us to make the much-needed shift needed to help address the current sex abuse crisis. There

²⁷ Gudorf, *Body, Sex, and Pleasure*, 12.

is a strong natural law tradition in the Church that postulates self-evident moral laws that are universal to all human communities, irrespective of their unique contexts.²⁸ Many of the Church's positions on issues dealing with human sexuality, reproductive health, and even the recent document from the Congregation for Catholic Education on gender theory demonstrate a clear bias for a particular way of reading the natural law tradition. But one has to ask the critical question: Is this particular reading of natural law done in honest dialogue with these other disciplines and their findings or is this reading of natural law based on an insular approach that preferences a specific narrative even when that narrative has no evidential credence? It is important to note here that at the core of our humanity, we experience our own identities as genderized and sexual beings. To simply deny the legitimacy of that self-awareness and existential experience may be a dangerous path to follow for the Church if it is to fully be a medium of hope and life for many who seek its counsel at moments in their lives when they need its nurturing and supporting guidance. The starting point for the Church's position on human sexuality ought always to be an open dialogue with other disciplines. The marriage of reason and faith is not a marriage of convenience. It ought to be one of authentic dialogue, however difficult that dialogue may be. There are many in our world who continue to struggle with their own sexuality. They are plagued by a deep sense of shame because of who they are as sexual beings in comparison to societal expectations. Their courage to embrace their sexuality as an essential part of who they are even when it goes against heteronormativity ought to be commended and not condemned. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. The curia document on gender theory concludes that such a step taken by these persons or by those who argue for such a process are embracing "the expression of a widespread way of thinking and acting in today's culture that confuses 'genuine freedom with the idea that each individual can act arbitrarily as if there were no truths, values and principles to provide guidance, and everything were possible and permissible'." These are not experiences that come from a place of abuse of freedom as the recent document on gender theory from the Vatican curia seems to suggest. These are existential struggles that sometimes lead to unimaginable self-hate that words cannot describe. Recent study on the experiences of members of the LGBTQ+ community show high levels of suicide attempts, mental

²⁸ See John Paul II, *Papal Encyclical Veritatis Splendor*, August 6, 1993, 50, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor.html

illnesses, and low self-esteem.²⁹ How ought the Church's vision of human sexuality to speak to these realities in ways that holistic embrace of oneself becomes the focus? This is the current challenge that a robust sexual ethics must address. Again, seminaries cannot exempt themselves from this process. Seminary curricula should be saturated with courses in the social sciences and the natural sciences that shed light on what it means to be fully human. What is a course in theological anthropology that does not speak to the realities of cultural, social, philosophical, linguistic anthropologies? What does it mean to be made in God's image when the embodied human's social location is not the starting point of any God-human talk? Who is Jesus Christ without his social location as a Jewish man living in an occupied land under strict patriarchal systems? Of what value is Jesus Christ to adolescents who are going through puberty and struggling with all the hormonal changes in their bodies if he is not presented to them as one who went through the same experiences and came out of them unscathed? Our theological discourses in the seminaries must now be as pragmatic and concrete as they can be if we are to have a handle on the sex abuse crisis. Our current crisis lies in the strong urge to flee to the utopic state of abstract discourses on what it means to be human. We are not words. We are embodied beings living in the concreteness of the here and now.

I want to begin my fourth intervention for a new paradigm for priestly formation that speaks to our realities today with the question: Why seminary formation? This question is the key to understanding how and why the Church is faced today with the crisis of inauthenticity among those ordained and tasked with the responsibility to be the media of God's mercy to God's own people. This question comes also from my own experiences as one who had the pleasure of receiving priestly formation under two very different models, one that is aligned to a more traditional model and another more progressive that seems to be taking seriously insights from discoveries from the social sciences.

A critical observation of priestly formation both in Nigeria and in the United States of America validates the following comments; in Nigerian priestly formation programs that I am conversant with, the primary focus is to weed-out candidates for the priesthood who are judged to be lacking in virtue or character. One could argue that the very fact that there are so many candidates for priestly formation along

²⁹ A. P. Haas, et al. "Suicide and Suicide Risk in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Populations: Review and Recommendations," *Journal of Homosexuality* 58, no. 1 (2011): 10 – 51.

with fewer resources to carryout 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 for the priesthood to learn from their mistakes as they fall short of the expectations for those in the priestly formation program, inauthenticity will logically become the way of being for those who desire to become priests at all cost. On the other hand, a different model that is currently being practiced by a growing number of dioceses in the United States is what I have labeled the full authenticity model. It entails a formative process where candidates for the priesthood are invited to self-disclose who they are, and that includes their sexual orientation. Whatever level one finds oneself in the sexual orientation spectrum, sexuality/sexual orientation is received as gifts that can be used to help the candidate to fully live out their calling to voluntary celibacy for which the priesthood calls. For this goal to be realized, concrete steps are taken to help the candidates in formation to embrace their inner truths as sexual persons. There are series of evaluations throughout the formative process and these include expert opinions from the social sciences. Candidates for the priesthood are considered human beings who are on a life journey, and that means they need all the professional, formal, and informal support at the different stages in that journey. Knowing that one is in formation not to be judged or weeded out but to be helped to discern correctly and acquire the needed skills, talents, and virtues for the ministry ahead allows for these candidates to open themselves up at their core to the process even if that opening up means embracing their own vulnerabilities. There is beauty in such a process when it is done right.

Conclusion

It is important that I acknowledge the many men and women who have embraced the works of the Church wholeheartedly and made it their lifelong calling to work with God's people. The current priest sex abuse scandal should not diminish our collective respect for these men and women. The Church will always be God's own Church. While human frailties may be a source of scandal for God's people, it is important that we understand that God's grace always remains with the Church. We are the Church. As church, we embody the transforming grace of the Spirit that renews everything and makes holy again that which sin has desecrated. To ensure that the priest sex abuse scandal is addressed, holistic solutions need to be embraced by all parties involved. Priestly formation programs need to be constantly updated based on reading closely the signs of the times.

In this work, I have intentionally moved away from the simplistic conclusions that tend to define the current clergy sex abuse crisis as being perpetuated by a culture of denial and a desire to root out anyone with non-heterosexual tendencies in the Roman Catholic priesthood. Some have even argued that there is a “gay mafia” operating in the Vatican.³⁰ There is no evidence justifying such a sensational conclusion. I do not want to give it the legitimacy it does not deserve. However, there is clear evidence that the Church has a sexual abuse crisis amongst its clergy. The crisis seems to be growing as we begin to see that it goes beyond just priests and deacons. The entire clergy (bishops, presbyters, and deacons) have a sex abuse crisis on its hands and it needs to figure out how to address this issue. The recent decision of Pope Francis instructing how the crisis ought to be addressed by leaving it in the hands of the bishops and the Roman curia is somewhat problematic.³¹ No institution can fully reform itself internally. I am aware that the pontiff is canonically bound to act within the juridical tradition of the Church where the local church has its own autonomy. However, a greater good is now at stake, the integrity of the Church. This greater good calls for a new approach to Canon Law and its inherent tradition. Without reducing other bishops to mere secretaries of the Bishop of Rome, it might be useful for the Church to articulate new canonical regulations that give the laity deliberative powers to help the members of the clergy to be faithful to their commitments to the people of God, especially in matters dealing with monitoring the unfolding sexual abuse crisis among the ranks of the ordained. It is time for the Church to abandon narratives and the psychology of power and embrace the psychology of service and humility. The current sex abuse scandal has injured the Church at its very core. How it heals from this self-imposed injury will be determined by its ability to embrace its own vulnerabilities. A church that speaks of vulnerability as the gateway of experiencing the

³⁰ “‘Gay Mafia’ Blamed for Papal Resignation in Cardinal’s Report,” *LifeSiteNews.com*, February 22, 2013, <https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/gay-mafia-blamed-for-papal-resignation-in-cardinals-report>

³¹ See Francis, *Apostolic Letter. On The Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Persons*, March 26, 2019, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20190326_latutela-deiminori.html. See also, *Law No. CCXCVII. On The Protection of Minor and Vulnerable Persons*, March 26, 2019, http://www.vatican.va/resources/resources_protezioneminori-legge297_20190326_en.html. See also, *Guidelines for The Protection of Children and Vulnerable Persons*, March 26, 2019, http://www.vatican.va/resources/resources_protezioneminori-lineequida_20190326_en.html.

divine must now demonstrate to the world and to itself that it does not only speak the words, it also knows how to live them out.

Secrecy is the scourge of the Church, and this attitude must be resisted by the Church if it is to have any legitimacy in today's world. The argument being made by some members of the clergy that information should be withheld from the members of the laity in order to protect them from being scandalized is disturbing. This was the case with the removal of Richard Burke, S.P.S. from the office of Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Benin City, Nigeria in 2011. Knowing that he had been accused of sexual improprieties with a minor and had been consequently been removed from office by the Vatican, pending the outcome of the investigations, the official position of the archdiocese was that the archbishop was on sick leave. When I inquired from some of the priests why the correct information was not being passed on to the members of the laity, I was told that the reason was to prevent scandal. The members of the laity are not infants who would be scandalized should they find out that their priest or bishop is a child molester. They do have the relevant knowledge that will help the Church address this crisis. The real scandal lies in the fact that the ordained hides the truth from the laity and operates as though all is well. The maturity of the members of the Church is conditioned not in clerical ordination; rather, it is in our shared baptism in Christ. If this is the case then, it is important that canon law reflects this sense of maturity on the part of the baptized and offer them their legitimate role as stakeholders in making sure the Church truly becomes the medium for experiencing the fullness of divine life and not the trauma of abuse that so many have and continue to experience from those ordained men who cause harm to the innocent and trusting ones in the Church.

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