

**Vocation Discernment:
A Study on Adequate Vocation Discernment in the
Seminaries of the Southeastern Region of Nigeria**

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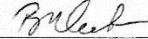
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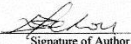
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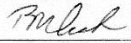
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Abstract

The study set out to investigate the process of vocation discernment for the Catholic priesthood in the southeastern region of Nigeria. The intention is to shine light on any areas of weakness in the process and provide some tools to enhance the vocation discernment. The research is a qualitative phenomenological study that utilizes interviews for data acquisition. It employs pastoral circle model. The ten participants involved in the study are five active priests and five candidates for the priesthood from some of the seminaries in the region. The study found that there is vocation explosion in the region but the seminaries do not have all the formation personnel they need to professionally manage the number of seminarians. Due to the large number, there is the problem of one-on-one personal touch of the formators with all the candidates at some of the seminaries. As a result, some candidates go through the process without all the scrutiny they should undergo. It was also found that there are still some elements of colonial mentality among the seminary authorities which affects the fraternal relationship that should exist between the seminarians and the formators. Rather, it creates distrust, discomfort and fears of expulsion for many seminarians. For this, some seminarians put on “protective” false self to retain their admission in the seminary for as long as possible. The research attempts to provide solution to some of the problems but it provides a stepping stone for further studies on vocation discernment in the region and country.

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Dedication

I dedicate this

Dissertation to my beloved late parents:

Paul Nwaka Ohanekwu

and

Juliana Ada Nwaka (Makigbo)

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Decisions, decisions! How often we find ourselves saying that when we have to make a choice. We have all seen people hold up the smorgasbord line because they couldn't make up their minds what to eat. You have probably spent much time trying to decide what to wear, or what record to buy, or whom to invite to a party. Decisions get tougher as they touch more important areas of our life: Should I take the new job offer? Should I go to college or get a job? Should I break up with this guy or keep hoping that he will change? (Pable 1980, 17)

In the daily events of life, one faces various choices that call for different kinds of decisions. As the above citation indicates, some of the decisions a person faces are simple or easy to make while others are complicated and difficult. Put differently, there are decisions that can be made instantly or in a short period of minutes, hours or days while some may take as long as weeks, months and even years depending on the nature, the need, significance or the impact it may have in a person's life (Kiechle 2005, 10, 11; Smith 1997, 13, 14; Pable 1980, 17, 18; Liebert 2008, 7).

In decision making, the decider is expected to make the right decision but there are cases where people have made wrong decisions due to poor judgment or confusion arising from the available options. Wrong decisions and choices often beget unfavorable results and are often closely accompanied by regrets. According to Kiechle (2005, 13) wrong decisions and choices “make us lose valuable time, reduce the quality of our lives, or may even damage us for the rest of our lives. We can hardly afford to make mistakes in our performance-oriented culture.” Kiechle is aware of the fact that people can learn

from mistakes, correct themselves and still achieve their goal. But he is of the view that the initial mistake can cost a valuable time and may lead to the problems he articulated above. However, whether there is an initial mistake or not, it is through right decisions and choices that one becomes the person God calls one to be (Liebert 2008, 7).

As stated above, decisions are not always easy to make. Some of them are difficult and complicated. Sometimes it will be the important decisions that one will find very difficult to make. With regard to the effects of decisions, some of them are light and short-lived, while some are very significant and long-lasting. As Kiechle (2005) puts it, “Failures resulting from faulty decisions are particularly painful and often no longer curable because of the guilt associated with them” (13). A person will naturally be very meticulous when he or she faces a decision that may have long-lasting impact, sometimes referred to as life-changing decision. The decision to get married and to a particular person or to pursue a particular career or profession is not always easy and carries long-lasting and life-changing effects in varying degrees (Kiechle, 11, 12).

The decision to become a priest is one of the life-long and life-changing decisions that a man can make in the Catholic Church. It requires more than a simple or causal decision. It requires adequate discernment before the final decision or a discerned decision can be made. It is the goal of this study to address the necessity of adequate discernment for the vocation to the priesthood.

a) Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to address the problem of vocation discernment for the Catholic priesthood in Nigeria seminaries with particular reference to the southeastern region of the country. This study limits its frame of reference, to the traditional and

dominant “Roman Theology” operative within the Nigerian Catholic context, so as to be of immediate use in Nigerian Catholic seminaries as presently constituted. The study does not address, or include insights from, the important wider contemporary theological debates across the global Catholic communion about the nature and purpose of ordained ministry. For that reason, I have added to the study two appendices on the theological history of ordained ministry and the role of the ordained ministry within the people of God.

This study intends to provide seminary formators with additional tools for more in-depth vocation discernment. The kind of discernment that is in consonance with the Second Vatican Council and the first African Synod as contained in the proposition of the Rectors and Spiritual Directors of the major seminaries of West and Central Africa. The proposition intends “to establish firm procedures and criteria for the selection of candidates at all levels so that those candidates not adapted to the ministry might be directed beforehand to seek their vocation in other areas of Church life” (Synod of Bishops: *Instrumentum Laboris*, 1994, n. 28). Adequate vocation discernment of the future priests is of immense value to the Church and also of great benefit to each candidate whether or not he becomes a priest. It will save the Catholic Church from the embarrassment of ordaining unsuitable candidate to the priesthood. It will also save suitable candidate the heart wrecking agony, the physical and emotional devastation associated with being mistakenly judged unsuitable for the ministry. Put differently, in-depth or adequate vocation discernment as stated in this text will enable the seminaries in this region to harvest every genuine vocation to the priesthood. At the same time, it will ensure that the candidate whose vocation is not genuine is charitably directed to other

areas of church ministry suitable for him. This text intends to serve as a scheme and a resource for the “firm procedures and criteria for the selection of candidate” (n. 28) as demanded by the Rectors and Spiritual Directors mentioned above so as to enable each God-given ministerial vocation to flourish.

The task of vocation discernment, it is not the easiest part of the process of formation of candidates for the Catholic priesthood. It has internal and external aspects, also known as internal forum and external forum. Both aspects are equally necessary to discern and ordain the right candidate. The internal aspect of discernment pertains to the spiritual life of the candidate while external aspect pertains to his material or physical life. Both tasks are not easy because they involve ascertaining the mind of God. That is, if God really called the candidate for the priesthood and to ascertain if the candidate has the right intention. The Bible asks, who can fathom the mind of God (Is 30:14; Rom 11:34; 1Cor 2:16), or understand the deceitful human heart (Jer 17:9; 1Cor 2:11). The internal aspect also involves prayers and may include some spiritual activity like the Ignatian exercise of spiritual discernment where a person offers prayers and seeks signs of God’s response for approval or disapproval of the issue at stake (Kiechle 2005; Farnham et al, 1991; Ignatius Loyala 2014 – *Spiritual Exercises*). The external aspect, as different from the internal aspect or forum of vocation discernment, employs practically verifiable measures like mental and physical health, academic performance, relational behaviors, etc. to discern a candidate’s vocation. However, its empirical verifiable characteristic does not make it easier and does not absolve it from certain problems or difficulties associated with human endeavors. Whatever is worth doing is worth doing well, says a life principle. As such, the difficulties associated with vocation discernment need not lead

to inadequate vocation discernment but serve to strengthen the achievement of the desired goal – adequate vocation discernment.

b) Thesis Statement

As stated above, both the internal and external forums of vocation discernment are difficult, complex and delicate tasks. At the same time concerted effort should be made, by utilizing all the available tools of vocation discernment, to ensure that no suitable candidate is denied ordination on the one hand. On the other hand, those candidates judged unsuitable need not be ordained as has been portrayed in the southeastern region. When the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council declared that the formation of future priests is of “supreme importance,” and a necessary process for all Catholic priests of whatever rite (Flannery ed. 1996, 365). They also affirmed the “supreme importance” and necessity of adequate vocation discernment which is an integral part of the process of priestly formation. For instance, at priestly ordination ceremony when a candidate is presented to the ordaining prelate, the prelate asks if the candidate has been judged worthy for ordination; that is, if he has been adequately scrutinized, discerned to have genuine vocation. The presenter usually responds: “After inquiry among the people of Christ and upon recommendation of those concerned with his training, I testify that he has been found worthy” (Paul VI 1991, 39). With this act of public affirmation that adequate vocation discernment and training have been accomplished, the ordination ceremony will then proceed. There is no doubt that a candidate who is not called can find his way to the seminary and become well trained for the priesthood, but that does not change the fact that he is not called for the ministry. It is adequate vocation discernment that reveals who is called and that is what should afford

the seminary educators or the formation team much more impetus to confidently declare a candidate suitable for the priesthood. And so, vocation discernment necessarily deserves every attention and effort it can get in the process of formation for the priesthood as stated in the above thesis.

c) Problem Statement

While the formation teams of the seminaries in the southeastern region have done and are doing commendable job in the field under discussion, it has been observed that everything is not as it should be with regard to vocation discernment. The problems range from elements of human weakness and lack or insufficient tools needed for adequate vocation discernment. These include but not limited to i) Vocation Boom and Discernment ii) Relationship with Authorities iii) False Self iv) Latent Harmful Trait vi) Unmerited Expulsions

i) Vocation Boom and Vocation Discernment

The Catholic Church in the southeastern region is currently enjoying a vibrant vocation to the priesthood and religious life. One of the authors who are well grounded on issues of the church in the region, Ihenacho, describes the momentum in these words: “One of the greatest features of contemporary Igbo Catholicism is the almost uncontrollable upsurge in vocations to the priesthood and religious life. The situation has become so remarkable and unique that it is often described as ‘vocation explosion’ or ‘vocation boom’” (2004, 150). “Igbo” is one of the tribes that make up the southeastern region with vibrant vocations. However, while the region is enjoying the teeming population of seminarians, the regional seminaries are confronted with the problem of insufficient number of educators to handle the seminarians.

Teaching positions in the seminary are not offered to every interested aspirant. At the same time, such teaching apostolate is not very attractive to every teacher. Consequently, the number of formators is not commensurate with the number of seminarians in most of the seminaries. Seminarians greatly outnumber formators, therefore it is virtually impossible for a regular one-on-one formator-seminarian meetings. These meetings are necessary for adequate vocation discernment. The second Vatican Council advises that seminarians should be divided into smaller groups in large seminaries to allow for better personal development of individuals, to have a good handle of every seminarian, to ensure that every seminarian is visible and adequately evaluated and at the same time retain the unity of the program and studies (Flannery ed. 1996, 370, n. 7). Even with the grouping, the number of seminarians per formator is still more than a formator can normally handle. Consequently, some of the seminarians do not receive sufficient assessment time with the formators and some are even anonymous, following the crowd of seminarians unnoticed. As a result, it is believed that due to the large number of candidates and lesser number of formators, some seminarians have been ordained without adequate vocation discernment and evaluation. This is a vocation discernment problem that needs to be resolved sooner than later.

ii) Relationship with Authorities

The authorities in question here are all those directly or indirectly concerned with the formation of the candidates for the priesthood in the region. The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council visualized seminaries that are family-like where the authorities and the seminarians live in unity. According to them:

Directors and teachers should realize how greatly the outcome of the students' formation is affected by their own way of thinking and acting. Led by the rector, they should cultivate among themselves a close harmony of mind and action; they should form with one another and with the students a family such as the Lord had in mind when he prayed: "that they may be one" (Jn 17:11), and nourish in the students a delight in their vocation. The bishop, by his keen and affectionate care, should encourage the Seminary staff and show himself a true father in Christ to the students. (Flannery ed. 1996, 368, n. 4).

Such cordial, friendly familial relationship that eschews favoritism, breeds respect, peace, freedom of expression and association is vital for vocation discernment. Incidentally, that is not the type of relationship that exists between the seminarians and formators in some of the seminaries in the region.

Generally the relationship here is not very cordial. At its best, it is too formal and at its worst, it is the "master-slave relationship" of the colonial years. Like the colonial masters of the past, some of the authorities seem to wield "absolute power" to retain or dismiss seminarians they personally deem unfit for the priesthood without reference to adequate vocation discernment. Under this condition, the seminarians are made to fear and avoid the authorities, there is tension and much talk or threat of suspension and expulsion in the seminary. Minor errors and mistakes are punished in the name of discipline. Freedom of expression or association is stifled. Personal initiative does not have sufficient free pass and some talents are not viewed favorably by the authorities. Differing opinions and views from that of the authorities are seen as being rebellious or

disobedient; the seminarians' words and deeds are constantly monitored within and outside the hostel, fear and mistrust is the order of the day.

While it is true that a clear conscience fears no accusation, in the sense that good seminarians will not be afraid of their teachers keeping watchful eyes on them. It is not in the best interest of the candidates that they are always under the probing gaze of their formators. The bruises on a slave who is always before his master are not marks of the slave's misdeeds but marks of control and lordship for the master. The candidates need the atmosphere of freedom and friendship with the authorities. This will provide the seminarians the atmosphere to engage in serene personal vocation discernment and also dispose them to directly or indirectly provide the authorities with some true pictures of who they really are for the discernment process. It may not be rightly said that Vocation discernment made under tension, frustration, fear, anger or stressful condition may not be said to be as adequate as vocation discernment should be.

iii) False Self

There is the problem of false self on the part of the candidates that persists unnoticed at some of the seminaries through formation period to ordination. For various reasons, especially out of fear of the authorities, many seminarians do not live out their authentic self. They conceal their "true self," and put on "false self" for the authorities until after their ordination. And since the current discernment process does not detect all such falsehood and deception, some unsuitable candidates have succeeded to the priesthood. The results are embarrassment to themselves and to the local church they are supposedly "called to serve."

According to Neafsey (2006) false self is born out of perceived fear or experience that “one’s actual emotional reality” or expression of the authentic self, which is not bad in itself, would not yield positive outcome before the authorities. And so, to appear acceptable to the authorities, or to avoid being called the bad one for differing, some of the candidates chose to put on “a kind of inauthentic mask that is motivated by the need to adjust or conform to the expectations...either to win their approval or to avoid their rejection” (54). Rejection by the authorities is an experience no seminarian wishes to have. As a result such candidates make concerted effort to ensure they would not encounter such “misfortune.” Thus, the inability of the authorities to dispose the candidates to live their authentic self has led to falsified self on the part of the seminarians and probably, to the ordination of some unsuitable candidates.

iv) Latent Harmful Trait

The question of adequate vocation discernment is also raised when, shortly after his ordination, a priest becomes a problem to himself, to his fellow priests, and to his local ordinary. This, by acts contrary to his training and expectation such as uncontrolled disobedience to constituted church authorities, celebration of the liturgies in manners not approved by the church, and confusing or leading the faithful astray by teachings that are not in consonance with that of the Church. These acts were latent in the candidate during the formation period but were not detected. Some other signs of latent harmful traits, like psychosis have also been missed during formation with unfavorable consequences for the Church. Missed diagnosis may occur when the formators are not able to conduct thorough evaluation of the candidates due to their large number. Sometimes it is due to lack of psychological evaluation in the formation process. This section is of the view that

those latent harmful traits that surface after the ordination of some candidates may be detected with thorough evaluation by the formators and psychologists during formation. That is part of what adequate vocation discernment is all about.

v) Unmerited Expulsion

During the eight years this researcher was under priestly formation, he observed the admission of many seminarians as well as the departure of many of them from the seminary. Some left on their own accord and some were asked to leave or expelled. Some of those who left on their own did so for reasons ranging from family issues to personal realization that the priesthood is not their vocation. On the other hand, the reasons for the expulsion of many candidates are best known by the authorities. The authorities do not reveal such reasons often and when they do, it is not always the full story unless it is a public issue witnessed or known to other seminarians such as violence against a fellow seminarian, examination malpractice, etc. Differently stated, the reason for the expulsion of a seminarian is mostly handled as a private or confidential matter. In this manner, many expulsion incidents tend lack teachable or learning moments for the rest of the seminarians.

Many of the expelled seminarians love to share with other seminarians their own narrative of what led to their expulsions. And the stories they share point to one issue: that some seminarians are expelled for reasons that do not merit expulsion. For instance, it may be very well understood when, in the process of formation, a seminarian is expelled due to a serious flouting of the norms or principles of the formation such as examination malpractice, poor academic performance, poor moral standard, lack of interest in liturgical/spiritual exercises, violent behavior, grave dishonesty, or reckless

breach of the rules and regulations of the seminary (Owerri Provincial Seminary Commission 2013, 21, 22, 27, 30). On the other hand, it may not be very well understood when a candidate is expelled because one of his formators demanded it. Or because he has a misunderstanding with one of his teachers on issue that is not detrimental to faith or moral or due to a dispute he has with an authority over a matter of common interest that has little or nothing to do with his formation. These raise some questions of proper application of vocation discernment.

John Paul II (1982) advises that: “Seminarians who are really unsuitable for ordination should be firmly and charitably advised to follow another vocation.” He implies there should be a procedure for the termination of the formation of a seminarian. But the abruptness, randomness, and the confidential reasons for some of the expulsions can make one doubt whether a procedure for adequate vocation discernment is applied. To avoid such doubts, expulsions should follow a firm procedure of adequate vocation discernment. There is a reported case of a junior seminarian who was abruptly expelled by his rector. The reason is not for any of those mischievous things little boys can do but because he prays a lot, often seen in the chapel praying according to the rector. It took a determined person to persuade the rector not to send the boy home on that ground. This may be an isolated case but it shows that sometimes personal decision and intention or desire may influence a formator’s judgment over a vocation. This is possible where there is no firm procedure or when the process of vocation discernment is broken.

d) Method

These problems, as stated above, along with personal experience and observations, demonstrate that the process of formation and vocational discernment in this region needs to be reviewed. The use of lived experiences makes this a phenomenological qualitative research study. It utilizes the pastoral circle method, also known as *Circle of Praxis*, which employs the pastoral approach of social analysis in its method of investigation and resolution of specific problems (Holland and Henriot 2003, 8). According to Mejia (2005) “the pastoral circle proposes a process of analysis of social situations and structures as well as theological reflection on them; this corresponds very well to the short description of the ‘evangelical discernment’ of the socio-cultural and ecclesial situations” (127). In the light of phenomenology inquiry that “attempts to explicate the meanings as we live them in our everyday existence, our lifeworld” (Van Manen 1990, 11); the pastoral approach according to Holland and Henriot (2003) “looks at the reality from an involved, historically committed stance, discerning the situation for the purpose of action” (7) in response to the research question. In pastoral circle “the role of experience is primary” (x). This experience may not be pure or raw, that is, it may not be hundred percent “unrelated to the interpretations we place upon it” (Holland and Henriot, x), but that is not intended to adulterate or disfigure the experience. Therefore, the said *involved* or *committed stance* does not mean that the experiences and views of the informants are manipulated to meet the goal and purpose of the researcher. The views and experiences of the informants, as units or clusters of meaning, are delineated by the researcher to illuminate and express in a manner that most adequately represents the views of the informants in the research phenomenon.

Pastoral circle methodology utilizes four closely related mediation stages of experience that combine vision and praxis in its analytic process (7). These four stages are also known as *moments* in pastoral circle method of analysis as propounded by Holland and Henriot (2003, 7). They include: (1) Insertion or Contact (2) Social Analysis (3) Theological Reflection and (4) Pastoral Planning. And they are explained as follows:

(1) *Insertion*: This first stage in the pastoral circle, which is considered as the basis for any pastoral action, “locates the geography of our pastoral responses in the lived experience of individuals and communities” (8) It makes inquiries into people’s feeling, experiences, and how they respond to those experiences (8). It endeavors to make lively contact with the experienced reality that is being analyzed. This step has a cognitive phase that presents clear life stories, especially those told by the persons directly involved or affected by the issue or problem, that it is intended to be resolved. Then the stories are reviewed, internalized, and related to similar personal experiences shared by others (Henriot 2005) for better knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon. Correspondingly, the expressed or shared experiences and views (stories) of each participant in this research are reviewed and analyzed to arrive at consensus representative of their experiences and views.

(2) The second stage: *social analysis* is connected the first stage. It tries to understand the various experiences in the richness of their interrelationships. It “examines causes, probes consequences, delineates linkages, and identifies actors” and equally “helps make sense of experiences by putting them into a broader picture and drawing the connections between them” (Holland and Henriot 2003, 8). For Mejia (2005, 130) such approach in social analysis offers in-depth analysis of the social situation to ascertain the

root cause of the problems the research seeks to resolve. Drawing from the above functionality (of the pastoral circle method of social analysis), this researcher brings together and analyzes collectively the experiences and views (Table 3.3) of the participants (Table 3.2), fathoms the differences and relatedness at the core of the experiences, and views they bring to the research (Tables 3.4 and 3.5). These resulted in credible findings (chapter four) towards the resolution of the research question.

(3) The third stage, *theological reflection*, uses the light of living faith, scripture, Catholic social teaching, and the resources of tradition to obtain or arrive at broad and deep understanding of the analyzed experiences (Holland and Henriot 2003, 9). According to Mejia, Catholic social teaching is a great tool for theological reflection. It allows each Christian community to objectively analyze its own situation in the light of the Gospel. It also encourages adaptation to the circumstances of the time and place in light of the “see, judge, act” method of social analysis and evaluation that is the pivotal point of pastoral circle method (124). In addition, the Church social teaching illumined by the gospel is a motivational force for practical planning and action. In the words of Henriot (2005), “A careful scriptural study and reflection on poverty dismisses the fatalistic attitude of ‘the poor are always with us.’ And an opening of the riches of church social teaching motivates a ‘preferential option for the poor’” (18). As a result, the poor are no longer and should no longer be abandoned to their fate.

In theological reflection, the source, structure, and circumstance of the point at issue form the central focus (Bodewes, 2005). For Holland and Henriot, “The Word of God brought to bear upon the situation raises new questions, suggests new insights, and opens new responses” (9). According to Henriot (2005), among such questions is, “What

does this mean to us as Christians?” (18). Thus, through the analysis, this researcher is able to identify the values central to the issues under investigation. Through theological reflection, he is able to present the meaning and place of the issues for Christians.

(4) The fourth step of pastoral circle method is *pastoral planning*. The objective of this *moment*, according to Bodewes (2005), is to use the information gathered and reflected upon from the social analysis and theological reflection to develop a program that can realistically transform or impact the issues under investigation (62). For Mejia the purpose of this final stage of the pastoral circle method is “to plan for a new pastoral praxis of the church” (134). It is to evaluate and “improve the praxis of the church” through “critical reflection oriented to improve it in the future” (135). These objectives and purpose are in harmony with this research whose goal is to critically contribute to the improvement of the system of formation and vocation discernment in the southeastern region of Nigeria.

With the above method and background in mind, this research uses semi-structured open-ended interviews in order to gather the research data. All interviews are audio recorded. Ten male participants are chosen. They are made up of five priests and five candidates for the priesthood. They are informed ahead of time and with their consent, are interviewed at their places of apostolate. The details of information about the participants and the procedure of data collection and analysis are presented in chapter three – the chapter on method.

e) Research Questions

This research is intended to provide some tools to enhance vocation discernment in the southeastern Nigeria. Having pointed out some of the problems that prompted the

study, this section contains the research questions that gathered the responses needed to resolve some of the problems. The questions include but are not limited to: What is vocation discernment? How is vocation discernment conducted? What are the problems that affect adequate vocation discernment? Who are the agents of vocation discernment? Do the formators and candidates have all the tools they need for adequate vocation discernment? What are the different areas of scrutiny in vocation discernment? How do the formators perceive their roles as discerners of vocation to the priesthood? What is the formators' job satisfaction in the ministry of vocation discernment? How long does vocation discernment last? Who has the final word in vocation discernment? What is it that makes a person unsuitable for priestly vocation? What are the contributions of the allied voices to vocation discernment, such as the priests in the parishes, family and others outside the seminary? What becomes of the expelled seminarians? These questions are summarized under seven questions that serve as the interview questions as contained in *Table 1.1* below.

Table 1.1

Interview Questions
Research Topic
Vocation Discernment: A Study on Adequate Vocation Discernment in the Seminaries of the Southeastern Region of Nigeria
(1) What is your theology of vocation to the priesthood?
(2) What factors do you think are responsible for Vocation Boom in Nigeria?
(3) Given the fact that not all seminarians may make it or be allowed to ordination, how do you discern which candidate has genuine vocation to the ordained ministry?
(4) Who is or should be involved in the process of vocation discernment to the priesthood?
(5) In the light of the signs of the times, what changes (inclusions and exclusions) would you suggest for the formation and vocation discernment program for the future priests?
(6) Some seminarians leave the seminary on their own, some are asked to leave/expelled. In your view, what can the Church do to help the expelled seminarian who may be hurting spiritually, psychologically, etc.?
(7) Is there any other related question I did not ask that you would like to address?

f) Significance of Study

The literature review will show that some authors in the southeastern region of Nigeria have studied the life of the seminarians under formation. This literature review also includes the history of the church and priesthood, inculturation of the way of being church in Nigeria and Africa, and the training of priests in the area. In-depth study that specifically addresses the problem of vocation discernment has not been conducted. This research intends to fill this gap. Neither the church nor the people want these problems to

continue. Hence the need for solutions at this time and this text is a response, a contribution to the solution. This study will shed light on the problem of vocation discernment. It intends to afford the formation teams of the seminaries in the region some tools they need to improve on their delicate task of vocation discernment. During this study, both the Rectors and Directors of Vocation felt that this research would be beneficial for the students. They were interested in the outcome of the research. They believe, as does this researcher, that it will have a significant impact on vocation discernment. Especially how it is seen and done in the area. This is the main goal of the research.

g) Limitations and Delimitation

This study will be beneficial to those concerned or interested in vocation discernment. But it is conducted specifically for the seminaries in the southeastern region of Nigeria. This region shares certain things in common including seminaries and will likely understand and appreciate more the views expressed herein. All the participants come from the seminaries in the region. The ideas and views of the study cover this region only.

The research is limited by the number of participants and the seminaries involved. Not all the seminaries in the region were selected to participate in the project. In addition, not all formators and seminarians from the participants' seminaries were interviewed. Time did not allow for research of such size. The research would have been too large for the purposes of this study. In that light, this research does not represent the views of all seminarians and formators in the region. The scope of this study is limited by its participants and area.

This study provides these seminaries a practical theological tool to enhance vocation discernment for the priestly formation. It does not claim to exhaust all research on vocation discernment in the region. This study can serve as a stepping stone for future and further exploration of the subject. It will be helpful in the face of the rapid changes and modern advancements under the enduring principle of *ecclesia semper reformanda*.

h) Chapter Overview

Chapter one, the introductory chapter, contains the purpose and thesis statements, as well as the problem statement. The research questions and the research method are stated in this chapter. Other subheadings of the chapter include: the significance of the study, its limitations and delimitations, and the chapter overview of the entire project.

Chapter two, the literature review, -reviews the relevant authors, journals, articles, magazines, and books that helped to inform and situate this research. This focuses on the general concept of vocation, the priesthood, discernment and vocation to the priesthood, and issues of discernment to the Catholic priesthood. This chapter also reviews the formation of candidates for the priesthood, the four areas of formation (human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral), and the African synod on vocation and discernment.

Chapter three explores the method and model of qualitative research methodology used in this research. This includes a phenomenological method that employs the pastoral circle model, which utilizes semi structured open-ended qualitative interviews for data collection. It explains the procedural logistics of data collection such as the selection of participants, the rationale for the selection of the research participants. It also explains the ethical considerations that promises physical and moral safety and protection of the

identity and privacy of the participants. The instruments of data collection, data transcription, data analysis, credibility issue, etc. are also described in the chapter.

Chapter four contains the findings and reports of the views and experience of the participants in relation to vocation, formation and vocation discernment issues as well as proposed and needed changes for adequate vocation discernment and the issue of the expelled seminarians. Chapter five contains the discussion on the findings. The findings in chapter four are discussed in the light of the Church teaching and relevant literature in order to situate them in theological discourse. Chapter six contains the conclusion and theological reflection, and also recommendations for the future studies.

The appendices contain the cultural-historical background and vocation to the priesthood in Southeastern Nigeria. It also contains a brief historical review on the relationship of the ministerial priesthood to the community of the faithful from apostolic time to the present. Finally, using the Second Vatican Council as a guide, it discusses the theology of the priesthood within the framework of the people of God.

i) Conclusion

Adequate vocation discernment is indispensable for the selection of suitably qualified candidates for ordination to the priesthood. Just as wrong decisions and choices can, according to Kiechle (2005, 13), “make us lose valuable time, reduce the quality of our lives, or may even damage us for the rest of our lives,” ill-discerned vocation can lead to the ordination of unsuitable candidates for the priesthood. Such candidates can do a lot of harm to the ministry. As such, no stone should be left unturned to ensure that it is well conducted with all the available tools. The driving force of this study is to provide the

church in the southeastern region of Nigeria with additional tools for adequate vocation discernment.

This chapter also articulates the research method and problems that prompted the research. It also includes the research questions that responded to the problem.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

a) Introduction

Nigeria has one of the highest rates of vocation to the Catholic priesthood in Africa (CISA 2009; VIS 2013). The country is made up of nine ecclesiastical provinces. Three of the provinces: Calabar, Onitsha, and Owerri are located within the southeastern region of the country and comprise eighteen dioceses (*Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria* 2011). The region is known to have relatively high rate of vocation to the priesthood (*Table A.1* of Appendix A). The focus of this research is in this region.

Vocation to the priesthood is integrally connected to vocation discernment and formation. A candidate for the priesthood verifies if he is really called by God through the process of vocation discernment (Lespinay 2009, 19). Through the process of vocation discernment, formation team judges the suitability of the candidates during their formation for the priestly ministry. The importance of vocation discernment is well noted in the seminaries and it is a topic of discussion at vocation and formation seminars and conferences in Nigeria. But the literature review conducted for this study showed no research that specifically addressed the issue of vocation discernment in the region. Some works in the region that treated related subjects include: *Answering God's Call* (Arinze 1983). This work assessed vocation as God's call and the response expected from the called. Another work is *The Nigerian Priest with His People* (Nwigwe 1984). This is a practical application of the priestly formation experience in the priestly ministry. The historical study, *A Hundred Years of the Catholic Church in Eastern Nigeria 1885 – 1985* (Obi, ed. 1985), incorporates the history of vocations and priesthood in the region.

In his work: *Priestly and Religious Vocations*, Eke (1985) contributed to the study “A Hundred Years of the Catholic Church in Eastern Nigeria 1885 – 1985.” Therein Eke stated, among other things, the pattern and progress of vocation to the priesthood and religious life in the region through the years. Ozigboh (1988) worked on the *Roman Catholicism in Southeastern Nigeria: 1885- 1931*. This is an historical exploration which included the difficult and courageous ministries of the early missionaries and the germination of vocation in the southeastern region.

These and others¹ are great works in themselves and they teach a lot about vocations, priesthood, priestly formation, and pastoral or missionary activities. They do not elaborate on vocation discernment. That is, they do not have detailed treatment of vocation discernment. Generally, they presume vocation discernment as a part of vocation. The review of other pertinent authors in this chapter presents both vocation and vocation discernment in their uniqueness and relatedness. It also presents formation, the priesthood and other issues that pertain to vocation and vocation discernment.

b) Vocation: General Notion of Vocation

Vocation is often seen as the religious state of life as it pertains to the priesthood or consecrated life (Grisez and Shaw 2003). As Neafsey (2006, 2) puts it: “People commonly associate vocation either with the call to ordained ministry or vowed religious

¹ The *Sources of Stress Experiences by Nigerian Catholic Priests* (Ukwuoma 1999) researches the stress that priests experience in the ministry, after formation. . Chigere (2001) researched on *Foreign Missionary Background and Indigenous Evangelization in Igboland*. The research explores behind the scene events as well as the activities of the early missionaries. It also assesses the issue of vocation boom in the region. *Living Between Two Worlds* (Uzor 2003) is a research on the life of seminarians in the real world and seminary world as they go through the priestly formation. *The African Christianity Rises*, volume two (Ihenacho 2004), incorporates inculturation that pertains to the priestly vocation and ministry. *The Amazing Gift of the Priesthood* (Okoro 2008), explores among other things the priestly vocation and its joy and challenges. Ezeoke (2012) in his work: *The Catholic Priesthood: Recapturing the Fading Glory*, considers the priesthood as a call and a gift from God to humanity and seeks to recapture the glory of the priesthood that is fading.

life or with the popular secular understanding of vocation as being synonymous with a job, occupation, or career. These are valid, but incomplete, understandings of vocation.”

The idea of vocation is broader than vocation to the priestly or religious life and is “much bigger than what we do to earn a living” (Neafsey 2006, 2). By its nature, vocation is not exclusive but includes what gives meaning to human endeavors or aspirations. Neafsey (2006) went further to say: “Vocation potentially touches and encompasses *every* level and dimension of our lives. This includes our family life, our love life, our creative interests and pursuits, and our politics. *Basically*, anything we do with our time and talents and resources can be infused with a sense of vocation” (3). This general sense of vocation differs in some perspectives, only slightly from the religious notion that follows.

c) Religious Notion of Vocation

From its Latin root, “voco,” “vocare,” vocation means “call,” “to call.” It is an invitation from God to be of benefit or to serve God in and through God’s people (Neafsey 2006, 5). As a call from God, Burns (2004, 24) believes that creation, including the human person, is the first thing God called. It is a call into existence. Having called everything to being, God went further to call people to different aspects of life and to specific services, tasks, or offices. According to the biblical creation account, the first human person God called to serve is Adam. He was assigned to serve as names-giver to every other created being (Gen 2:19-20, 23). Later God calls the prophets, the kings and priests to serve as ministers and representatives between God and God’s people in the Old Testament.

In the New Dispensation, according to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, God calls the human person to a new life in the Christ through baptism in order

to share in the mission of Christ in the Church. God also calls the baptized members of the Church to various vocations including marriage, the priesthood, religious life, etc.

For Grisez and Shaw (2003, 34), not only does everyone in the Church have “a vocation, but everyone lives in a complex, rich vocational context.” Further, they present three different senses in which vocation applies to every Christian. According to them, the “first is the vocation to be a Christian and to live the truth of one’s faith” followed by the “vocation in the sense of state of life” that includes the priesthood, consecrated life, married life and single life. Last but not the least, “vocation in the sense of personal vocation” (34). Vocation in this sense extends and takes into account all circumstances of a person’s life: “strengths and weaknesses, talents and disabilities, existing commitments and obligations - and requires that all one’s choices be made in their light” (35). Grisez and Shaw reference John Paul II’s *Redemptor Hominis* (1979), to imply personal vocation when he spoke of “singular, unique and unrepeatable grace by which each Christian in the community of the People of God builds up the Body of Christ” (21). These various vocations are in one way or another found under the sacraments. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (United States Catholic Conference 1994) instructs that “sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us” (n. 1131). Each sacrament, like the priesthood, has graces, gifts of the Spirit proper to it (n. 2003). It is this grace that enables a person to respond a vocation and to live personal vocation.

Personal vocation and indeed every Christian vocation is intended or has the prospect of building up the Body of Christ, spreading the kingdom of God on earth. Adding his voice on the religious perspective of vocation, Lee (1972) wrote: “a vocation

is a religious thing. A vocation implies a divinely and ecclesiastically approbated way of life which is intended to enable the person having the vocation thereby to give greater glory to God, to spread God's kingdom more efficaciously, and to himself become more holy" (149ff). Holiness of life as a general vocation of all Christians is very well expressed in some biblical passages. From the first Letter of Saint Peter (1:15-16) one reads: "he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in every aspect of your conduct, for it is written, 'Be holy because I am holy.'" Further Peter instructs believers: "you are 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises' of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1Pt 2:9). On his part, Saint Paul writes: "For God did not call us to impurity but to holiness" (1Thes 4:7). While concluding his letter to the Philippians (4:8) he advises them: "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." The general vocation to holiness is to be "good," as the Lord himself encourages on a high level: "So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48). Even though only God is good (Mk 10:18), it is believed that humans generally appreciate and desire what is good. Doing what is good then is living one's vocation while failure or refusal to do what is good is indicative of not responding adequately or not living fully the general vocation to be holy (good). It is to be noted that although the call to holiness is a general vocation, it is at the same time a personal vocation like most of other vocations.

Drawing from the views of Grisez and Shaw (2003), all these point to the four cardinal vocations in the church: single life, married life, religious or consecrated life,

and ordained life or the priesthood. These demonstrate the fact that there are various vocations and each person has a vocation in accordance with the function or ministry that God (the Caller) wants and assigns each person to perform. The above views demonstrate that the priesthood is not the only vocation but just one of the many vocations in world and in the church. In all these, from a Christian perspective, Saint Paul will say that every vocation is very important for the building up of the Body of Christ (1Cor 12:12-26).

d) Vocation to the Priesthood

Fichter (1961) sees vocation to priestly ministry as an invitation by God “to serve God and the Church that is personal, supernatural and sacrificial” (4). He observes that vocation to the ordained ministry has two vital aspects: the subjective and objective. The subjective, according to Fichter, is the “genuine, personal, and inner urge” toward serving God and God’s people in the personal and sacrificial way (4). This urge according to him, an inner motivational force, is something very different from calculated consideration of a plan or exterior proposals (4). He thus echoes the prophet, Jeremiah (20:9) to whom the internal urge to preach the word of God became an irresistible “fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones; I grow weary holding it in” and so he succumbed: went and preached, ministered in the name of the Lord.

On the other hand, Fitcher continued, the objective aspect of vocation to the priesthood has to do with the “recognizable suitability of health, intellect and character and then the actual acceptance of the candidate by ecclesiastical authority or superior” (4). Fitcher’s subjective and objective aspects of vocation are similar to Hostie’s (1963, 74) internal and external vocation motivation which for him, should be evaluated to

ascertain the authenticity of vocation before the church accepts a candidate for the ministry.

Schuth (1999) is one of those who have participated in the “interviews of prospective seminarians” for many years with the intention to discover their motivations for the priesthood. Her personal observation from the interviews suggests that the candidates are mainly motivated by the inner urge to serve God and God’s people. In her words: “Listening carefully to the replies to that question, I have noted that the majority of responses fall into the personal helping category: ‘I want to help people find God,’ ‘I want to help people know Jesus,’ ‘I want to help people in times of need,’ or ‘I want to help people by providing the sacraments’” (35, 36). These responses show that many of the seminarians have that initial inner motivation for the priesthood. Schuth shows that she is not very impressed by the mostly one-sided motivation of “personal helping category,” but she expressed optimism that it will be corrected in the course of their formation. According to her, “After all, it is the task of seminary formation to expand the student’s horizons and to help him embrace an understanding of priesthood that moves back and forth between one-to-one helping and the expectations of leadership in a public forum” (36).

This review shows that vocation has different meanings. It shows that the Priesthood originates from God for a sacred mission like some other vocations. It shows there are two elements without which vocation to the priesthood is not authentic. These elements are: subjective or internal vocation on one side and objective or external vocation on the other side.

e) Priesthood: Priests and Priesthood

According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (United States Catholic Conference 1994, n. 44), the human person is a religious being by nature and vocation; “coming from God, going toward God,” in whom life is fully and freely lived through bonding with God. Human beings are made to live in communion with God. In God humanity finds happiness (n. 45). As a result, a person, consciously or unconsciously, expresses or demonstrate that he or she is in constant need of the happiness and goodness from God. Like a magnetic pull, people are drawn toward God. Saint Augustine exquisitely stated the attraction, the magnetic pull towards God in these words: “You stir us so that praising you may give us joy, because you have made us and drawn us to yourself, and our heart is unquiet until it rests in you” (Augustine 2012, 3). This constant need or desire for God, according to Wayne (2010), is due to a historically evident fact of “a world-wide recognition of the *consciousness of sin* in the human experience” that alienates it from God. In this light Saint Augustine addresses God as follows: “we humans, who are a due part of your creation, long to praise you - we do carry our mortality about with us, we carry the evidence of our sin and with the proof that you thwart the proud” (Augustine 2012, 3). Due to sin humanity, despite their desire for God, are estranged from the glorious presence of the most holy God (Rom 3:23) who dwells in unapproachable light (Ex 19:10-12; 1Tm 6:16). The experience of sin and estrangement also renders humanity incapable of atoning for the sins to redeem themselves (Wayne 2010). Consequently, according to the Congregation for the Clergy (1998) since “the very dawn of its history, the human race has always sensed a need for those individuals, who despite having received a mission in very different ways, act as God’s mediators and converse with Him on behalf of others” (Congregation for the Clergy 1998). A priest is

an example of such a mediator.

In his *Christian Courier* online works, Wayne (2010), states that the word “priest” is used about eighty times in the New Testament. Whereas in the Old Testament, the term and its cognates are used about seven hundred and fifty times and mostly applied specifically to those the Lord appointed and entrusted with the daily religious events and activities of the community of Israel (Wayne 2010). The letter to the Hebrews (5:1) presents a clearer view of the priest and his main function: “Every high priest is taken from among men and made their representative before God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.” Though the passage refers specifically to the high priests, obviously other priests are equally chosen from their various communities to act as mediators for the communities they represent (Schillebeeckx 1981, 38). The common denominator here is that a priest is called and chosen from among the people to act as a mediator between the people and God.

i) Old Testament Priesthood

The Old Testament priesthood was hereditary and restricted only to Aaron and his descendants of the Levitical ancestry (Ex 28:1; Nm 18:1, 8). And the priests were divinely called and chosen by God alone (Hardon 1998). Designated others like Moses, carried out the ordination or investiture of the chosen person. This ordination was specifically dictated by God (Lv 8). The criteria for the choice of each candidate for the Old Testament priesthood were according to the divine will and purpose. At that time, God would make his choice of candidate abundantly clear. The problem of vocation discernment, which is one of the most difficult tasks of contemporary seminary formators, was not an issue at that time. The first priest chosen and ordained in the Old

Testament was Aaron.

ii) New Testament Priesthood

In the New Testament, Jesus chose those he wanted to serve in his ministry through prayer and his divine vision (Mt 4:18-22; Lk 6:12-16). During the apostolic era, ministers and presbyters were chosen and ordained to the priesthood through spiritual discernment, prayer, and laying on of hands (2 Cor 8:19; Tm 4:14; Titus 1:5-11). That model has persisted to the present time with some modifications. During the early church according to Schillebeeckx (1981 38), people were called and ordained to the ministry only when the need arose in order to avoid the problem of priests without communities. As Schillebeeckx puts it, no priest or deacon may be ordained “unless a local community is clearly assigned to him” (38) because priests are ordained for the needs of the community of believers – the Church.

Priests of the Old Testament functioned as mediators who offered sacrifices of various materials to God over and over again on their own behalf and that of the people. On the other hand, Christ is the foundation and the perfect priest - priest par excellence - of the New Covenant which replaced the Old Covenant. He offered one single perfect sacrifice that seals all and every other sacrifice by offering his very self (Heb 7:27). In that one and everlasting sacrifice, Christ “showed himself the Priest, the Altar, and the Lamb of sacrifice” (USCCB 2011, *The Roman Missal*).

According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (United States Catholic Conference 1994, n. 1544f), Christ is the true priest, the fullness of the priesthood, and in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell (Col 1:19). His priesthood is not of the Levitical order, but according to the order of Melchizedek and forever (Heb 7:11-22).

The entire Christian priesthood, ministerial and non-ministerial, is a participation in the one eternal priesthood of Christ (The Catholic Church 1996, 302; United States Catholic Conference 1994, n. 1547).

The sacrifice that the priests of the New Covenant offer is not the sacrifice of the Old Testament. It is a reenactment, a commemoration of the one sacrifice of Christ. It is done in obedience to his command at the Last Supper when he gave his disciples his Body and Blood and said: “do this in memory of me” (Lk 22:17-19). The Catholic Church strongly believes and teaches that his institution of the New Covenant in his Body and Blood, Christ intends the Covenant to be everlasting celebration. It will celebrate the memorial of that salvific sacrifice of his suffering, death and resurrection - Eucharist (The Catholic Church 1996, 134f; United States Catholic Conference 1994, n.1323; Mt 26:26; Lk 22:17-19). According to John, Jesus “loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end” (13:1). As a result, according to the *Catechism*, “in order to leave them a pledge of this love, in order never to depart from his own and to make them sharers in his Passover, he instituted the Eucharist as the memorial of his death and Resurrection, and commanded his apostles to celebrate it until his return; ‘thereby he constituted them priests of the New Testament’” (United States Catholic Conference 1994, n.1337). Christ has offered one all-embracing eternal sacrifice that cannot be repeated for the redemption of humanity. The priests of the New Covenant are instituted to celebrate as often as possible the memorial of Christ’s sacrifice (1Cor 11:24-26).

ii) **Priestly Mediation**

As stated above, the human being has historically longed for mediators between human and God. With particular reference to the Old Testament, Hardon (1998) states

that the priest is not the only mediator the people of God ever had. They also had the prophet. He describes the mediation of the prophet as downward mediation. The prophet receives the words of God from heaven above and communicates them to the world below. On the other hand he describes the priest as upward mediator, from earth to heaven. The priest offers up to God the people's sacrifices, prayers, and worship in order to seek God's favors. These favors include blessings, compassion and forgiveness for the people (Hardon 1998). While discussing the relationship between the ministry of priests and prophets, Pohle (1911) calls for caution so as not to confuse or equate the priestly office to that of prophets. For Pohle, priests are more than mere leaders at public prayers, custodians or guardians of shrines and places of worship, etc. The priestly ministry, according to the letter to the Hebrews, is an honor no one arrogates to himself rather each person has to be called by God as Aaron was (5:4).

Currently the office of the prophet is no longer necessary because according to the letter to the Hebrews God decides not to speak to God's people through prophets any more (1:1-2) but directly and clearly through God's only begotten Son, Word made flesh and visible (Jn 1:14). He is Jesus Christ who has the words and message of eternal life (Jn 6:68). With that the old office of the prophet is eliminated. The new vertical mediation of the priest now embodies the prophetic office in addition to horizontal mediation.

In his address to the presbyters (priests/elders) Peter urges them to take good care of their flocks as God wants (1Pt 5:1-4; Acts 20:28). This care, as experienced in the ministries of priests today, comes in the form of service, intervention, or mediation in times of spiritual, moral and some temporal needs. It also comes in the form of fostering good relationship between persons or group of persons. This is the horizontal form of

mediation. It works in consonance with the vertical mediation of offering sacrifices, prayers, and supplications to God on behalf of the people.

iii) Priesthood as a Covenant

According to Busenitz (1999), the priesthood is one of the six covenants God made with God's chosen people. The other five covenants that Busenitz mentions are: the Noahic Covenant, the Abrahamic Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, the Davidic Covenant, and the New Covenant. The priestly Covenant, Busenitz explains, was made in perpetuity with the people of God through descendants of Levi in the Old Testament (189). Jesus came in the New Testament not to abolish the law and the prophets but to fulfill them (Mt 5:17). Hence the priestly Covenant of the Old Testament "transitioned" to the New Testament and acquires a new and higher standard in the New Covenant made in the blood of Christ (Lk 22:20). According to Hardon (1998), the priesthood is one of the old institutions that Christ elevated to a new height. Therefore it became the cornerstone of the Christian religion. Hardon argues that, one could define true Christianity as the religion of a divinely revealed priesthood. Continuing, Hardon states that Christianity is priestly. The priesthood is its essence, therefore, without the priesthood there is no Christianity.

Rausch (1992, 34) emphasizes the central position the Eucharist occupies in the church ministry of the New Covenant. This vital position has in turn elevated the leadership role of the priest, who is the minister of the Eucharist. Rausch argues that the church is not just a community, it is a Eucharistic community. It was out the ordained minister's presidential role at the community's sacred worship that the sacral concept of

the priesthood developed. In the New Covenant, the celebration of the Eucharist has remained central to the ministry and the office of the priest (Rausch, 34).

iv) The Two Priesthoods of the New Testament

There are two categories of the priesthood in the Catholic Church: the common or universal priesthood of believers, and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood. The common priesthood of the believers comprises all the baptized members of the Church. Members of this group are priests by virtue of the mystery of regeneration and anointing of the Holy Spirit symbolized by the anointing with the same sacred chrism with which the ministerial priests are anointed (The Catholic Church 1996, 14f; Paul VI 1976, 148). Borrowing from Saint Peter (1Pt 2:9), the Church refers to this group as: a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and, people set apart to love and serve God in one another and to sing the praises of God (United States Catholic Conference 1994, n.1268).

The other category of the priesthood is the ministerial priesthood, also known as hierachical priesthood, because of its definitive graded order. First in the hierarchy are the episcopates or bishops. They are the successors of the apostles who are sharers in Christ's consecration and mission. The bishops possess the fullness of the sacred Order of the priesthood (The Catholic Church 1996, 318ff). Next to the bishops are the priests who are lower in rank and perform their ministerial function "in a lesser degree." By the sacred power of orders conferred on them by the bishops, they are able to function publicly for the faithful in the name of Christ. They work with the bishops for the proper fulfillment of Christ apostolic mission (318ff). After the priests are the deacons. Deacons assist the bishops and the priests. They are ordained for the "tasks of service of the Church; they do not receive the ministerial priesthood" (United States Catholic

Conference 1994, n. 1596). Their office, by ordination allows them to function in the “ministry of the word, divine worship, pastoral governance, and the service of charity” (n.1596).

According to Vatican II, both the priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial priesthood share in the one priesthood of Christ in applicable ways (The Catholic Church 1996, 14f). It is from the richness of the common priesthood of the faithful, the baptized members of the church, that the Lord calls the ministerial priests. Membership of the common priesthood of believers is liturgically and sacramentally prerequisite for the membership of the ministerial priesthood.

f) Discernment

This section reviews discernment that pertains to the priesthood. It argues that discernment is distinct from the notion of decision making. This will clear the confusion between the two terms in reference to the ministry of the priesthood.

i) Discernment and Decision Making

A review of *discernment* shows that it has often been confused with or seen as synonymous with *decision making* as when business management boards or administrators talk about discerning “new mission statement” or “new company advertising tagline.” And on individual level, some people speak of discerning college choice and majors (Liebert 2008, 3). These, as presented, are not really acts of discernment but acts of decision making. According to Liebert, decision making is mostly “about more mundane matters” (7) while discernment in its religious origin is “a Christian spiritual discipline” (22). It “deals with the mystery of God” (8). According to Farnham et al (1991), “Discernment comes from the Latin word *discernere*, which means

‘to separate,’ ‘to distinguish,’ ‘to determine,’ ‘to sort out’” (23). These authors relate that in classical spirituality, discernment means “identifying what spirit is at work in a situation: the Spirit of God or some other spirit” (23).

While explaining the same Latin origin, Morris and Olsen (1997), observe that to discern means “to see the heart of the matter with spiritual eyes; from God’s vintage point,” and to see “beyond the immediate and the transient” (1997, 23). According to Liebert, the Latin root also means “to discriminate” and for him, discernment, in the Christian spiritual tradition “refers to the process of sifting out what is of God, discriminating between that which expresses God’s call and anything that runs counter to it” (8). The authors view discernment as having religious, spiritual, moral components, and theological implications. But these do not mean that decision making is completely devoid of every element of spirituality.

Though there are such decisions that have some religious, spiritual, and moral connotation as when a prayerful person makes a prayerful decision as a faith-filled person may also make a faith-filled decision. For the authors, that does not make decision the same as discernment. According to Liebert (2008), “Discernment is far more than the decisions we make. It is a discriminating way of life, in which we come to notice with increasing ease and accuracy how our inner and outer actions affect our identity in God” (24). Further, she argues that in decision making, a person may be faced with problem of choosing between right and wrong or good and evil options. But that is not the case with discernment. According to her, “when the choice facing us is between an ethically evil action and a neutral or good one, discernment, strictly speaking, is not at issue. God could never be calling us to do something evil” (21, 22). For instance, Liebert continues, “We

don't discern whether or not to cheat on our income tax." Furthermore, she makes a simple but important exception that when the line between moral good and evil is not distinctly demarcated in a world of moral ambiguities, discernment may help a person make a virtuous decision in morally ambiguous situations. She argues, "As a Christian spiritual discipline, discernment is appropriate when one is faced with deciding between two 'good' choices, between a 'good' and a 'better' choice, or sometimes to help sort out morally ambiguous choices" (22). It is not about avoiding evil, rather in discernment "we move beyond avoiding evil. We seek, among good options, that which better aligns us with God's creative purpose" (9) or points to what we believe is the will of God.

Additionally, Liebert holds that discernment "is the process of intentionally becoming aware of how God is present, active, and calling us as individuals and communities so that we can respond with increasingly greater faithfulness" (8). In this light, Lonsdale (1992) states that discernment is "a way of making Christian choices, of following the Spirit of God in the decisions we make" (19). In other words, discernment is a spiritual process of attempting to understand God's will by sifting through interior and exterior experiences to distinguish God's thoughts and designs from every other (Farnham et al 1991, 23; Adams 1987, 46, 48).

On his part, Adams (1987, 45) refers the attempt to discern the will, thoughts, or things of God as "spiritual discernment." Only the Spirit searches the depth of God and knows the mind and thoughts of God (1Cor 2:10-11). As such, a person has to align oneself with the spirit of God in order to discern God's will. It is the illuminating presence of the spirit of God that is at work in the process of spiritual discernment. That is what radically differentiates this form of discernment from any other discernment

(Adams 1987, 48; Morris & Olsen 1997, 42, 43). Morris and Olsen assert: “The purpose and goal of spiritual discernment are knowing and doing God’s will” (51). It is not to discern between moral ills and it is quite different from the idea of choices we make everyday or now and then.

ii) Vocation Discernment

Vocation has been described as a call from God to various persons for various purposes depending on God’s intention for each person. Like every other person, the voice of God is not the only voice the candidate for the priesthood hears calling him. There are the voices of the family, relatives, friends, peers as well as those of the community and society at large. There are also the voices of nature, of events of life, of ego, personal desires and ambitions (Farnham et al 1991; Neafsey 2006). These voices may be good in themselves but they are not the real voice of God. Some of the voices may serve as reminders to stimulate and revive the voice of God (vocation) that has been neglected by the candidate. The voices, Farnham et al (1991) argue, may also drown out the voice of God itself. Hence the need for adequate vocation discernment.

As it pertains to an individual vocation, Lespinay (2009, 19) states that vocation discernment is “the act of discovering a vocation” or “God’s call” as well as the process to authenticate the vocation as God’s call. Similarly, Farnham et al (1991) writes: “Discernment helps a person understand the source of a call, to whom it is directed, its content, and what response is appropriate. Discernment also involves learning if one is dodging a call, is deaf to a call, or is rejecting a call” (23). It opens a person up to listen attentively and seek God’s will for him or her. Each vocation to the priesthood is unique in the sense that it is personal. it is a free call from God, but God calls the candidate

through the church. Schuth (1999) refers to this as “a mutual call from God and the Church” (35). God initiates the call in the candidate and the Church makes the final call to the sacred orders after adequate vocation discernment. As such the discernment of a candidate’s vocation does not solely belong to him (the candidate) as it seems. It also belongs even majorly to the Church.

iii) Discerners of Vocation to the Priesthood

According to Lespinay (2009), “The first person responsible for vocation discernment is the candidate himself” (21) because it was he who first felt the call. Next are the bishop and the formation team. On his part, Hostie (1963) believes that “when it comes to final decision, those responsible for the discernment of vocations are bishops or major superiors, who may call upon the assistance of collaborators” (33) as their delegates or representatives at certain stages of the discernment process. Others include specialists who have no formal participation in the formation process. Next is the seminarian or candidate who makes his own tentative and conditional, but real discernment. The candidate’s advisers and directors also play vital roles in the discernment of his vocation (33).

The Congregation for Catholic Education (2005) differs slightly from Lespinay’s view. It writes: “A vocation is a gift of divine grace, received through the Church, in the Church and for the service of the Church” (n. 3). As a result, the vocation discernment of each candidate belongs to the Church led by the bishop. The bishop makes the final decision based on the information he receives from those collaborators mentioned by Hostie. According to Hostie (1963), “The discernment of a vocation and of the maturity of the candidate is also a serious duty of the rector and of the other persons entrusted with

the work of formation in the seminary. Before every ordination, the rector must express his own judgment on whether the qualities required by the Church are present in the candidate” (n. 3). Thereafter, the bishop decides whether or not to ordain the candidate based on what he knows about him.

For Haughey (2004, 1) those in the process of vocation discernment should undergo some sort of conversion, but not necessarily conversion from no faith to faith or from one church to the other. The conversion in question here has three parts. According to Haughey, the first conversion is intellectual conversion. Intellectual conversion is conversion from bias. This enables a person to accurately hear and interpret the unfolding call of God. The second conversion is moral conversion, which is necessary for hearing the call to live a meaningful life in community. The third conversion is affective conversion. Affective conversion is living and abiding in the love of God and neighbor. These components of conversion, according to Haughey, can help overcome the obscurities associated with some vocations in the process of discernment.

According to Hostie (1963) it is incumbent on the bishops, who may also turn to a wide range of collaborators, to ensure that the right candidates are discerned and presented for ordination. Additionally, he recommends that specialists’ assistance should be sought whenever the need arises (24). He gave instances of cases that may require specialist attentions as: when persistent doubts exist about a candidate’s state of physical and mental health. As well as when there is suspicion of certain religious or paramystical phenomena and other such cases (24). These, he said, require and should be subjected to the intervention of competent or qualified doctor or theologian to decide the best course of action. Hostie prefers the specialists in such cases because according to him, “Both

directors and directed are sometimes ill-informed about this. Directors in their zeal, candidates in their enthusiasm, forget that in any vocation discernment, it is a question of seeking the will of God” and “not of acquiescing in any human will. Further he said, “However loft the aim proposed, whatever the intrinsic value of the gift envisaged, there is no justification for a step which is not furthered by a divine vocation, corroborated by the guardians of the priestly or religious life” (25). Furthermore, Hostie adds: “For this reason not only the superiors and their immediate collaborators but also all priests must be duly experienced in matters concerning discernment, for sooner or later they will be approached by candidates. It will be extremely regrettable if genuine candidates were turned away from their vocation by clumsy handling or an erroneous judgment. And it would be no less harmful should they follow their vocation guided by misunderstood principles or fallacious reasoning” (26). In light of Hostie’s thoughts, some elements of vocation discernment should be taught in the seminary as part of the formation process. In this way every priest can be informed and able to respond adequately when he is approached by candidates for the priesthood.

The above authors argue that every effort should be made to ensure that each vocation is adequately discerned through unrelenting team work. The goal is to produce good results for the Church, which is presenting suitably qualified candidate for the priestly ministry.

g) John Paul II on the Areas of Formation

Kariuki Wakarega (2006) traces the origin of the word formation to the Latin word ‘*formosus*’ which for him means bringing out the best or the beauty in a person. He references Vatican II’s view that real education should be directed towards the formation

of the human person bearing in mind his final end. The human formation should also take into account, the good of that society in which he or she lives as well as the role he or she will play as an adult in the society. Today the formation of candidates for the priesthood starts in the family. According to John Paul II (1995), “Not only is the Christian family the first cell of the living ecclesial community, it is also the fundamental cell of society. In Africa in particular, the family is the foundation on which the social edifice is built” (n. 80). For John Paul II (1995), it is the intention of the Synod

for each African Christian family to become ‘a privileged place for evangelical witness,’ a true ‘domestic church,’ a community which believes and evangelizes... ‘It is in the heart of the family that parents are by word and example...the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children.’ ‘It is here that the father of the family, the mother, children, and all members of the family exercise the *priesthood of the baptized* in a privileged way by the reception of the sacraments, prayer and thanksgiving, the witness of a holy life and self- denial and active charity.’ Thus the home is the first school of Christian life and a school for human enrichment.’ (92)

For Reker (2008) also, the family is a place of growth and maturity. It is the first seminary a seminarian attends where his parents serve as the first teachers and rectors. In light of this, the United States bishops have deemed it necessary to include parents “as important partners in building a positive climate for vocations” (Reker 2008). On the formal level, the candidate who felt called to the priesthood is usually sent by his ordinary or religious superior to the seminary to be formed. There he undergoes years of

intensive and rigorous formation in different areas of discipline before he is judged suitable for ordination.

There are four areas of formation that every candidate for the priesthood must undergo in order to be regarded as a formed candidate for the priestly ministry. In his Post-Synodal Apostolic exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, John Paul II (1992) articulates the four areas under: Human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation.

i) Human Formation

John Paul II expresses the importance of human formation as the basis of all priestly formation because grace builds on nature. It is in his nature as a human being, by the spirit and grace of God, that the priest will be able to perform all his ministerial functions. In this vein, John Paul II (1992) states that “the whole work of priestly formation would be deprived of its necessary foundation if it lacked a suitable human formation” (n. 43). According to him, for a credible and acceptable ministry, it is important that the personality of the priest be molded “in such a way that it becomes a bridge and not an obstacle for others in their meeting with Jesus Christ the Redeemer of humanity” (n. 43). As the John Paul II relates, it is necessary that the priest should form himself, after the example of Christ in order to “be able to know the depths of the human heart, to perceive difficulties and problems, to make meeting and dialogue easy, to create trust and cooperation, to express serene and objective judgments” (n.43). This will enable him to serve the people of God well.

Further, John Paul II stresses that the candidates for the priesthood should cultivate and manifest those commendable human qualities that are equally vital for effective ministry. These qualities, according to John Paul II, “are needed for them to be

balanced people, strong and free, capable of bearing the weight of pastoral responsibilities” (n.43). The qualities according to John Paul II include: knowledge and love for truth, humility, respect for every person, right sense of justice, genuine compassion and, “to be men of integrity and, especially, to be balanced in judgment and behavior” (n.43). In addition, John Paul II emphasizes the importance of good, cordial relationship with people. As someone called to be responsible for a community the seminarian should train himself or be trained to be what he calls a “man of communion” (n.43). The formation will result, according to John Paul II, to a priest who is not “arrogant, or quarrelsome, but affable, hospitable, sincere in his words and heart, prudent and discreet, generous and ready to serve, capable of opening himself to clear and brotherly relationships and of encouraging the same in others, and quick to understand, forgive and console” (n.43).

John Paul II also elaborates on the importance of affective maturity for the future priests which he says “presupposes an awareness that love has a central role in human life” (n. 44). According to him “Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself; his life is meaningless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it” (n. 44). The love John Paul II addresses here is not partial love but “love that involves the entire person, in all his or her aspects - physical, psychic and spiritual” (n. 44). It is love modeled after the love of Christ for humanity.

According to John Paul II, problems are bound to occur where love is partial or reduced to sexuality as it is with the “widespread social and cultural atmosphere which ‘largely reduces human sexuality to the level of something commonplace, since it

interprets and lives it in a reductive and impoverished way by linking it solely with the body and with selfish pleasure” (n.44). Incidentally, the candidates are members of the current society and culture and some of them may come from families dotted with similar views and thoughts of human sexuality (n.44). For this and other reasons, John Paul II emphasizes that: “Education for responsible love and the affective maturity of the person are totally necessary for those who, like the priest, are called to celibacy, that is, to offer with the grace of the Spirit and the free response of one’s own will the whole of one’s love and care to Jesus Christ and to his Church” (n.44). According to him, “In view of the commitment to celibacy, affective maturity should bring to human relationships of serene friendship and deep brotherliness a strong, lively and personal love for Jesus Christ” (n.44). As a result, John Paul II goes on to say, the priesthood aspirants need “properly understood sexual education” (n.44). That is, an understanding that would lead them to realize the truth about human love because they “need an affective maturity which is prudent, able to renounce anything that is a threat to it, vigilant over both body and spirit, and capable of esteem and respect in interpersonal relationships between men and women” (n. 44). It is also an understanding that will enable them to know the meaning of the gift of self.

Finally, John Paul II reiterate that: “Human maturity, and in particular affective maturity, requires a clear and strong training in freedom, which expresses itself in convinced and heartfelt obedience to the truth of one’s own being, to the ‘meaning’ of one’s own existence, that is to the ‘sincere gift of self’ as the way and fundamental content of the authentic realization of self” (n. 44). These will serve both the priest and the church well in the ministry of salvation.

ii) Spiritual Formation

As grace is related to nature so is spiritual formation related to human formation. According to John Paul II, the human formation finds its completion in the spiritual formation, which is formation in human relation and communion with God. It is the work of the Holy Spirit and it engages the total person. It is rooted in the experience of the cross (n.45). According to him, the spiritual formation “should be structured according to the meanings and connotations which derive from the identity of the priest and his ministry.” He goes on to say, “Without spiritual formation pastoral formation would be left without foundation” (n.45). Further, citing *Optatam Totius* he states that “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” (n. 45). Here, according to Schuth (1999), seminarians are encouraged “to develop a spiritual worldview that incorporates the reality of working in parishes” (140). This will include prayer and spiritual exercises that will enable them to discern the needs of their parishioners and which will also assist them (the candidates) in their ministry as a whole (140).

In this context, spiritual direction is another important factor. According to the John Paul II (1992), regular attendance to spiritual direction will not only help the seminarian in his spiritual life and growth, but will also prepare him to offer spiritual direction to his parishioners when he becomes a priest. Taking on the likeness of Christ, the priest should be trained, says John Paul II, to form habits that will develop a friendly relationship with Christ in every detail of their lives (n. 45).

Further, John Paul II outlines “fundamental values and demands of the spiritual path” for the aspirants to the priesthood. According to him:

First there is the value and demand of ‘living intimately united’ to Jesus Christ.

Our union with the Lord Jesus, which has its roots in baptism and is nourished with the Eucharist, has to express itself and be radically renewed each day.

Intimate communion with the Blessed Trinity, that is, the new life of grace which makes us children of God, constitutes the ‘novelty’ of the believer, a novelty which involves both his being and his acting. It constitutes the ‘mystery’ of Christian existence which is under the influence of the Spirit: it should, as a result, constitute the ethos of Christian living. (n.46)

He goes on to say that the reality of Christian life taught by Christ, which is the heart of spiritual life, is to abide in Christ, the true vine that is being dressed and cared for by the heavenly Father because when detached from him, the Christian life bears no fruit but withers and fades away (n. 46).

The second great spiritual value, according to John Paul II is “the search for Jesus” (n.46). The candidates should be taught to seek and find Jesus in their daily life and life of others as well as in the daily events of things around them. For John Paul II “In a certain sense, the spiritual life of the person who is preparing for the priesthood is dominated by this search: by it and by the ‘finding’ of the Master, to follow him, to be in communion with him” (n. 46). This is vital because without the Master, he can do nothing.

This spiritual value and demand of seeking Jesus, according to John Paul II, should not end at finding him (Jesus), rather it should continue by leading others to Jesus

or helping others to seek and find him. For instance, Andrew found Jesus and brought his brother Simon to him (Jn 1:41-42). Bringing of others to Jesus, he says, is better done if it is out of lived experience and all through life. It is to be lived both as a candidate for the priesthood and as a priest.

Further, John Paul II states that a prayerful and meditated reading of the word of God and a humble and loving listening of him who speaks are essential elements of spiritual formation (n. 47). For him, it is “by the light and with the strength of the word of God that one’s own vocation can be discovered and understood, loved and followed, and one’s own mission carried out” (n. 47). He goes on to say: “Familiarity with the word of God will make conversion easy, not only in the sense of detaching us from evil so as to adhere to the good, but also in the sense of nourishing our heart with the thoughts of God, so that the faith (as a response to the word) becomes our new basis for judging and evaluating persons and things, events and problems” (47). The candidate who forms himself well on the word of God finds a stand on the solid ground of faith and on the message of everlasting life.

Another point John Paul II emphasizes is the Eucharist. For him, “The high point of Christian prayer is the Eucharist, which in its turn is to be seen as the ‘summit and source’ of the sacraments and the Liturgy of the Hours. A totally necessary aspect of the formation of every Christian, and in particular of every priest, is liturgical formation, in the full sense of becoming inserted in a living way in the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ, who died and rose again, and is present and active in the Church’s sacraments” (48). The Eucharist is closely associated with the sacrament of penance in the Catholic Church. Its importance in the life of every Catholic, especially priests and candidates for the

priesthood, cannot be overemphasized. Speaking of the sacrament of penance, John Paul II writes, “It is necessary and very urgent to rediscover within spiritual formation the beauty and joy of the sacrament of penance” (n. 48). For him, in a culture that is running the fatal risk of losing the “sense of sin” through self-justification, “it is vital to educate future priests to have the virtue of penance...which finds its fullness in the sacrament of reconciliation” (n. 48). Regular reception of the sacrament of penance will enhance the candidate’s virtue of humility, patience and compassion. These virtues will in turn assist him as a priest in the ministry of the sacrament of penance.

Spiritual formation also involves seeking Christ in people in the general context of charity - which consists in the loving gift of oneself as contained in this John Paul II’s directive: “Students must clearly understand that it is not their lot in life to lord it over others and enjoy honors, but to devote themselves completely to the service of God and the pastoral ministry. With special care they should be trained in priestly obedience, poverty and a spirit of self-denial, that they may accustom themselves to living in conformity with the crucified Christ and to, give up willingly even those things which are lawful, but not expedient” (n. 49). This is a call to lead a humble life in the ministry after the manner of Christ.

With regard to spiritual formation on celibacy and chastity, the John Paul II sets down the following instructions:

Let the bishops together with the rectors and spiritual directors of the seminaries establish principles, offer criteria and give assistance for discernment in this matter. Of the greatest importance for formation for chastity in celibacy are the bishop’s concern and fraternal life among priests. In the seminary, that is, in the

program of formation, celibacy should be presented clearly, without any ambiguities and in a positive fashion. The seminarian should have a sufficient degree of psychological and sexual maturity as well as an assiduous and authentic life of prayer, and he should put himself under the direction of a spiritual father. The spiritual director should help the seminarian so that he himself reaches a mature and free decision, which is built on esteem for priestly friendship and self-discipline, as well as on the acceptance of solitude and on a physically and psychologically sound personal state. ... In order that the seminarian may be able to embrace priestly celibacy for the kingdom of heaven with a free decision, he needs to know the Christian and truly human nature and purpose of sexuality in marriage and in celibacy. It is necessary also to instruct and educate the lay faithful regarding the evangelical, spiritual and pastoral reasons proper to priestly celibacy so that they will help priests with their friendship, understanding and cooperation. (n.50)

These point to the fact that priestly celibacy is more than living a single life or the renunciation of marriage.

Finally, the John Paul II expresses his intention to have seminarians with excellent spiritual formation in all aspects of the formation. Their goal is to live as Christ and lead the flock as Christ would.

iii) Intellectual Formation

This has to do with understanding the faith or “faith seeking understanding” as Saint Anselm would say. It is thus connected to both the human and spiritual formation (n.51). John Paul II (1992) describes intellectual formation as “a fundamental demand of the

human intelligence by which one ‘participates in the light of God’s mind’ and seeks to acquire a wisdom which in turn opens to and is directed toward knowing and adhering to God” (n.51). According to him, the intellectual formation of the future priests is the very nature of ordained ministry. Intellectual formation is faced with various challenges. The biggest challenge is the new evangelization in the new millennium (n.51). For John Paul II, understanding the contemporary situation requires corresponding knowledge and intelligence. The “widespread mistrust regarding the real capacity of reason to reach objective and universal truth, and the fresh problems and questions brought up by scientific and technological discoveries ...strongly demands a high level of intellectual formation” (n.51). He argues that this would help priests face contemporary challenges adequately and thus proclaim “the changeless Gospel of Christ and to make it credible to the legitimate demands of human reason” (n.51). In this light, “A crucial stage of intellectual formation,” according to John Paul II “is the study of philosophy, which leads to a deeper understanding and interpretation of the person, and of the person’s freedom and relationships with the world and with God. For him, “A proper philosophical training is vital” (n.52) because “only a sound philosophy can help candidates for the priesthood to develop a reflective awareness of the fundamental relationship that exists between the human spirit and truth, that truth which is revealed to us fully in Jesus Christ” (n.52). This would afford the candidates “a deeper understanding of man and the phenomena and lines of development of society, in relation to a pastoral ministry which is as ‘incarnate’ as possible, the so-called ‘human sciences’” (n.52). These will empower the candidate to carry out efficient ministry as he will be able to interact and proclaim the message of life to people of different works of life more effectively.

Speaking of the importance of philosophy in the formation process of priestly candidates, John Paul II argues that theology is the rock on which the intellectual formation of future priests is built. He states that “The value and genuineness of this theological formation depend on maintaining a scrupulous respect for the nature of theology” (n.53). In his explanation of the nature of theology, he states, “True theology proceeds from the faith and aims at leading to the faith” (n.53). This has been the concept of theology that the Church, and her magisterium, has always put forward (n.53).

Though theological formation is both complex and demanding, it should lead the candidate to a complete and unified vision of the truths which God has revealed in Jesus Christ and of the Church’s experience of faith. John Paul II John Paul II observes: “In reflecting maturely upon the faith, theology moves in two directions. The first is that of the study of the word of God” and “The second direction is that of the human person, who converses with God” (n. 34).

There are times when theologians present views or teachings that are not in agreement with the teaching of the Church. This has often, if not always, created confusion. Aware of such disparity between the magisterium and the theologians John Paul II notes: “Theological formation nowadays should pay attention to certain problems which not infrequently raise difficulties, tensions and confusion within the life of the Church. One can think of the relationship between statements issued by the magisterium and theological discussion” (n. 55). He indicates that there has been and there still exists a good deal of cooperation between the magisterium and theologians but cautions that: “When, for a number of reasons, this cooperation is lacking, one needs to avoid misunderstandings and confusion, and to know how to distinguish carefully ‘the common

teaching of the Church' from the opinions of theologians and from tendencies which quickly pass (the so-called trends). There is no 'parallel' magisterium, for the one magisterium is that of Peter and the apostles, the pope and the bishops" (n. 55). In this light, it is not expected of a priest or the candidate for the Catholic priesthood to side with the opinions of theologians against the Church and her magisterium but to stand with and defend the teachings of the Church.

iv) Pastoral Formation

The process of formation that candidates undergo, according to John Paul II, are aimed at preparing "them to enter into communion with the charity of Christ" and to make them true shepherds of souls after the example of Christ the good shepherd, the good teacher, the good priest, etc. who went about doing good to everyone (n.57). For this, according to him, "their formation in its different aspects must have a fundamentally pastoral character" (n. 57). Their pastoral formation for John Paul II, should include training on the ministry of the word "so that they may gain an ever-increasing understanding of the revealed word of God, making it their own by meditation and giving it expression in their speech and in their lives" (n. 57). Their pastoral training should also include the "ministry of worship and sanctification so that by prayer and the celebration of the sacred liturgical functions they may carry on the work of salvation through the eucharistic sacrifice and the sacraments" (n.57). This formation, John Paul II states, will also enable them "to undertake the ministry of the shepherd, that they may know how to represent Christ to humanity" (57). They will express the knowledge through humble service by becoming the servants of all after the example of Christ who came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many (n. 57).

According John Paul II, “Pastoral formation develops by means of mature reflection and practical application, and it is rooted in a spirit, which is the hinge of all and the force which stimulates it and makes it develop” (n. 57). As a result, the pastoral formation of candidates “cannot be reduced to a mere apprenticeship, aiming to make the candidate familiar with some pastoral techniques” (n. 58). Rather, he continues: each seminary “must seek really and truly to initiate the candidate into the sensitivity of being a shepherd, in the conscious and mature assumption of his responsibilities, in the interior habit of evaluating problems and establishing priorities and looking for solutions on the basis of honest motivations of faith and according to the theological demands inherent in pastoral work” (n. 58). Thus, the candidates should be formed to appreciate the pastoral ministry as a lived experience, part of their daily lives as servants of God in Christ. Since pastoral ministry is closely related to the missionary aspect of the Church, the seminarians should also be trained to have the missionary spirit. In this regard, John Paul II advises that seminarians should, with openness of mind and heart, embrace “the missionary dimension of the Church’s life” (n.58). To stand and keep them on the right footing, he instructs that opportunity should be created for the seminarians to practice “some initial forms of cooperation with one another and with the priests alongside whom they will be sent to work” (n.58). He further directs that when it comes to the time seminarians are sent out for some pastoral experience that “the parish should be given particular importance for it is a living cell of local and specialized pastoral work in which they will find themselves faced with the kind of problems they will meet in their future ministry” (n. 58). The priests outside the formation team play significant roles as they take over the formation process at such times. In union with the seminary, they direct the

candidates on how they should go about the pastoral work within the period of time assigned to them. John Paul II also instructs that at such time, the seminarians should be directed to undertake pastoral duties such as “visits to the sick; caring for immigrants, refugees and nomads; and various social works which can be expressions of charitable zeal” (n.58). For him, “These and other pastoral activities will teach the future priest to live out as a ‘service’ his own mission of ‘authority’ in the community, setting aside all attitudes of superiority or of exercising a power if it is not simply that which is justified by pastoral charity” (n.58). These will enable him to model his ministry after the Good Shepherd who came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.

Furthermore, John Paul II points out that pastoral formation should note that the Church is essentially ‘mystery,’ ‘communion,’ and ‘mission.’ As a result, the candidates should be formed to “live these ecclesial aspects in the exercise of the ministry” (n. 59). In his explanation of these three aspects, John Paul II states that the candidates ought to be aware that the Church is a ‘mystery,’ in the sense that she is “a divine work, fruit of the Spirit of Christ, an effective sign of grace, the prescience of the Trinity in the Christian community” (n.59). According to him, a candidate’s awareness of the Church as ‘communion’ will prepare him “for the priesthood to carry out his pastoral work with a community spirit, in heartfelt cooperation with the different members of the Church: priests and bishop, diocesan and religious priests, priests and lay people” (n.59). In this way, according to John Paul II, the seminarian’s awareness of the Church as a ‘missionary’ communion will help him “to love and live the essential missionary dimension of the Church and her different pastoral activities. He should be open and available to all the possibilities offered today for the proclamation of the Gospel, not

forgetting the valuable service which can and should be given by the media. He should prepare himself for a ministry which may mean in practice that his readiness to ...be sent to preach the Gospel even beyond the frontiers of his own country” (n. 59). For a priest is ordained for the service of all the people of God irrespective of where they live.

Finally, the goal of priestly formation is to present suitably qualified candidates for ordination. That is, candidates that are ready to live among the people of God and serve them in holiness of mind, body, and soul (Schuth 1999, 126). Such candidates should uphold the Church’s tradition, her fundamental doctrines, and teaching on the priesthood. (Okoro 2008, 104, 105). Training candidates for the priesthood is exploratory, expository, and liberative. Through training the candidates gain wisdom and understanding, and attain all-round formation. They are enabled to adequately discern their vocation, respond appropriately, and follow after the example of their ideal teacher and formator – Christ, the good Shepherd. After their ordinations, the candidates would be able to lead and guard the people of God entrusted to their care according to the mind of Christ. For when fully trained, every disciple will be like his teacher (Lk 6:40).

h) USCCB² Program of Priestly Formation

The *Program of Priestly Formation* (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops 2006) is a document for the admission and training of candidates for the Catholic priesthood. The program is designed for the local church of the United States, but it can be adapted to suite other countries. It draws heavily from the global Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II, *Pastores dabo vobis* (1992) on the formation of Catholic priests. It also draws from two other papal documents: *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (John Paul II 2000) and *Ecclesia in America* (John Paul II 1999), as well as from Vatican

² USCCB is the abbreviation for United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

II documents such as the *Decree on the Training of Priests*. As would be expected, in the Program for Priestly Formation (PPF³), the USCCB (2006) integrates and addresses issues of priestly formation to reflect “the lived experience of seminaries in the United States” (n.6).

In allusion to *Pastores dabo vobis* (John Paul II 1992, n.5), the USCCB (2006) states that: “Priestly formation takes place in a given ecclesial and historical context. Identifying that context is a critical task for giving specific shape to particular programs of formation” (n.10). For this reason, the context varies from one particular ecclesiastical jurisdiction or culture to another. The manner of approach to formation also varies, but without any compromise to faith and the crux of the Church teaching. Thus the document states: “All priestly formation must have its foundation in an adherence to the truths of faith about the nature and mission of the ministerial priesthood. Those who are involved in the process of priestly formation whether as administrators, teachers, formators, or seminarians must adhere to these teachings” (n.13). This program is designed for the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the United States, but it contains views that are also useful to some other jurisdictions as reviewed hereunder.

i) Foundations of the Priesthood

In the *Program for Priestly Formation*, the USCCB (2006) presents a priesthood anchored on three foundations: Trinitarian, Christological, and Ecclesiological. It states that the priesthood is basically Trinitarian in nature. This is because, after a priest’s consecration at ordination, he is “sent forth by the Father through the mediatorship of Jesus Christ, to whom he is configured... in order to live

³ PPF is an abbreviation for the *Program for the Priestly Formation*

and work by the power of the Holy Spirit in service of the Church and for the salvation of the world” (n.15). The priest’s ministry is also centered on the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He baptizes people, celebrates the Eucharist, absolves, blesses, etc. in Trinitarian way.

The “Christological foundations” of the priesthood, according to the USCCB, is that the priest is called to prolong the presence of Christ, embody his way of life, and to make him visible in the church and the world. And as a sacramental representation of Jesus Christ in and for the Church, he, the priest is also called to authoritatively proclaim Christ’s word, offer his salvation through the sacraments especially in Baptism, Penance, and the Eucharist and to demonstrate Christ’s loving concern to the point of a total gift of self (n.16).

The USCCB (2006) cites *Pastores dabo vobis* (John Paul II 1992, n.6) to show that the priesthood has “ecclesiological foundation” as follows: “The priesthood, along with the word of God and the sacramental signs which it serves, belongs to the constitutive elements of the Church. The ministry of the priest is entirely on behalf of the Church; it aims at promoting the exercise of the common priesthood of the entire people of God” (n.17). That is why priest’s participation in Christ’s priesthood is called “ministerial.” The priest’s duty is to serve the members of Christ’s Body – the Church (n.17). With this brief review of the foundations of the priesthood, the next topic deals with the manner of admission of candidates for the priesthood.

ii) Process of Admission into the Seminary

It is believed that the person who aspires to be admitted into the major seminary must have made some initial personal preparations and has with him some basic requirements that may set him as a probable candidate. For instance, he has to be a baptized Catholic. The church expects him to have qualities of a Catholic Christian, which may serve as rudimentary form of vocation discernment. The USCCB (2006) lists such qualities as follows: “a right intention, a sufficient degree of human maturity, a sufficiently broad knowledge of the doctrine of the faith, some introduction into the methods of prayer and behavior in conformity with Christian tradition. They should also have attitudes proper to their regions, through which they can express their effort to find God and the faith” (n. 34). According to the USCCB, the PPF also uses “the principle of gradualism” to judge the suitability of an applicant. The principle of gradualism states that: “progressively higher levels of expectations should be sought as an applicant seeks admission to progressively higher levels of preparation, moving from the preparatory to the collegiate or pre-theologate, and finally to the theologate program” (n.34). For the purpose of clarity, Schuth (1999) uses the word *theologate* to designate institutions that enroll seminarians and/or lay students studying at the graduate level as they prepare for ministry” (xvii) as distinct from “seminaries that operate at the high school and college levels” (xvii).

The principle of gradualism deems it “unrealistic to expect an applicant for admission to be fully mature in all areas” (USCCB 2006, n.35). At the same time the principle “does not deny that a minimal level of development is necessary for admission to any level of priestly formation. The minimal qualities necessary for admission are

properly understood as *thresholds* or *foundations*” (n. 36). It explained that the principle expects all applicants to have sufficient formation or passed through certain thresholds of human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral development. It serves as foundations for further development. It relates that the candidate who achieved a threshold of a basic capacity for empathy and communication would be seen to have a foundation upon which pastoral formation could develop (n. 36). Similar instances could be drawn on the other three areas of formation: human, spiritual, and intellectual formations. The four are the key areas of formation already reviewed above under the “Areas of Formation.”

Suffice it at this point to note that:

sufficient human formation for admission means not only an absence of serious pathology but also a proven capacity to function competently in ordinary human situations without need to do extensive therapeutic or remedial work to be fully functioning, a psychosexual maturity commensurate with chronological age, a genuine empathy that enables the applicant to connect well and personally with others, a capacity for growth or conversion, and a deep desire to be a man for others in the likeness of Christ. Sufficient spiritual formation means a well catechized person who prays daily, belongs to a parish, participates at least weekly in the Sunday Eucharist and regularly in the Sacrament of Penance, and is drawn to explore and deepen his spiritual life and share it with others. Sufficient intellectual formation means proven capacities for critical thinking, an ability to understand both abstract and practical questions, and the capacity to understand other persons and to communicate effectively with them in both oral and written form. Sufficient

pastoral formation means having a fundamental sense of the Church's mission and a generous willingness and enthusiasm to promote it and knowing how the ordained priesthood contributes to the mission; having a sensitivity to the needs of others and a desire to respond to them; and having a willingness to initiate action and assume a position of leadership for the good of individuals and communities. (n. 37)

The candidates should possess the *right intention*: to pursue preparation for priestly ordination and ministry that corresponds to the Church's understanding of it (n. 37).

When all is said and done, according to the PPF, it is the primary responsibility of the bishop on the diocesan level "to decide whether or not to admit candidates to priestly formation, in accordance with the criteria which have been properly established" (USCCB 2006, n. 39) by the diocese concerned. But he can always delegate or share the responsibility "with the vocation director or vocation team, perhaps also with a vocation board or commission, and with the local parishes" (n. 39) to ensure suitability of the candidate and to obtain all the necessary requirements for admission.

iii) Requirements for Admission

While the process of admission is more on the theoretical sphere, the requirements for admission make more of practical demands on the applicant. For instance, he is required to provide certain documents and undergo tests or evaluations. According to the USCCB (2006), the candidate for admission is required to submit "sacramental records and autobiography." Other requirements include a review of his "psychological and medical assessment, observations of the potential candidates during the course of their visits to the seminary, interviews, transcripts, criminal background

checks, and immigration documentation as well as letters of reference” (n. 39). The program further stated that the bishops and rectors must have moral certitude about the psychological and physical health of applicants. In addition, according to the PPF, they must particularly “be assured that applicants have a requisite level of affective maturity and the capacity to live celibate chastity” (n.39) through determined necessary means. Such means include “their own interviews with applicants, the reliable testimony of those who have known the applicants, and psychological and physical assessments made by expert consultants.” And “Whenever possible, the diocese and the seminary should conduct separate admission procedures to ensure the broadest and most objective screening possible, while avoiding a duplication of these efforts” (n. 39). In other words, even though it is the prerogative of the diocesan bishop to admit candidates for the priesthood, it is a collaborative work to ensure that only the suitable candidates are admitted from the beginning.

iv) Norms for the Admission of Candidates

The USCCB stipulates that seminaries and dioceses “must have clear written statements of admission policies, which are to be regularly reviewed and updated” (n.42). These policies include behavioral criteria that place the burden of qualification for admission on the applicants and not on the seminary or diocese (n.42). The major norms for the admission of candidates for the priesthood in the United States according to the USCCB are these:

Seminaries should specify thresholds or foundations in a way that permits those charged with admitting candidates to have clear criteria available. This approach to admissions assumes that the seminary formation program is not

the place for long term therapy or remedial work, which should be completed prior to a decision concerning admission.

Applicants must give evidence of an overall personal balance, good moral character, a love for the truth, and proper motivation. This includes the requisite human, moral, spiritual, intellectual, physical, and psychological qualities for priestly ministry.

All applicants should give witness to their conviction that God has brought them to the seminary to discern whether or not they are really called to the priesthood, and they should commit themselves wholeheartedly to carrying out that discernment.

Applicants for pre-theology must follow a careful and thorough admissions process equivalent to entrance procedures for the theologate. This process may result in specific recommendation concerning the applicant's program.

Applicants must undergo a thorough screening process. Personal interviews with the applicants, evaluations from their pastors and teachers, records and evaluations from a previous seminary or religious community if applicable, academic records, standardized test scores, psychological evaluations, and criminal background checks are all components of an effective admission program and are weighed together with an assessment of the applicant's motivation. Those who do not fulfill these entrance requirements of the seminary must not be admitted. (nn. 43, 44, 45, 46, 47)

Those who qualify or fulfill the requirements are given the opportunity to continue or start the seminary training for the ministry.

Generally, the PPF of the USCCB is well formulated for the diocese and priests of the United States. At the same, it is inclusive in the sense that it takes into consideration the fact that the US is not a homogenous church, but a church of diverse people and cultures and accordingly made provision for candidates of other cultures who may seek admission to the priesthood in the States.

I) Church Teaching on the Use of Psychology in the Admission and Formation of Candidates for the Priesthood.

i) Introduction

This section reviews the Congregation for Catholic Education's *Guidelines for the Use of Psychology in the Admission and Formation of Candidates for the Priesthood* (2008). The Congregation for Catholic Education is a department of the Congregations of *Roman Curia* responsible for educational institutions of the Catholic Church. This Congregation for Catholic Education has issued and continues to issue many and various guidelines and regulations for various educational establishments of the Church. Its *Guidelines for the Use of Psychology in the Admission and Formation of Candidates for the Priesthood*, as submitted by the Cardinal Zenon Grocholewski at Rome, is approved and authorized for publication by Benedict XVI on June 29, 2008.

In reference to *Pastores dabo vobis* (John Paul II 1992, n. 35), the Congregation for Catholic Education's *Guidelines for the Use of Psychology in the Admission and Formation of Candidates for the Priesthood* recognizes and teaches that the priesthood is not the only Christian vocation. It states that, "each Christian vocation comes from God and is God's gift" and the purpose of each vocation "is to build up the Church and to

increase the kingdom of God in the world” (Congregation for Catholic Education 2008, n. 1). It also teaches that the gift of vocation “is never bestowed outside of or independently of the church.” Rather “it always comes about in the Church and through the Church” (1). It explains that the Church, which by her very nature is a vocation is also “a begetter and educator of vocations,” as well as “a ‘sacrament,’ a ‘sign’ and ‘instrument’ in which the vocation of every Christian is reflected and lived out” (Congregation for Catholic Education 2008, n. 1; John Paul II n. 35). Consequently, it behooves the Church as a begetter and educator of vocations, to discern the genuineness of vocations to the priesthood and ascertain the suitability of the candidates. At the helm of this process, according to the Congregation for Catholic Education, is the bishop who has to recognize and authenticate “the interior call of the Spirit,” that is, the internal motivation for the priesthood, as may be expressed by each candidate (n. 1).

Adequate discernment and formation take into account the good of both the Church and the candidates as expressed by the Congregation for Catholic Education: “In furthering this discernment, and throughout the entire process of formation for ministry, the Church is moved by two concerns: to safeguard the good of her own mission and, at the same time, the good of the candidates” (n.1). For the Congregation for Catholic Education, “the good of the Church and that of the candidate are not in opposition, but rather converge” (n.1). It notes that “those responsible for formation work at harmonizing these two goods, by always considering both simultaneously in their interdependent dynamic” (n. 1). The candidate and his vocation belong to the Church and the Church belongs to Christ. And so are not opposed to each other. However, the Church does not take issues of formation and discernment lightly. The Congregation for Catholic

Education in the document: *A Guide to Formation in Priestly Celibacy* (1974)

recommends that: “Detecting defects earlier would help avoid many tragic experiences” (n. 38). As a result, the Church scrutinizes not only the physical but every aspect of the candidates. The goal is to have all-round well-formed and adequately discerned vocation and balanced persons for the ministry of the priesthood.

ii) Balanced Personality

According to the Congregation for Catholic Education (2008), “The priestly ministry, understood and lived as a conformation to Christ, Bridegroom and Good Shepherd, requires certain abilities as well as moral and theological virtues, which are supported by a human and psychic – and particularly affective – equilibrium, so as to allow the subject to be adequately predisposed for giving of himself in the celibate life, in a way that is truly free in his relations with the faithful” (n. 2). Drawing from *Pastores dabo vobis* (John Paul II 1992, n.43) the Congregation for Catholic Education affirms that the human dimension of priestly formation “is the foundation of all formation” (n.2). The Congregation for Catholic Education (2008) also references *Pastores dabo vobis*’ (n.43) series of human virtues and relational abilities that are required of the priest, so that his personality may be “a bridge and not an obstacle for others in their meeting with Jesus Christ the Redeemer of humanity” (n.2). According to the Congregation, “These virtues and qualities range from the personality’s general equilibrium to the ability to bear the weight of pastoral responsibilities, from a deep knowledge of the human spirit to a sense of justice and loyalty” (n.2).

Further, the Congregation for Catholic Education (2008) states that “priestly vocation involves an extraordinary and demanding synergy of human and spiritual

dynamics” (n. 2). It is incumbent on the Church, through her qualified formators, the Congregation goes on to say, to form and equip the “candidates with an effective integration of the human dimension, in light of the spiritual dimension into which it flows and in which it finds its completion” (n. 2). This will produce the balanced personality fit and needed for the ordained ministry.

iii) Formators

In their *Message of the Synod* (Bishops of Africa 1994, n. 51), the Fathers of the first African Synod urges every African Episcopal Conference to ensure that only well-qualified priests, who are capable to carry out the synod’s formation program, are sent to teach in the seminaries. The Church has always emphasized the necessity of well-trained teachers for the formation of candidates for the priesthood. Some of the emphases are contained in the *Directives concerning the Preparation of Seminary Formators* (Congregation for Catholic Education 1993). According to the Congregation for Catholic Education (1993): “Every formator should have a good knowledge of the human person: his rhythms of growth; his potentials and weaknesses; and his way of living his relationship with God. Thus, it is desirable that bishops – by making use of various experiences, programs and institutions of good reputation – provide a suitable preparation in vocational pedagogy for formators, according to the indications already published by the Congregation for Catholic Education” (n. 3). The Congregation for Catholic Education (1993) also stipulates that the formators should have, in addition to authentic pedagogical sense, an attitude of spiritual paternity, expressed in an attentive, respectful and discreet, accompaniment of the growth of the person (n. 3). The *Optatam Totius* (The Catholic Church 1996) presents a more detailed information on the requirements as

follows: Since the formation of students depends both on sensible rules and still more on suitable educators, seminary rectors and teachers should be chosen from among persons of the highest calibre, and they should be prepared by sound teaching, appropriate pastoral experience and spiritual and pedagogical training. To this end special colleges are to be set up, or at least suitable courses organized, as well as regular meetings of seminary directors” (n.5). Suitable courses for the training of educators for the formation of the future priests will obviously include course in vocation discernment as the Congregation for Catholic Education (2008) instructs: “Formators need to be adequately prepared to carry out a discernment that, fully respecting the Church’s doctrine on the priestly vocation, allows for a reasonably sure decision as to whether the candidate should be admitted to the seminary or house of formation of the religious clergy, or whether he should be dismissed from the seminary or house of formation for reasons of unsuitability” (n. 3). In this light, a well prepared formator will be able to make the initial discernment of the suitability of a candidate for admission in the seminary.

At the same time, the Church is aware that in spite of the training and efforts of the formators, mistakes can still occur. This is articulated in: *A Guide to Formation in Priestly Celibacy* (Congregation for Catholic Education 1994, n.38; 2008, n.4). In this document the Congregation for Catholic Education (1994) states that “errors in discerning vocations are not rare, and in all too many cases psychological defects, sometimes of a pathological kind, reveal themselves only after ordination to the priesthood. Detecting defects earlier would help avoid many tragic experiences” (n. 4). For this reason, the Congregation for Catholic Education (2008) enunciates that it is necessary:

For every formator to possess, in due measure, the sensitivity and psychological preparation that will allow him, insofar as possible, to perceive the candidate's true motivations, to discern the barriers that stop him integrating human and Christian maturity, and to pick up on any psychopathic disturbances present in the candidate. The formator must accurately and very prudently evaluate the candidate's history. Nevertheless, this history alone cannot constitute the decisive criterion which would be sufficient for judging whether to admit the candidate or dismiss him from formation. The formator must know how to evaluate the person in his totality, not forgetting the gradual nature of development. He must see the candidate's strong and weak points, as well as the level of awareness that the candidate has of his own problems. Lastly, the formator must discern the candidate's capacity for controlling his own behaviour in responsibility and freedom. (n. 4)

The Congregation for Catholic Education is aware that the formator is not an expert in psychology and does not expect him to do the job of experts in psychological sciences. It views these assessments as the basics a well-trained formator can undertake before "meeting experts in the psychological sciences, to compare notes and obtain clarification on some specific issues" or to employ their expertise for adequate vocation discernment (n. 4).

iv) Psychology in Formation and Vocation Discernment

The Congregation for Catholic Education (2008) explains that "inasmuch as it is the fruit of a particular gift of God, the vocation to the priesthood and its discernment lie outside the strict competence of psychology" (n. 5). At the same time, it shows that there

are some discernment cases where expert help will be sought from psychology to adequately evaluate the candidate's psychic state so as to ascertain his human disposition to respond to divine call. The Congregation is of the view that such expert assessment can provide the formators with some helpful information and may even provide therapy to the candidate if psychic problem was diagnosed (n. 5).

It also notes that many of the contemporary aspirants to the priesthood have contemporary problems that need to be sorted out in the process of discernment and given serious timely attention. It expresses the fact that "those who today ask admittance to the seminary reflect, in a more or less accentuated way, the unease of an emerging mentality characterized by consumerism, instability in family and social relationships, moral relativism, erroneous visions of sexuality, the precariousness of choices, and a systematic negation of values especially by the media" (n. 5). Among the candidates also, the Congregation continues, there "can be found some who come from particular experiences – human, family, professional, intellectual or affective – which, in various ways, have left psychological wounds that are not yet healed and that cause disturbances. These wounds, unknown to the candidate in their real effects, are often erroneously attributed by him to causes outside himself, thus depriving him of the possibility of facing them adequately" (n. 5). The Congregation explains that all the above-mentioned issues, can "limit the candidate's capacity for making progress on the path of formation towards the priesthood" (n. 5). Consequently, it recommends that when particular difficult psychological cases present themselves, the help of experts in psychology should be sought to evaluate the problem. The psychological evaluation, it states, can take the form of interviews and test with prior approval and consent of the candidate (n. 5).

While the Congregation advocates for the use of the services of experts in psychological sciences, it does not approve the utilization of every psychological technique for or by everybody. Hence it warns that, “In consideration of their particular sensitive nature, the use of specialist psychological or psychotherapeutic techniques must be avoided by the formators” (n. 5). For the experts in psychological sciences whose assistance is sought, the Congregation directs that they “cannot be part of the formation team, will have to have specific competence in the field of vocations, and unite the wisdom of the Spirit to their professional expertise” (n. 6). This is because specific competence and wisdom of the Spirit in the field of vocations, according to the Congregation, provides some assurance, “to guarantee, as much as possible, an intervention that is coherent with the candidate’s moral and spiritual formation...to avoid any harmful confusion or opposition” (n. 6). For it will not be fair to subject a candidate to an expert who does not share his belief or one who has no clue of what his aspiration means. Therefore the expert must show that he “openly shares the Christian vision about the human person, sexuality, as well as vocation to the priesthood and to celibacy.” And “Wherever such experts are not available, let steps be taken to specifically preparing them,” the Congregation for Catholic Education (2008) instructs (n. 6). Thus, the Congregation allows the local church to train her own experts in psychological sciences for the good of the seminarians and the Church as a whole.

At the same time, in the *Guidelines*: the Congregation for Catholic Education (2008) makes it clear that whatever assistance psychological science offers to the candidate will not be in isolation but “must be integrated within the context of the candidate’s entire formation. It must not obstruct, but rather ensure, in a particular way,

that the irreplaceable value of spiritual accompaniment is guaranteed” (n. 6). This supports an earlier statement that formation for the ministry is about the entire person and vocation discernment is a continuous process from initial discernment until ordination.

v) Initial Discernment of Vocation

On discernment of vocation, USCCB (2006) states in the PPF that “Potential candidates for the priesthood must be in prayerful dialogue with God and with the Church in the discernment of their vocation” (n. 33). It sees this connection and dialogue as the first phase of vocation discernment that may lead to admission into the seminary (n. 33). The program presents a process of admission whose purpose “is to determine whether candidates have the requisite qualities to begin the process of formation and preparation for priestly ordination and ministry” (n. 34). This is to ensure from the beginning that the candidates who are likely to become priests are admitted to the seminary. The Congregation for Catholic Education (2008) is of the view that a well-trained formator should, with his or her knowledge of psychology and vocation discernment, be able to evaluate from the onset some of the psychological problems a candidate may have. In the words of the Congregation: “Right from the moment when the candidate presents himself for admission to the seminary, the formator needs to be able accurately to comprehend his personality; potentialities; dispositions; and the types of any psychological wounds, evaluating their nature and intensity (n. 8). Further, the Congregation (2008) advises that the formator should be keenly aware of the fact that some candidates tend to minimize or deny their weaknesses. Such candidates fear they would not be understood or accepted. The Congregation goes on to say, that there are also candidates who

emphasize their own difficulties to the extent of considering them insurmountable obstacles for the realization of their vocation (n. 8). That means that the well-trained educator of the seminarians should be on the lookout for those extremes while being mindful of the midway, for virtue stands in the middle.

On the part of the formators, vocation discernment for the candidate starts as soon as he shows up at the seminary. According to the Congregation: “The timely discernment of possible problems that block the vocational journey can only be of great benefit for the person, for the vocational institutions and for the Church” (n. 8). The Congregation lists some of the possible problems as: “excessive affective dependency; disproportionate aggression; insufficient capacity for being faithful to obligations taken on; insufficient capacity for establishing serene relations of openness, trust and fraternal collaboration, as well as collaboration with authority; a sexuality identity that is confused or not yet well defined” (n. 8). These, according to the Congregation, are obstacles on the vocational journey but not deterrents. Timely adequate vocation discernment and treatment may save the vocation concerned. The Congregation also directs that expert psychological sciences’ assistance can be sought during the initial discernment phase but principally on specific diagnostic level whenever there is suspicion that psychic disturbances may be present. Should an evaluation of the suspicion indicate that the candidate will need therapy; his admission should be put on hold until after the therapy (n. 8). It is also the position of the Congregation that “The assistance of experts can be useful for formators, including when they are marking out a path of formation tailored to the candidate’s specific needs” (n. 8). Such assistance will afford them the tool to adequately address the candidate’s issues.

As regards the issue of sexuality or celibate life, the Congregation instructs:

When evaluating whether it is possible for the candidate to live the charism of celibacy in faithfulness and joy, as a total gift of his life in the image of Christ the Head and Shepherd of the Church, let it be remembered that it is not enough to be sure that he is capable of abstaining from genital activity. It is also necessary to evaluate his sexual orientation, according to the indications published by this Congregation. Chastity for the Kingdom, in fact, is much more than the simple lack of sexual relationships. (n. 8)

The publication of the Congregation mentioned above is captioned: *Instruction concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies in View of their Admission to the Seminary and to Holy Orders.*

The publication, among other things reaffirms the Church's stand that the Church "cannot admit to the seminary or to holy orders those who practice homosexuality, present deep-seated homosexual tendencies or support the so-called 'gay culture'" (Congregation for Catholic Education 2005, n.2). And one of the reasons advanced for this stand is that "Such persons, in fact, find themselves in a situation that gravely hinders them from relating correctly to men and women" (n. 2). For the document, early or initial discernment will be of benefit to such persons and the Church.

vi) Subsequent Formation

According to the Congregation for Catholic Education (2008), the assistance of experts in psychological sciences should not only be employed at initial evaluation or in times of crisis. It should be used during the formation process. As the Congregation states, the expert "can also be useful in supporting the candidate on his journey towards a

more sure possession of the moral virtues. It can furnish the candidate with a deeper knowledge of his personality, and can contribute to overcoming, or rendering less rigid, his psychic resistances to what his formation is proposing” (n. 9). The Congregation believes that “a deeper knowledge of his personality” informs a candidate who he really is and what potentials he possesses. It also enables him to become a better master of his weaknesses and his human and spiritual forces. As a result he can, with awesome awareness and maturity continue his response to God with more freedom and responsibly (n. 9).

The Congregation is cognizant of the fact that each candidate is different and may present unique issues. Hence what works well for one candidate may not work well for the other, even with extra personal efforts and expert’s assistance. While the Congregation acknowledges this fact, it offers some solutions in these words:

It is possible that the candidate – notwithstanding his own commitment and the support of the psychologist, or psychotherapy – could continue to show himself unable to face realistically his areas of grave immaturity – even given the gradual nature of all human growth. Such areas of immaturity would include strong affective dependencies; notable lack of freedom in relations; excessive rigidity of character; lack of loyalty; uncertain sexual identity; deep-seated homosexual tendencies; etc. If this should be the case, the path of formation will have to be interrupted. (n. 10)

According to the Congregation, “the same is also true if it becomes evident that the candidate has difficulty living chastity in celibacy: that is, if celibacy, for him, is lived as a burden so heavy that it compromises his affective and relational equilibrium” (n. 10).

The interruption may include suspension until he is healed or the termination of his formation from the seminary.

This subsection shows that subsequent formation goes a long way in “supporting the candidate on his journey towards a more sure possession of the moral virtues” (n.9) he needs in his formation and ministry. It also monitors his growth, development, maturity, and revisits past issues to assess what progress has been made. It equally provides more learning, guidance, encouragement and support where possible. It seeks to ensure that the focus is on the goal.

vii) Expert Evaluation and Privacy of the Candidate

Though vocation is a free call from God, God calls people through the Church as the “begetter and formator of vocations” (n.1). Therefore, “it belongs to the Church to choose persons whom she believes are suitable for the pastoral ministry, and it is her right and duty to verify the presence of the qualities required in those whom she admits to the sacred ministry” (n. 11). Citing Canons 1051.1 and 1052 (law of the Church), the Congregation affirms the right of the Church “to verify the suitability of the candidates, including by means of recourse to medical and psychological science” (n.11). Going further, it says: “In fact, it belongs to the bishop or competent superior not only to examine the suitability of the candidate, but also to establish that he is suitable” (n. 11). According to the Congregation, the candidate concerned should accept the outcome. In the words of the Congregation: “A candidate for the priesthood cannot impose his own personal conditions, but must accept with humility and gratitude the norms and the

conditions that the Church herself places, on the part of her responsibility. Therefore, in cases of doubt concerning the candidate's suitability, admission to the seminary or house of formation will sometimes only be possible after a psychological evaluation of the candidate's personality" (n.11). These are both for the good of the church and the candidate.

Like the Church, the seminaries also have "the right and the duty to acquire the knowledge necessary for a prudentially certain judgment regarding the candidate's suitability" (n. 12). The Congregation however, cautions that care should be taken so as not to harm the reputation of the candidate who has the right to protect his privacy. For this reason, it stipulates that a "candidate's psychological consultation can only proceed with his previous, explicit, informed and free consent" (n.12). It also advises that care should be taken to avoid creating the impression that the psychological evaluation or consultation "is the prelude to the candidate's inevitable dismissal from the seminary or house of formation" (n. 12). The Congregation specifies that no particular expert should be imposed on a candidate. Instead the candidate should freely choose from among the approved experts, the one that he feels comfortable with. At the same time, the Congregation instructs that a candidate has the right to refuse to undergo any psychological procedure. Should that be the case, especially if the psychological procedure is a motivated request by the formators, "the formators will not force his will in any way. Instead, they will prudently proceed in the work of discernment with the knowledge they already have, bearing in mind the aforementioned canon 1052 § 1" (n.12). The said canon "establishes that the bishop, in order to be able to proceed to ordaining the candidate, must have moral certainty that 'positive arguments have proved'

his suitability” (Canon Law Society of America 1983). And § 3 of the same canon provides that “in the case of motivated doubt, he must not proceed with the ordination (Canon Law Society of America 1983). Since no candidate can impose his personal will on the Church. Each candidate has to undergo all the process of evaluation for vocation discernment that the Church deems necessary in order to ascertain his suitability or withdraw from the formation.

viii) Formators and the Expert

Both the expert in psychological sciences and the formators belong to the external forum in the formation program of the future priests. In addition to operating on the external forum, the Congregation stipulates that the expert should not be a member of the formation team. In spite of that, the expert is still bound by confidentiality in order to retain the trust of the candidate and in keeping with the norms of priestly formation. Each candidate should be given the opportunity to choose the expert who will attend to his psychological needs. But the expert must be an already approved or be approved by the formators.

Similarly, the Congregation instructs that the release of candidate’s test results will not be taken for granted. Each evaluation or consultation that a seminarian undergoes produces some results that may be used for his formation. But the results will be used only if he consents to the release. To apply such results for the good of the candidate, the Congregation directs as follows:

In a spirit of reciprocal trust and in co-operation with his own formation, the candidate can be invited freely to give his written consent so that the expert in the psychological sciences, who is bound by confidentiality, can communicate the

results of the consultation to the formators indicated by the candidate himself. The formators will make use of any information thus acquired to sketch out a general picture of the candidate's personality, and to infer the appropriate indications for the candidate's further path of formation or for his admission to ordination. (n. 13)

The Church has demonstrated how much she treasures the privacy and reputation of the candidates. For this, the Congregation stipulates that: In order to protect, in both the present and the future, the candidate's privacy and good reputation, let particular care be taken so that the professional opinions expressed by the expert be exclusively accessible to those responsible for formation, with the precise and binding proscription against using it in any way other than for the discernment of a vocation and for the candidate's formation" (n.13). There shows an attitude of collaboration. Though the expert in psychological sciences may not be a member of the formation team, he or she plays significant role in the formation and discernment of vocation of the candidates for the priesthood. He or she does this by providing the formators with the necessary materials that lie outside the formators competence, but which they have to work with to determine the suitability of the candidates for the ordained ministry.

ix) Spiritual Director

While the formators and the experts in psychological sciences work on the external forum, the spiritual director operates on the internal forum. The internal forum deals with the candidate's spiritual life. This is a restricted forum, strictly reserved for the candidate and his spiritual director only. Here the candidate relates or shares his spiritual life, challenges, struggles and progress with his spiritual director. It is part of the duty of

the spiritual director to encourage and direct him on the best possible way to follow. The information the spiritual director obtains in this forum are never, under any circumstance disclosed on the external forum. Indeed it is not the easiest forum in the formation program as the Congregation states: “The spiritual director’s task is not easy, neither in discerning the vocation nor in the area of conscience” (n. 14). This is because he is bound in conscience and by the seal of confidentiality and secrecy different from that of the external forum. Most of the time, if not always, he is excluded from the forum that discusses the candidates, especially during screening. Yet he is a member of the formation team who has to make positive contributions for quality outcome in the formation ministry.

However, the spiritual director can and does make some positive contributions for the formation and adequate discernment of seminarians’ vocation without compromising the principles of the internal forum. He makes his contribution by instruction, advice, encouragement, persuasion, or appeal to the conscience of the candidates in matters of faith and moral. While he does not present internal forum information to the external forum, the spiritual director can, when he considers it necessary, encourage the concerned seminarian to be open and sincere to the external forum formation team for his good and the good of the Church (n. 14). The Congregation for Catholic education (2005, n.3) also directs that:

In his discussions with the candidate, the spiritual director must especially point out the demands of the Church concerning priestly chastity and the affective maturity that is characteristic of the priest, as well as help him to discern whether he has the necessary qualities. The spiritual director has the obligation to evaluate

all the qualities of the candidate's personality and to make sure that he does not present disturbances of a sexual nature, which are incompatible with the priesthood. If a candidate practices homosexuality or presents deep-seated homosexual tendencies, his spiritual director as well as his confessor have the duty to dissuade him in conscience from proceeding towards ordination. (n.3)

The Congregation (2008) allows that the spiritual director "in order to clear up any doubts that are otherwise irresolvable and to proceed with greater certainty in the discernment and in spiritual accompaniment, he needs to suggest to the candidate that he undergo a psychological consultation – without, however, ever demanding it" (n.14). The Congregation goes on to say: "Should the spiritual director request that the candidate undergo a psychological consultation, it is desirable that the candidate, as well as informing the spiritual director himself about the results of the consultation, will likewise inform the external-forum formator, especially if the spiritual director himself will have invited him to do this" (n.14). The congregation further states that for some reason, "if the spiritual director should believe it useful that he himself directly acquire information from the consultant, let him proceed" with caution and the confidentiality prescribed for the formators in the external forum (n. 14). After a good review of the information, "The spiritual director will infer from the results of the psychological consultation the appropriate indications for the discernment that is of his competence, as well as the advice he must give the candidate, including as to whether to proceed on the path of formation" (n. 14). Should the spiritual director discern that the seminarian should not continue his formation, he should cordially but firmly advise him to withdraw from the seminary and seek a different vocation.

x) Expelled or Withdrawn Seminarian

Some expelled seminarians do not give up immediately, especially when they feel they have been wrongfully expelled. On the other hand, there are seminarians who decide to withdraw from one seminary and later apply for admission at another diocesan seminary or religious house. The Church has room for such candidates as long as the applicable norms are followed. The norms have to do with some screening and investigation of any visualized or suspected problems with the seminarian and with his former seminary. To this end the Congregation (2008) teaches that: “It is contrary to the norms of the Church to admit to the seminary or to the house of formation persons who have already left or, *a fortiori*, have been dismissed from other seminaries or houses of formation, without first collecting the due information from their respective bishops or major superiors, especially concerning the causes of the dismissal or departure” (n. 16). In addition to the information from their bishops or major superiors, it is the duty of previous formators to provide the new formators with all required information about the seminarian (n.16). The Congregation (2008) cautions that “particular attention be paid to the fact that often candidates leave the educational institution spontaneously so as to avoid an enforced dismissal” (n. 16). That is why the admitting institution should follow every protocol. It should not hurry or be hurried into admitting a seminarian from another seminary simply because he was not expelled.

On the part of the seminarian who transfers to another seminary, the Congregation (2008) stresses that he is bound in conscience and honesty to “inform the new formators about any psychological consultation previously carried out” (n.16). But it is “only with the candidate’s free, written consent can the new formators have access to the

communication of the expert who carried out the consultation” (n. 16). The candidate still has his right to privacy and that should be respected.

For a previously dismissed seminarian who underwent psychological treatment and becomes fit to be readmitted into a seminary, the Congregation stipulates: “let first his psychic condition be accurately verified, insofar as possible. This includes collecting the necessary information from the expert who treated him, after having obtained the candidate’s free, written consent” (n. 16). But should any candidate who has had psychological consultation or evaluation refuse to make the results available to the formators while seeking admission, the Congregation states: “let it be remembered that the suitability of the candidate must be proved with positive arguments, according to the norm of the aforementioned canon 1052, and, therefore, that all reasonable doubt must be excluded” (n. 16). The refusal of the candidate to make the result available may mean there is some problem and that may disrupt or terminate his admission.

For the Congregation (2008), all those who are responsible in various ways, for the formation of the future priests, should offer their convinced co-operation, “so that the discernment and vocational accompaniment of the candidates may be sufficient” (n. 16). This is necessary because the job of formation and vocation discernment require collaborative efforts of all those concerned to produce suitably qualified candidates for the ministry.

j) Hostie’s Psycho-Religious Examination of Vocation

Hostie (1963) is one of the voices that feels it is indispensable and wise to use necessary psychological tools in the process of formation of candidates for the priesthood. Hostie writes from his wealth of knowledge and experience as a priest and a psychologist. He is

also a counselor to candidates for the priesthood and religious life and equally has, to his credit, many years of experience as a consultant to religious superiors and spiritual directors. Hostie argues that each candidate for the priesthood should undergo some psycho-religious examination as a process of vocation discernment and formation. His views are similar to those already reviewed but he differs in his practical applications.

i) Discernment of External Vocation

According to Hostie, divine vocation is the immediate object of discernment. For him vocation can be discerned in two broad ways: external and internal. These are distinct but complementary dimensions of vocation discernment. According to Hostie, in the process of external discernment, the external graces that combine to form the candidate's aptitude can be revealed more easily. They can be observed more conveniently as well as judged more objectively. But this is not the case with the internal graces that constitute the discernment of the internal vocation. He advises that care should be taken not to be deceived by the presence of the required or expected aptitudes. These do not constitute a positive sign of internal vocation (35). He cautions that the enthusiasm of the formation team for a candidate should not be motivated by human calculation or appearances but by submission to the spirit of God. This is because a seminarian may possess to eminent degree all that is visibly needed to become a good priest, but he does not have the internal vocation. Without the internal aspects a vocation is not authentic (36). Since the aptitudes, products of the external graces are "revealed more easily, observed more conveniently and judged more objectively" (36). Hostie advises that they should serve as a convenient starting point to scrutinize the candidates and never be assumed as conclusive evidence of genuine vocation to the priesthood (36).

Hostie argues that for adequate vocation discernment or scrutiny, the candidate should equally be investigated under the canonical impediments to orders. He sums up the canonical impediments under three headings: bodily health, mental health, and spiritual equilibrium. According to him, when a seminarian is declared free from any serious impediment under this investigative process of discernment, “it may be concluded that aptitude is there, and the candidate can therefore present himself for the reception of orders” (37). If the candidate is found to have any of the impediments he may not be rightly allowed to go forward as it is.

Additionally, Hostie strongly believes that each candidate for the priesthood should undergo some psycho-religious examination. According to him, the aim is:

To provide the competent authorities, who have to decide whether to retain or dismiss a seminarian or young religious, with a detailed opinion based on factors both specifically religious and medico-psychological, and at the same time to promote in the candidate awareness of the nature of a vocation as well as of his personal difficulties, so that the superiors and the candidate may come, if possible unanimously, to a decision which makes allowance for all the factors at work.

(55)

The above contains some comparative analysis of the two broad ways to adequate vocation discernment. It has shed some light on the discernment of internal vocation as reviewed next.

ii) Discernment of Internal Vocation

While Hostie is convinced of the insufficiency of discernment of external vocation alone as the basis for judging the suitability of candidates. He is at the same

time worried that the discernment of internal vocation is rife with uncertainties. This is because it is not easy, if at all possible, to evaluate what cannot be quantified such as grace or spirit. Alluding to the discernment of the external vocation, Hostie states that seminarian's aptitude to the priestly or religious life can be sought and accessed "at various levels of his personality and at every level" (74). According to him, this can be done by "experiential data systematized into a coherent whole with its own proper laws. But can the same be said of internal grace, which, like all supernatural facts, surely eludes direct observation and exact verifications?" (74). Hostie acknowledges that this is a problem. He believes that a solution is possible. True as it is, grace is not visible, but Hostie is aware that grace builds on nature and its effect on nature can be accessed. He argues that through the effects of grace on a candidate, the internal vocation can be verified. In his words: "Of course, we cannot detect the presence of grace nor submit it to outside control. But does this mean we cannot observe or verify it in any way at all? Grace, being a supernatural force received by man produces its own effects. Its operation affects the whole man, even to his conscience" (74). This echoes the biblical axiom (Mt 12:34; Lk 6:45) that out of the abundance of the invisible heart, the mouth speaks thereby exposing the invisible part from which a person can be evaluated in some respect.

On another note, according to Hostie, discernment of the internal vocation questions the source or the spirit from which each candidate received his idea of vocation. This leads to a twofold inquiry: (1) the verification of motive. This inquires whether the ground for the desire to become a priest is authentic. (2) Verification of spiritual results which considers if the desire produces authentic fruits to that effect. (75). Incidentally, Hostie continues, it is not every priest that can adequately discern whether

the spirit of a vocation is genuine or not. Only the priest who has thorough knowledge of the seminarian and a priest who is entirely familiar with the particular spirituality the seminarian wishes to adopt or has actually adopted (75). This calls for the need to be deeply versatile in spiritual theology on the part of the formators. It also calls to mind the thoughts of Ekwunife (1997) who says Africanizing the formation of African priests should include creating in the seminaries the atmosphere of real home and family. This is a place where fraternal love, care, and appreciation of the other replaces the atmosphere of tensional fear, anxiety, suspicion, or hate. This, in Ekwunife's view, will enable the formation team to have close and thorough knowledge of the seminarians. It will help to understand them better and thus be able to evaluate or judge them objectively.

iii) Verification of Spiritual Results

The verification of spiritual results according to Hostie (1963) is not just “a matter of establishing whether or not a candidate is generous, faithful, detached, charitable, humble or even recollected, obedient, chaste or poor in the spirit. These virtues, if they are deeply rooted, certainly show whether he is open to grace.” But they are also virtues that other Christians possess or may acquire. The discernment process at this instance, according to Hostie, seeks to verify something more precise and delicate such as “whether there is an internal grace calling him to the life of a priest...and not simply to a fully Christian life in the world” (99). Such examination for Hostie can only arrive at a veritable affirmative conclusion after a considerable lapse of time during the formation (99). This confirms the view that vocation discernment is not a one-time event but a continuous process throughout the period of formation.

From Hostie's perspective, every element of the spiritual life of a seminarian says something about his vocation. But his life of prayer and practical understanding of the truths of faith are more revelatory and contribute more to the process of discerning his vocation. Prayer is the life of the soul and the priest is expected to be a man of prayer after the likeness of Christ. Hostie maintains that in-depth inquiries should be made to ascertain the seriousness and authenticity of the prayer life of the aspirant to the priesthood as part of the spiritual assessment. He submits that the seminarian should be evaluated on his view or attitude to prayer with the following soul searching questions:

Is it an exercise imposed from outside; or does it proceed from an inward urge, so that he must adopt his own personal attitude toward it? Is his prayer simply an asking for favors, or is it also, and primarily, a giving of self? Is it a search for sensible consolations or emotionally felt desires, or does it try to find God, even in renunciation and aridity? Is it something static that fastens on to past experiences, or something alive and dynamic which goes forth into the future? Does it follow the ups and downs of external circumstances or is it deeply rooted?

(101)

In the same disposition, Hostie puts forth the following questions he feels will help to shed light on the seminarian's attitude to the revealed truths of faith:

Does he understand what he is saying when he talks about God, Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints, or does he allow his imagination to indulge in more or less pious flights of fancy? Do spiritual truths, which he may well be fond of talking about, have any effective meaning for him and his behavior, or are they merely abstract considerations and perhaps disordered ones? Does he refer to

some experience which has helped him to form his judgment or does he confine everything to what he has been told and perhaps has heard repeatedly? Does he manage to form his own outlook from the whole corpus of revealed truths, or is he left cold by certain points and fascinated by others? (101)

The results of these evaluations will have a lot to say about the seminarian's source or spirit from which he received his vocation. However, Hostie admonishes that at the start, under this process of discernment, perfection should neither be expected nor demanded. This is for the fact that human and spiritual growth take gradual process. As a result, the candidate should be allowed sufficient time during the formation to learn, develop, grow, and mature in these areas. Hostie goes on to say that after a sufficient period of time has passed and the seminarian shows no spiritual growth, then some action should be taken. In his words, if it is observed that doubtful or insufficient motivation goes on in the life of the seminarian "together with non-existent or purely formal prayer and a completely exterior or perhaps fanciful understanding of truths of faith, there can be no further hesitation about passing a negative judgment. And this should in conscience be disclosed to the seminarian" (102). But, Hostie continues: passing a negative judgment does not necessarily and immediately mean that the seminary has disqualified the candidate from the seminary. Because given more or extra time, his awareness that a discerned judgment has been passed on him may serve to motivate him to genuine positive change and outcome. Hostie however concludes as follows: "If, in spite of his good intentions and efforts, there are no signs of the life-giving action of God, it will be necessary to conclude that he has no vocation" (203). And at that, the candidate may be asked to seek his vocation in other areas of the Church ministry.

In this process, the seminarian is made to see what is coming his way and given ample time to ruminate over it, to improve on it or to accept the inevitable outcome. In this manner, the seminarian may experience less, if any shock at all, when he is finally and charitably advised to seek his vocation elsewhere. One can only bloom where God plants him or her.

iv) Growth in Formation

Hostie does not believe in sluggish, but a dynamic growth of vocation as a personal choice. He also believes that dynamic life is not devoid of mistakes and difficulties. Likewise, the growth of vocation (formation process) is not free from problems. In his words: “A vocation, being a personal commitment to a particular form of life, must grow in depth and intensity. But such a growth does not proceed without jolts and collisions, and in this it follows the laws of all life” (132). For the wise, the mistakes, “jolts and collisions” serve as learning experience for better growth and development. Consequently, Hostie continues: “It is utopian to expect the initial formation to remove all difficulties and produce an infallible and irrevocable decision. The years of formation give candidates a chance to realize their talents and gifts and show their capacities, and this means that certain difficulties are inevitable and even necessary if real growth is to be assured. Nothing can be done without personal effort” (134). And when such personal efforts are appreciated and encouraged by the formators, the seminarian is motivated in freedom to make more efforts towards successful realization of the formation goal – the ordination of adequately discerned ministerial priest.

v) Discernment in Collaboration

In the *Program for Priestly Formation* the USCCB (2006) expresses the need for collaboration between the diocesan bishops, their formation teams, councils, and others who are responsible for the discernment of vocation and formation of candidates. The goal is to help candidates arrive at the desired common goal. From his experience, Hostie (1963) sees this as a normal practice. According to him

In practice many people with various qualifications contribute to the discerning of a vocation. If their interventions are to lead to a really satisfactory conclusion, it is most important that they should be animated by the same spirit. Any divergence in their views compromises the value of their decisions... To this end they must study closely and with one mind the problems which arise, in order to agree on a uniform line of conduct. Collaboration of this sort does not by any means demand lengthy discussions of each individual case. (147)

It is not only the bishop and those responsible for formation who should collaborate in the process. It is also required of the seminarian to collaborate with the formation team by being open, honest and sincere at all times. He should be particularly aware of the fact that vocation discernment is not a one-day or one-time affair. He has to cooperate with the team as long as it lasts – all through the formation period. To this end Hostie gives this reminder: “The Church explicitly says that the discernment of vocations must be exercised until perpetual vows or ordination” (149). And as a key player in the process, the seminarian cannot but be a full participant. According to Hostie: “...although discernment of vocations is primarily an ecclesiastical function, it can only be carried out fully if the person who is its object identifies himself fully with the will of God” (152) and by collaborating with the formation team. Because it is the vocation team that will at

the end of the formation say, like the apostles (Acts 15:28): it is the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us to recommend that this candidate be or not be promoted to the ministry of the priesthood.

k) Herr on Screening Candidates for the Priesthood

Another author that lends his voice to the use of psychology for discernment and formation of candidates for the priesthood is Vincent V. Herr. He expresses his views in his book: *Screening Candidates for the Priesthood and Religious Life* (1964). This review discloses that Herr is a priest and a psychologist who develops “psychological tests that measured visual literacy, cognitive and behavioral aptitude as they related to personality traits, physiological psychology, and associative psychological indices.” (Herr 1964, 66). He also developed the Loyola Language Study (LLS), which is used to determine psychologically normative behaviors. He participated in the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) used for test of adult personality and psychopathology. Under the sponsorship of National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) he took on the “Religion and Mental Health Project, which sought to describe the psychological state of religious order, as well as assess seminarians’ mental health” (Szegedi 2008).

i) Screening before Admission

Herr (1964) firmly believes in “Initial Discernment” (66) of vocation. For him, it is indispensable that there be a thorough screening of all the aspirants for the priesthood prior to their admission into the seminary. According to him, screening is an evaluation procedure whereby each candidate is tested for those natural traits or characteristics needed to become an effective priest so as to have only the proper kind of candidates

undergo the formation for the priesthood. He describes a proper candidate as “one who will do the most good for God and man in his spiritual ministrations” (66). For him, such screening and selection would reduce the risks of failures during the formation period and also prevent the wastage of time and resources on the candidates who will not succeed to the priesthood or will only succeed with almost insurmountable difficulties. He however acknowledges, like the other authors, that absolute prevention of all failures is not possible in the screening process (66).

Herr presents seven criteria under which the candidates for the priesthood should be tested and evaluated to ascertain the inherent traits and qualities that may qualify or disqualify a candidate. These traits are: Mental ability, Emotional control, Doubts, anxiety and guilt, Relation to persons in authority, Self-regarding attitudes, the Self and the Group, and Adjustment to Sex.

Herr elaborates on each of these criteria and discloses the results of the tests conducted using the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Test. The Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI together with its broader second edition MMPI-2) is a psychological assessment instrument that embodies personality tests frequently used in mental health to identify personality structure and psychopathology. In this process, according to Eifert (2010), the person under evaluation completes a series of tests items from different examiners (professionals). These are scored, compared and analyzed. The results allow the administrator to infer or determine the candidate’s typical behavior and way of thinking. These include: severity of impairment, outlook on life, approaches to problem solving, typical mood states, likely diagnosis, and potential problems in

treatment and also the mental health. Herr's seven criteria under which the candidates should be tested and evaluated are now reviewed.

ii) Mental Ability

According to Herr, under mental ability the students' intellectual capacity and mental health are tested. The students are evaluated to determine if they are suitable for the intellectual demands of formation, stress, and difficulties of the priestly life and ministry in the years to come. Herr strongly advocates that each candidate should undergo the intelligence tests to ascertain his intellectual capacity, and how he uses that intelligence (68).

iii) Emotional Controls

For Herr the emotional control test provides basis for judging the general emotional life of the candidate. With particular emphasis given to the kind of control he exercises over his feelings. The test would detect "whether or not an undesirable amount of emotionality exists" and "whether the emotional reactivity is too low, or too high" (70). The test also responds to the question of whether the candidate has normal human emotions or is apathetic and cold; whether he is oversensitive in very specific areas such as his personal worth, etc. (70).

iv) Doubts, Anxiety and Guilt

According to Herr, when a prospective candidate persistently suffers mental agonies and indescribable bitter mental conflicts with his own decisions regarding the morality of his deliberate acts, his suitability as God's instrument of peace for the suffering human mind is highly doubtful. The tests in this category will reveal the candidates' tendencies toward compulsive behavior, depression, anxiety, and hysteria.

For Herr, when these qualities are found to a high degree in any candidate for the priesthood, he should be suspected of basic disturbance “which might be too deep-seated for successful treatment in the seminary” (73). The suspension may be lifted when he undergoes adequate verifiable successful treatment.

v) Relations to Persons in Authority

Respect and obedience to constituted authorities are important qualities. These qualities are expected of every seminarian. When a seminarian is disobedient to the seminary authorities he is judged as one who will also be disobedient to the bishop. No bishop wants such a priest. According to Herr, unwarranted disobedience of the authorities may disrupt the flow of events and affect relations. Here the tests tend to uncover traits of “unconventionality and disregard for social mores; inability to profit by experience and no deep emotional response” (75). The seminarian who possesses this trait to an extreme degree according to Herr, seems obvious that he will run into serious difficulties with authority figures from the start. Such a candidate sees no easy or healthy way to express his emotions but in defiance of authority and conventions. Such a candidate Herr predicts, will neither relate well with other ministers nor with his parishioners if he becomes a priest. Training such a person, according to Herr, will not improve his condition but worsen it (75). That means, he does not deserve to be admitted or be allowed to remain in the seminary.

vi) Self-regarding Attitude

On self-regarding attitude Herr writes: “A happy combination of self-assertion and submissiveness seems to be the best quality to look for in the priest. When it is present, there likely will be present also much inner harmony and peace of mind” (76).

According to Herr, the priest as a human being should have a realistic estimate knowledge of his value and worth and live or assert himself as such; not high above or low below his worth (76). When self-regarding attitude tests are conducted they will detect the amount of self-integration, interactive functioning and orderliness that are present in the mental makeup of each candidate as well as traits of disorientation and split of personality. This is in the light of Herr's argument that "seminarians can and ought to be carefully chosen with respect to their degree of personal integration, their accuracy of self-evaluation, and the proven genuinity and stability of their inner motivation" (77) which are highly beneficial qualities for their ministry as priests.

vii) The Self and the Group

The priest as a man of the public (Frison 1962) spends many long working hours serving the people. At the time of his admission into the seminary, Herr (1964) states, that the candidate for the priestly ministry must show certain minimum social graces that will be improved on as he proceeds in the formation (77). The tests conducted here aims to detect the seminarian's extroversive and introversive tendencies. For Herr, extroversive social tendencies will help to predict the leadership quality of the seminarian. At the same time, he needs introversive tendencies so that his prayer life and meditation will not suffer (77). While both traits are good for the seminarian, they should be in moderation and not at extremes.

viii) Adjustment to Sex

This scrutinizes the attitude and adjustment of the seminarian with regard to sex. According to Herr, it is not yet generally agreed as to which signs or behavior pattern should be designated as normal or abnormal. But one thing that stands very clear to the

rectors of the seminaries is that “the applicant for the priesthood must have a wholesome and healthy attitude toward sex. The man must recognize the fact of sexuality and sex differences and be able to reconcile in his own thinking the need for parenthood with the need for ministers” (80). According to Herr a healthy balanced attitude to sex is vital for the seminarian. For him, this will enable the candidate to empathetically and sympathetically assist his flock when they are in difficulty with regard to issues about sex. It will also help him as a priest, to live with and maintain the demands of his celibate vocation (80).

Without a generally accepted result of the tests conducted in this regard, Herr feels that under the atmosphere of trust and real rapport, the seminarian will in conscience give the truth of the information required of him as regards his sexuality. On this count, Herr asserts that the firsthand trustworthy information the interviewer is able to obtain from the seminarian with regard to how he manages his sexual inclinations and temptations may very well serve as the predictor of his attitude to sex (80).

1) Personal Vocation Discernment

As already indicated, each vocation to the priesthood is unique in the sense that it is a free personal call from God. At the same time, God does not call a candidate for the priesthood in the void but through the church. In this light Schuth (1999) states that vocation is “a mutual call from God and the Church” (35). God initiates the call in the candidate and the church makes the final call to the sacred orders after adequate vocation discernment. The USCCB (2006) speaks of initial or the first phase of vocation discernment that may lead to admission into the seminary. According to the document: “Potential candidates for the priesthood must be in prayerful dialogue with God and with

the Church in the discernment of their vocation” (n. 33). The prayer will enable a candidate who is contemplating the priesthood to respond, to a certain extent at his level, to the fundamental question about vocation according to Catholic Doors Ministry (1998): “Is God calling me?” An affirmative response to the question may be indicative of the possession of certain qualities, experience or healthy feeling of being called to the ministry which may lead to the first step in the process. But the candidate still needs to do some more in-depth assessment to convince himself and his director of vocations, at this initial phase, the source of his feeling of being called. According to the Catholic Doors Ministry one of the basic ways to start personal discernment process for the priesthood is by answering certain questions as contains in *Table 2.1*

Table 2.1 Personal Discernment Questions

1. When you hear the Word of God, does it make you want to share it with others?
2. Do you find yourself more uplifted when you speak of spiritual things versus holding a full-time job in the world?
3. Do others enjoy your presence because they feel uplifted when hearing you speak of spiritual things?
4. When you participate in the celebration of the Holy Mass, do you sometimes wish you were the priest celebrating the Holy Mass?
5. Have you always wanted to become a priest but you have kept it as a secret in your heart?
6. Are you afraid to tell your family and friends that you want to become a priest?
7. Do you feel unworthy of serving God as a priest?
8. Do you like to serve others?
9. Have others ever told you that you should become a priest?
10. Do you find that you are different from the others and have been told so?
11. Do you feel that while you are in the world, you are not of the world?
12. Are you detached from the worldly ways of fame, pleasures, wealth,

- believing that there is more to life than what can be gained?
13. Do you have a natural inclination towards doing charitable works?
 14. Do you sometimes wish that Jesus would just appear to you and tell you what He wants from you?
 15. Has your mind been preoccupied with the fact that you must now make a major decision regarding your future, either to serve God or not?
 16. Do you feel guilt eating away at you because you are not pursuing a calling to the priesthood?

In its assessment of the responses to the questions, Catholic Doors Ministry advises:

If you have answered “yes” to a few (3 or more) of the above questions, you may have a calling to the priesthood or the religious life. With an increase number of “yes” as an answer (7 or more) to the questions, there is a greater likelihood that God is calling you to the religious life.

To follow-up on discerning if you have a calling, contact a priest within your diocese and ask him the name of the vocations director for your area. Then arrange to meet with the vocations director. You may wish to print this page and share with him why you suspect that you may have a calling.

It is when that formal step is accepted by the diocesan director of vocations that the journey for vocation formation and discernment will begin. It will last until the candidate leaves the seminary or is called to the priestly ordination. When a candidate rightly discerns his vocation he often experiences some good or joyful feeling and some kind of comfort with the formation process. In the words of Neafsey (2006): “When we move in the right direction, we feel right with God and with ourselves. Inwardly, we experience the sense of intuitive “rightness” that accompanies any step we take in the direction of emotional and spiritual health and growth. ...the path feels right to us” (38). And it will

continue to feel right as long as one remains in the path by observing to all that is required in the process of discernment.

According to Kiechle (2005), there are three methods to discernment: quiet time and prayer, greater freedom, and practice of imagination. On quiet time and prayer, he narrates how the great masters of spirituality such as Ignatius of Loyola, Saint Augustine, and Saint Francis of Assisi spent time in solitary prayer especially prior to public appearance. He goes on to say: “The moment we enter silence, our inner self comes to life; we become more sensitive and more receptive to subliminal messages revealing the things hidden behind the concerns, impulses, motives, and powers that remain otherwise unnoticed,” (69). On freedom, he says that each candidate needs to afford himself sufficient freedom by avoiding those things that restrain freedom. According to him: “In order to become more free, we ought to take care as much as possible not to let ourselves be affected by fears that will restrain us and stand in our Way” (73). In this light, Lonsdale (1992) writes:

The key to finding the will of God lies in our use of the gift of freedom. In the context of discernment, it is important to recall that God, far from imposing on us the fulfillment of God's hopes and desires, graciously invites us to collaborate with God and with one another to bring them about. Our true freedom lies in our capacity to respond to this invitation: to cooperate With God in creating a world that enables us, individually and collectively, to become both now and in the future the people that God desires us to be. (69)

Freedom is associated with responsibility. A person is responsible for the decision he or she makes in freedom. Continuing to the third point on imagination, Kiechle (2005)

references how Jesus called his disciples (1:16-20 or Jn 1:35-51), Mary Magdalene (Jn 20:11-18). He also references other Old Testament calls and commissions and states that: “Anyone facing a decision can view his or her decision in the light of one of these narratives. They can imagine how God touches them, addresses them, and tells them what to do” (78). Elaborating on this, Lonsdale (1992) writes:

Failure or inability to make use of our imagination, therefore, impedes discernment. Imagination is a capacity for arriving at the truth. When there is no appeal to the imagination, or the imagination is not able to work freely and to range widely then we are likely to be trapped within the limits of one way of looking at things, and unable to tune in when the Spirit calls for a vision of how things can be different and for change. If our imagination is stifled, then in working with other people, we tend to be unable or unwilling to listen to their viewpoints and to enter sympathetically and sensitively into their thoughts and feelings. All of this limits our capacity for good discernment, because it hinders us from recognizing the value of options and possibilities which offer us alternative ways of acting, alternative but nonetheless valid ways of being disciples of Jesus and of struggling to make the reign of God a living reality.

(134)

Imagination can also bring things closer, make the future present, and visualize approaching success and achievements that keep a person optimistic in life.

On a different but related note Kiechle (2005) puts forward ten advisory guiding principles of vocation discernment which the candidate could observe in his attempt to discern the will of God. They are as follows:

1) Stay in touch with reality and what is really going on. Pay attention to its concrete aspects, even to the small things. 2) Develop and appropriate internal sense of timing: do not act in too much haste, but do not drag out decisions either. Accept external time pressure as well as huge delays with prudence. Break down your decision-making process into steps and put them on a realistic timetable. 3) Place your thoughts and plans before the critical eyes of your friends. Seek the advice of prudent people. Examine your alternatives by testing them against experience. 4) Listen to what your mind, your heart, and your intuitions tell you. Make sure all three of these voices from your soul are part of the final discernment. 5) Be aware that the 'evil spirit' often intends to make the decision more complicated than it actually is. He uses fear. Seek trust and simplicity. 6) Do not make a decision when you are immersed in a crisis. In everything, look for the greater degree of consolation and the greater amount of fruitfulness. Follow your desires. Be radical. 7) Know your limits: accept and observe them. Do not seek the cross, but be prepared to accept it out of love if God wants you to. God's will does not come to us in the guise of something alien, but reveals itself through the desires of your heart, in the consolation and in the fruit. 8) Mourn the possibilities you ignored as well as the opportunities you missed. Your life is a path of letting go and dying. If you accept life to be this way, you will be able to commit to relationships more easily and become more content. 9) Jesus should be the norm, the primordial image and the 'shape and form' of our lives and decisions. 10) Once we are involved in the process of making a decision, we will reach a point where 'the Gordian knot' must be cut. We must accept the risks and let go. One's

fundamental trust in life, in fellow humanity, and in God will help throughout the process. (105-121)

In his view, these guiding principles will assist those who want to make discerned decision for their life to realize their strengths and weaknesses. The strengths should encourage them while efforts should be made to overcome or combat the weaknesses (104). These personal tools may assist the seminarian in his journey to the priesthood from the initial stage to the mature stage of the final decision.

m) Synods of Africa on Formation and the Priesthood

i) Introduction

According to the *Catholic Encyclopedia* (Havey 1907), “Synod” originates from the Greek word *synodos* which means assembly (meeting or coming together). The word is not new in the history of the Church assemblies. What is new is the reform it brings to the Church each time it is held at different epochs especially in the post-Vatican II era. According to the Havey (1907) it was probably in the *Apostolic Canons* that the word “synod” made its first appearance in the history of the Church. The *Apostolic Canons* are a list of eighty-five decrees of the early Church believed to have been written by the Apostles. They address the duties, responsibilities and expectations of the episcopate, presbyterate and the faithful as well as issues of excommunications and synods, etc. (Fanning 1912).

The influence of these canons was very conspicuous at the Council of Nicaea of AD 325, especially in the promulgation of the new twenty canons (laws or rules) for “definiteness in Christianity and in the order of the Christian Church” (Pennington 2008). In these canons, the Council Fathers freely referred to themselves as the *Synod*, the *great*

Synod and the *Holy Synod*. The Apostolic Canons decreed the bi-annual convocation of the meeting of the bishops. According to the canons, the first meeting will be held by the fourth week of Easter and the second one will be held on the twelfth day of October (Percival trans. 1998, *Canon xxxvii/xxxviii*). Drawing from this, the Council of Nicaea specifically promulgated the holding of two synods of the bishops each year on the provincial levels. The first would be held before Lent and the second after the autumn season (Adams 2010, *Canon 5*). However, most if, not all later assemblies of the bishops are referred to as Councils and not so much as synods though council (*concilium in Latin*) is a synonym for synod (Fanning 1912).

It is important to indicate here that the African synod reviewed in this text is not the first synod ever to be held in the African region of the Catholic Church. History has it that many synods were convoked in Africa in the early centuries of the Church, especially when Cyprian (249 – 258) and Aurelius (391 – 429) were bishops of the Northern region of the continent (Havey 1909). John Paul II alludes to this fact during his homily that marked the opening of the *Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops* on April 10, 1994 at Saint Peter's Basilica. According to him, it is natural to “remember the African Synods of the first centuries, the activity of Origen and Saint Cyprian, the ecclesiological controversies which then divided Christianity (John Paul II 1994).” At the same time John Paul II points out that those synods were concentrated in the northern coast of Africa, unlike the one he inaugurated which involves the entire continent of Africa and nearby islands.

It is neither the intention nor within the scope of this study to review those pre-Vatican II synods. Rather the focus here is the two post Second Vatican Council synods

of Africa. They are reviewed with particular reference to their treatment of vocation, vocation, discernment, and formation of the candidates for the Catholic priesthood in the continent.

ii) Background

Synods in the current dispensation are the winds of the Holy Spirit blowing in the Church for reform and growth. They stem from the Second Vatican Council inaugurated by John XXIII (1958 – 1963). According to Buhlmann (1978) through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit the John XXIII sees the need to open the windows of the Church to allow some fresh air of the Spirit of God to blow through and give new birth to the Church. The Second Vatican Council is an embodiment of that rebirth: a great rejuvenation, a remarkable turning point, a new beginning, a new Pentecost in the history of the Church especially for the African Church. At the Pentecost, people understood the message of salvation in their own language. With the Vatican II event, the tradition of celebrating the liturgies, especially the Mass, in foreign language came to an end in Africa.

With that, the message of salvation assumes African languages and cultures. The Church in Africa becomes African Church. Buhlmann (1978) described the event of the Second Vatican Council in the Church as “a brilliant moment in its life, a time of spiritual breakthrough, such as we rarely find in the course of history” (13). This is very much applicable to the church in Africa following Vatican II. John XXIII did not see reforms in the Church as a once-in-a-lifetime event as expressed in the famous maxim, “ecclesia semper reformanda” (Kung 2001, 183), but as necessary events that should be taking place in the Church just as growth and development take place in living organisms. This is necessary for the Church to maintain her relevance in a fast developing and changing

world. As such, the Second Vatican Council ushers in an era of “deeper doctrinal study, ecclesial maturation and pastoral renewal” (Svidercoschi 1997). Since then the new Pentecostal wind, in providential coincidence with events of the world, has continued to blow through the entire Church (Buhlmann 1978, xi); bringing spiritual growth and nourishment to the teeming population of believers like the Ezekielian stream that flows out of the sanctuary of the Lord and gives life and growth wherever it flows (Ezek. 47:1-12).

However, the Synod of Bishops, as it is known today, is an offspring of the Second Vatican Council. It enables particular churches to engage in the art of self-reformation for the growth of the universal Church in the light of the gospel, place, and time. It is established by Paul VI. According to the Synod of Bishops (2009): “The Synod of Bishops is a permanent institution established by Paul VI, 15 September 1965, in response to the desire of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council to keep alive the positive spirit engendered by the conciliar experience” (Synod of Bishops. 2009). Paul VI establishes the synod by *Motu Proprio* “*Apostolica sollicitudo*” (an apostolic letter of 15 September 1965), shortly after his conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, which was started by his predecessor John XXIII. “*Motu proprio*” is the phrase that usually identifies a papal document written on the pope’s own initiative and personally signed by him to address issues he considers to be of special importance to the Church (Svidercoschi 1997). While establishing the synod the Paul VI (1965) himself states: “And so, after carefully considering the whole matter, because of our esteem and regard for all the Catholic bishops and with the aim of providing them with abundantly means for greater and more effective participation in Our concern for the universal Church, on

our own initiative and by Our apostolic authority, We hereby erect and establish here in Rome a permanent Council of bishops for the universal Church, to be directly and immediately subject to Our power. Its proper name will be the Synod of Bishops.”

The Synod as intended by the pope has “general” and “special and immediate purposes.” The general purposes, according to him, are:

- a) to promote a closer union and greater cooperation between the Supreme Pontiff and the bishops of the whole world; b) to see to it that accurate and direct information is supplied on matters and situations that bear upon the internal life of the Church and upon the kind of action that should be carrying on in today’s world; c) to facilitate agreement, at least on essential matters of doctrine and on the course of action to be taken in the life of the Church. Its special and immediate purposes are: a) to provide mutually useful information; b) to discuss the specific business for which the Synod is called into session on any given occasion. (Paul VI, n. II)

Briefly stated, the Synod of Bishops is instituted to assist the pope in governing the Universal Church.

In keeping with the intention of the Paul VI, at the inauguration, the Synod of Bishops wasted no time to utilize the opportunity afforded it to make vital contributions for the good of the universal Church. At their very first assembly in 1967, the Synod came up with the propositions (among others) for: the revision of the Code of Canon Law, to allow major control of seminaries and formation of priests by the Episcopal Conferences of the places where they are located, the revision of the procedures of mixed marriages, and the need for a new Order of the Mass. Some of

the proposals were immediately implemented while others became effective in due course in cognition of the circumstances and needs of the times (Synod of Bishops 2012). This testifies to the fact that synod is one of the Church's vital instruments of self-reformation: growth and development to remain relevant and effective in her mission of evangelization and advancement of the kingdom of God in every generation and culture. Synods of Bishops have been held in the Church since the inception of the Second Vatican of 1965. Africa had her first of such synods in 1994 and the second one in 2009. The African synods and their outcome with regard to vocation and formation of candidates for the ordained ministry in Africa are reviewed below.

iii) Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops

The African synod of bishops of 1994 was the first African synod of the modern time. This researcher was privileged to participate at the preliminary stage of the synod on the diocesan level. As a result, the review he presented here was born out of his experience and from some of the documentary information available then and currently. This is not a review of the entire great grace event as John Paul II (1995) refers to the synod in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: *Ecclesia in Africa* (n. 6). Rather the review is particularized on the Synod Fathers' thoughts and teachings on the priesthood: vocation, vocation discernment, and formation of future priests in Africa.

iv) The Process

The process for the first Synod of Bishops of Africa started when John Paul II announces his intention to convoke the African Synod. It was during one of his regular Angelus addresses on January 6, 1989 in Saint Peter's Basilica of the Vatican City.

According to him, it was in response to the petitions expressed by “the African Bishops, priests, theologians and representatives of the laity, in order to promote an organic pastoral solidarity within the entire African territory and nearby islands” that “I have decided to convoke a Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops.” The theme he chose for the synod was: “The Church in Africa and Her Evangelizing Mission Towards the Year 2000: ‘You Shall Be My Witnesses’ (Acts 1:8)” (John Paul II 1989). At the time of the announcement, he also “set in motion the synodal process of preparation necessary for a fruitful outcome of the providential event” (Schotte 1994).

The preparatory period may be divided into two major stages: the *Lineamenta* (Outline of the Synod topics) and the *Instrumentum Laboris* (Working Document or Paper) stages. The drafting of the *Lineamenta* was a team work that involved the Council members, expert theologians in the area of the discussion as well as the staff of the General Secretariat who acted as coordinators. By its nature, the *Lineamenta* is very broad in scope as it is intended to cover and educe expansive range of observation and reaction on the theme of the synod. The final output of the *Lineamenta*, which was published in Lomé, Togo, July, 1990, is in the form of series of questions. With the approval of the John Paul II it is sent to all the Episcopal Conferences of Africa, Madagascar, the concerned Bodies of the Roman Curia, and the other concerned organs of the Church (Synod of Bishops 2012). The bishops make the *Lineamenta* available to the priests and religious. These in turn made the document available to the laity of their areas of jurisdiction and pastoral ministry. The purpose was to generate at the local level, study, discussion, prayerful reflection and support for the synod by all and sundry. This researcher participated in this stage.

v) **Acceptance**

Africa welcomed the Papal announcement of the synod with great joy and enthusiasm. This is demonstrated in a special way during the *Lineamenta* stage. The rate at which the Africans responded to the questions of the *Lineamenta* is to a great extent beyond the expectations of Vatican officials. There is a huge response from the base communities, parishes, organizational, diocesan, provincial, and national levels. Schotte (1993), as the general secretary of the synod expresses the response in the following words: “It can be affirmed without exaggeration that the whole Church in Africa became involved in the synodal process.” During his presentation of the *Instrumentum Laboris* in Kampala, Uganda on February 9, 1993, he further states: “The response was truly remarkable: some 94% of the Episcopal Conferences sent in extensive contributions, a result never before attained since the institution of the Synod of Bishops by Pope Paul VI on 15 September 1965.” The reason for not having a 100% response, as he explains, is due to the absence of three Episcopal Conferences who “were under very difficult circumstances at the time.” For the unprecedented success record at this stage he gleefully concluded: “The entire Catholic Church owes a debt of gratitude to the African Bishops, priests, men and women religious, theologians, and laity for such a convincing and serious commitment to the Synodal endeavour.” Another impressive issue noted about the *Lineamenta* is the mobilization tool it turns out to be. Due to the all-embracing event it was, many lapsed Catholics were revived, Christians of different denominations came together for a common discussion, and there was news of new converts. Judging from the way the wind of the transforming Spirit of rebirth blew across Africa during the

Lineamenta session, one could easily say that the synod started to bear fruits from the preparatory stage (Schotte 1994).

The *Lineamenta* presented the theme of the synod in five orderly sections as follows: *Proclamation of the Good News of Salvation, Inculturation, Dialogue, Justice and Peace, and Means of Social Communication*. Each of these sections had a good number of related questions that evoked lots of discussion. Also, each section said much, implicitly or explicitly, about the priesthood and pastoral ministry. But the issue of vocation and formation received the most attention under the first section, “Proclamation of the good news of Salvation.” This section has fourteen questions and three of them, questions: five, six, and seven were directly concerned with *pastoral service, vocation, formation in the major seminaries, and ongoing formation for priests*. The other sections on: *Inculturation, Dialogue, Justice and Peace, and Means of Social communication* comprised of eight, forty-one, five, and thirteen questions respectively. Though some of the questions have a number of sub-questions, basically, the *Lineamenta* had eighty-one major questions. The responses formed the *Instrumentum Laboris* which is the next stage of the synodal process.

vi) The Instrumentum Laboris

At the end of the stipulated period of the *Lineamenta*, the General Secretariat utilized the responses to draft the *Instrumentum Laboris*; that is, the *Working Document* on which the final synodal process was based. The “Instrumentum Laboris” is thus a faithful synthesis of the responses (of the various Episcopal Bodies in Africa both of Latin and Oriental rite as well as that of the concerned departments of the Roman Curia

and other organs of the Church) to the *Lineamenta*. This became a constitutive reference point or the agenda of the synod proper.

Unlike the *Lineamenta* which was for a general discussion, the *Instrumentum Laboris* was offered to the “Bishops’ Conferences to help them prepare their participation at the synod, to see which points they will want to examine in the Synod and which priorities to propose” (Schotte 1994). But it was still within the bishops’ discretion to use it for further animation of their local churches and the faithful. Generally, the faithful were encouraged to continue in prayer for a successful completion and happy outcome of the synod. And the Symposium of the Episcopal Conferences of Africa & Madagascar approved the prayer below to be said throughout the continent and nearby islands during the period. It was captioned “Prayer for the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops” (1994) and runs thus:

Loving Father,
in your desire to communicate eternal life,
you sent Jesus your Son to bring all people into your kingdom.
As the Church in Africa prepares to answer the call to be witness
to the Gospel through the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops,
we humbly implore you, to strengthen your people for their mission to
evangelize all the nations of the continent.
Where there is ignorance, give knowledge;
where there is fear, courage;
where there is indifference, love;
where there is oppression, justice;

where there is conflict, peace.

May the Holy Spirit guide us in forming and living our pastoral plan to make disciples of all the peoples of Africa teaching them to know and observe all that you have commanded. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

It is believed that God answered the prayer as the synod turns out to be a huge success for the Church in Africa.

The publication and release of the *Instrumentum Laboris* took place in Kampala, Uganda during John Paul II's Ninth Pastoral Visit to Africa in February, 1993. Later, the main synod sessions commences on April 10, 1994 and lasted until May 8, 1994 (Schotte 1994). In attendance were 242 Synod Fathers. There were 46 observers, 20 experts, and 7 Fraternal delegates. John Paul II presides over the opening Eucharistic celebration with 35 Cardinals, one Patriarch, 39 Archbishops, 146 Bishops, and 90 priests in attendance (John Paul II 1995, n. 6; Ikenga 1994). The discussion centers on evangelization from the five perspectives already mentioned (Proclamation, Inculturation, Dialogue, Justice and Peace, and Means of Social Communication). The resulting document from the discussion as approved by the John Paul II was promulgated in his Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa* at Yaoundé, Cameroon during his 14 – 20 September, 1995 pastoral visit for the celebration phase of the Synod (Synod of Bishops 2012).

Among the highlights of the Special Assembly were the opening and closing ceremonies which incorporated many elements of African rich liturgical traditions (Synod of Bishops 2012). A special and unique attribute of the African synod was its continental status. In his earlier address to the Council of the General Secretariat, John

Paul II reiterates the fact that the synod was the first ever to be convoked in the region on a continental level (John Paul II 1989, n.5).

vii) The Discussion

The “Discussion” comprises the Synod Fathers’ thoughts on formation to the priesthood as contained in the synodal working paper, the *Instrumentum Laboris* as well as in the final outcome as was presented by John Paul II in his *Apostolic Exhortation: Ecclesia in Africa*. According to the Synod Fathers, John Paul II’s intention for convoking the synod is to promote in a particular way the proclamation of the gospel in Africa so as to mark a turning point in the history of the continent during the closing years of the twentieth century. And the object, among other things is to assist the African Church deepen her commitment to the evangelizing mission of the Church in the context of her historical, cultural, social, political and economic developments (*Synod of Bishops 1993*, n.1). The Fathers alludes to Jesus’ parting injunction to his disciples to go and make disciples as they proclaim the good news of salvation to the entire world (Matt. 28:19) and infers that the Church is missionary, her vocation is to evangelize, and she exists for her mission and vocation (Synod of Bishops 1993, n. 10). Consequently, the missionary spirit of the Church and her method of evangelization ought to be renewed and strengthened regularly so as to continue the renewal of the face of the earth through the Spirit (Ps. 104:30). This includes deepening her commitment to evangelization in the context and light of the signs of the time so as to remain relevant to the people of every generation in Africa.

The idea of evangelization implies the agents of evangelization which in turn suggests training and commissioning of the agents or evangelizers. For how can people

call on the one they have not believed or believe unless they heard and how can they hear if no one preached to them (Rom. 10:14-15). By this Paul emphasizes the importance of preachers or teachers of the faith. And for Luke, it is not any teacher but the one who knows the need and is ready to learn and understand the saving truth, that is, a well-formed teacher. In the words of John Paul II “People who have never had the chance to learn cannot really know the truths of faith, nor can they perform actions which they have never been taught” (John Paul II, 1995). On the other hand, a well-trained disciple will be like his master (Lk. 6:40), able and ready to take and preach the message of salvation welcome or unwelcome, both near and to faraway lands.

For the Council Fathers, Jesus is not only the Master, he is himself the “Good News of God...the very first and greatest evangelizer” (Synod of Bishops 1993, n.8). But he needed others to help him, to function as his agents and representatives to perpetuate his salvific ministry in the world. While every believer is expected to proclaim the message of salvation (Matt. 10:32; 20:8), the Synod sees those specially called and chosen by the Lord for the mission among whom are the priests, as the “primary collaborators of evangelization” (n.25). In his address to the African Church while presenting the outcome of the synod, John Paul II, in the *Apostolic Exhortation: Ecclesia in Africa* highlights the primary importance of priests in advancing the mission of Christ in and through the Church. He stressed that without priests the Church would not be able to live the fundamental obedience that is her very existence. That is, her obedient response to make all nations the disciples of the Lord and to celebrate his great memorial mystery of human redemption (John Paul II 1992, n.1).

This mission, the Synod agrees, requires adequate priestly formation programs in the seminaries. It underlined the need to have the African major seminarians, especially the diocesan candidates, understand more deeply that missionary commitment is integral part of the priest's life and ministry. For the Synod, this awareness is essential to better prepare and dispose them with the missionary spirit in their life as diocesan priests. According to the Synod, this will enable them to zealously reach out to the non-Christians and un-evangelized in their parishes. It will also enable them to undertake some missionary work in other distant and remote areas within or outside their dioceses (Synod of Bishops 1993, n.16). In this manner, they would make up for the lack of priests, missionary and pastoral services in other parts of the family of God – the Church. In all, the Synod underscored the need for adequate formation of the African priest so as to be able to confront the challenges the developing continent may pose on the growing Church.

viii) Vocation and Formation for the Priesthood

The Synod expresses the belief that vocation is a blessing from God and thanks God for the “current abundance of vocations in Africa.” At the same time, it observes that not all those in the seminary are called to the priesthood as such there should be adequate vocation discernment to ensure that only those who are really called are ordained to the priesthood. Accordingly, the bishops encourages the seminary authorities to “establish firm procedures and criteria” of vocation discernment at all levels for early discovery and redirection of those candidates who do not meet the requirements for the priesthood (Synod of Bishops, n. 28). This echoes the 1982 address of John Paul II, to Nigerian bishops and priests: not to compromise the quality of candidates called to the ordained

ministry for sheer number. For the Synod Fathers, adequate formation would include a deep sense of lived spirituality, adequate human, pastoral and intellectual formation that takes into account “the demands and conditions of the times” (Synod of Bishops 1993, n. 28). The formation of contemporary priests in the contemporary milieu of Africa that takes into account the signs of the time is the crux of the bishops’ demand for adequate formation because many African priests are still being formed in the colonial method and system.

The bishops believe that authentic African formation of priests is very much realizable without compromising the quality. Hence they concur with John Paul II and strongly advocate for only suitably qualified candidates as the final product irrespective of the number of candidates under formation in the seminary (27). The bishops call on all Christians (the ordained, professed and laity) to engage in pastoral care of vocation (28) as a way to encourage and promote vocation by all Africans if the current abundance of vocation in the continent is to continue for a long time.

In the Synod Fathers’ *Message of the Synod* (1994), the bishops reiterate their desire and optimism for a better Christian Africa in the third millennium. To achieve this goal, the priests of Africa would play very significant role. With that in mind, the bishops reemphasize the inevitability of forming priests suitable for the new century. According to them:

The programme of formation desired by the present Synod is one which is aimed at leading candidates resolutely along the road to sanctity. It envisages the formation of people who are truly human, well inserted in their milieu and who bear witness therein to the Kingdom which is to come. This is done by means of

evangelization and inculturation, of dialogue and involvement in justice and peace, as well as by means of a presence in the new culture constituted by the world of the mass media. (n. 49)

That is to say that African priests should be formed in African culture and in the light of their modern time.

The Synod Fathers encourage the seminarians to endeavor to savor and live in-depth the proceeds of the synod and to be convinced that spiritual formation is fundamental and the key to their entire formation (Bishops of Africa 1994, n. 60). The seminarians are also reminded that it is by a life of intense prayer and sufficient effort in the spiritual warfare that they will be able to make adequate vocation discernment.

Further in their address, the episcopates advises the seminarians to see seminary discipline as self-discipline and the expression of their maturity (n.61). They urge every Episcopal Conference to ensure that only qualified priests capable of carrying out effectively the formation program desired by the Synod should be sent to teach in the seminaries (n.51). In its *Guidelines for the Use of Psychology in the Admission and Formation of Candidates for the Priesthood*, the Congregation for Catholic Education (2008) presents qualified priests for the formation of seminarians as priests who “have a good knowledge of the human person: his rhythms of growth; his potentials and weaknesses; and his way of living his relationship with God” (n.3). Such priests must have been “prepared, including by means of specific courses, to understand profoundly the human person as well as the demands of his formation to the ordained ministry” (n.4). Lending his voice to the discussion, John Paul II states: it is necessary to discern priestly vocations wisely and so it is equally necessary “to provide competent directors and to

oversee the quality of the formation offered.” According to him, “The fulfilment of the hope for a flowering of African missionary vocations depends on the attention given to the solution of this problem, a flowering that is required if the Gospel is to be proclaimed in every part of the Continent and beyond” (John Paul II 1995, n. 50). As stated in their *Message of the Synod*, the African bishops (1994) agree with John Paul II’s view.

According to them: “We should respond to this grace with a real sense of responsibility, being concerned with the quality of our vocations discernment process, setting up criteria for admission and formation. We must make available to seminaries priests capable of carrying out effectively the formation programme” (n.51). The grace referenced here is the grace of increase of vocation both priestly and consecrated life in Africa for which the bishops are grateful to God (n.51).

In support of the Synod Fathers’ proposition on the need to form African priests in the “true cultural values of their country” (n.95) John Paul II details that: ““They shall be formed in such a manner that they will have the qualities of the representatives of Christ, of true servants and animators of the Christian community...solidly spiritual, ready to serve, dedicated to evangelization, capable of administering the goods of the Church efficiently and openly, and of living a simple life as befits their milieu”” (n.95). Additionally, he said that “Seminarians ‘should acquire affective maturity and should be both clear in their minds and deeply convinced that for the priest celibacy is inseparable from chastity.’ Moreover ‘they should receive adequate formation on the meaning and place of consecration to Christ in the priesthood”” (n. 95). These qualities will enable the candidate to truly represent Christ among the people he is called to serve.

One of the responses to the Synod Fathers' clarion call for the formation of African priests in the African context came from East Africa. At one of their plenary assemblies in 1999, bishops of the Episcopal Conference of the region: Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) express appreciation of the current intellectual and academic formation in their seminaries. But they decided it is time to pay much more attention, as Africans, on the areas of "human, spiritual and pastoral formation - a formation that must be more experiential and spiritual and practical" (AMECEA 1999). They also touched on one other problem that has continued to plague priestly formation in Africa. As they put it: "We also are aware of the need for seminarians to be given and to take more personal responsibility for their own formation." And in conclusion they stated "We shall find ways of pursuing these objectives" (AMECEA 1999).

According to John Paul II (1995), "The Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops is *an historic moment of grace*: the Lord *visited* his people in Africa." He also called the synod "true moments of grace" (n. 6, n. 2). These grace-filled moments of the Lord's visit had already produced results of great joy. Schotte has earlier testified that the synod started to bear fruits from its preparatory stage. There are indications that it has continued to bear more fruits.

ix) The Second African Synod

It is John Paul II who also announced the second African synod. As the Synod of Bishops (2012) states, "On 13 November 2004, during the Symposium of the Bishops of Africa and Europe, held in Rome, John Paul II, 'welcoming the desire of the Special Council for Africa' and responding to 'the hopes of the African pastors,' announced the

convocation of the Second Special Assembly for Africa. Benedict XVI, in his weekly General Audience on 22 June 2005, reconfirmed this decision” (Synod of Bishops 2012). Subsequently, Benedict XVI (2009), approves the topic of the Synod: “The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace: ‘You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world’” (Mt 5: 13, 14) (Synod of Bishops 2012). The Synod is scheduled to last from 4 – 25 October, 2009. Comparably, and as it is often with human events, the enthusiasm that greeted this synod was not as much as it was in the first one. But as it was in the first synod, the same process of the *Lineamenta and Instrumentum Laboris* were followed and completed successfully.

As a “follow-up assembly,” the Synod concentrates “on a theme of the greatest urgency for Africa: our service to reconciliation, justice and peace in a continent that is very much in dire need of these graces and virtues” (Synod of Bishops 2009, n. 1). These were both pastoral and social issues of great concern for the believers and all the people of Africa who had experienced the ravages of wars, oppression, discrimination, poverty and other social ills. Since the synod centered on the said theme, it raised no new ideas on the topic of this text. Suffice it to say that the second synod of Africa was equally successful on its set goal.

ix) Conclusion

In his introductory remarks at the celebration phase of the first African Synod, John Paul II (1995) remarks: “Faithful to the tradition of the first centuries of Christianity in Africa, the Pastors of this Continent, in communion with the Successor of the Apostle Peter and members of the Episcopal College from other parts of the world, held a Synod which was intended to be an occasion of hope and resurrection, at the very moment when

human events seemed to be tempting Africa to discouragement and despair” (*Ecclesia in Africa*, n.1). The synod is intended for healing and restoration, to turn a new page in the Christian way of living and serving in the world in the context of African milieu and the present time. In the remarks, John Paul II also recognizes and honors the first centuries of African church and her synods.

By and large, John Paul II deserves every gratitude for the synods just as the synods deserve every appreciation from the Church in Africa. As the announcement of the first synod was received with much joy and enthusiasm so also was its outcome - the Apostolic Exhortation: *Ecclesia in Africa*. Most, if not every African Catholic (clergy, consecrated persons and the laity) has some reason to be happy with the synods because they touched on most of the important areas of their Christian life and ministry. The synods ushered in a new wave of Pentecost into the life of the African Church. The handbooks (Post-Synodal Exhortations) that resulted from the synods will remain manuals of pastoral ministry for the African clergy, the religious and laity for a very long time.

xi) Summary

The reviews have shown that the process of vocation discernment in the formation of priests is not an easy task and the bulk of the task lies with the formation team. It is thus understandable when the church documents, synods and experts in pastoral ministry insist that only suitably trained educators should be sent to the seminaries. The reviewed experts are of the view that the formators should have some good knowledge of psychological sciences for basic vocation discernment. Additionally, the Church demands that the experts in psychological sciences who attend to the seminarians should be

persons who share the views, belief and teachings of the Church. In that regard, it may be more beneficial for the church in Nigeria and Africa to commit to an extensive investment of training some numbers of their priests in psychological sciences and vocation discernment. This will ensure sufficient number of the required formators in the seminaries for adequate vocation discernment. Moreover, when priests are the experts in psychological sciences and serve as consultants for the seminarians, the spirituality of the process may be accorded more respect. This however, does not imply that the lay Catholics will not do the same and even better jobs in some respects.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHOD

a) Intent of Study

The purpose of this research was to address problems of vocation discernment to the Catholic priesthood in Nigeria with particular reference to the southeastern region of the country. The goal is to provide the local churches in the region with more tools to enhance their process of vocation discernment to the ministry of the priesthood. Adequate vocation discernment to the priestly ministry is very necessary to achieve two equal and very closely related goals. (1) It seeks to ensure the selection and ordination of suitable candidates for the priesthood. (2) It seeks to ensure that no suitable candidate is expelled or denied ordination due to error in judgment on the part of the authorities. Adequate

vocation discernment does not judge on the face value. It does not draw immediate or hasty conclusions on issues, unless in the case of certain public scandals that may evoke the immediate penalty of expulsion as contained in the rules and regulations of the seminary. Adequate vocation discernment is open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. It allows regular dialogue with the candidates and thereby eliminates the problem of fear and uncertainties that candidates experience during formation. This study involves an in-depth review of vocation discernment in relation to its application as taught and employed by the Church. It also gathers and analyzes the views and experience of the candidates for the priesthood and their educators in relation to vocation.

b) Research Questions

Considering the above intent, the overarching research questions for this study include but are not limited to: What is vocation discernment? How is vocation discernment conducted? What are the problems that affect adequate vocation discernment? Who are the agents of vocation discernment? Do the formators and candidates have all the tools they need for adequate vocation discernment? What are the different areas of scrutiny in vocation discernment? How do the formators perceive their roles as discerners of vocation to the priesthood? What is the formators' job satisfaction in the ministry of vocation discernment? How long does vocation discernment last? Who has the final word in vocation discernment? What is it that makes a person unsuitable for priestly vocation? What are the contributions of the allied voices to vocation discernment, such as the priests in the parishes, family and others outside the seminary? What becomes of the expelled seminarians? These questions gave rise to the sample questions (*Table 1.1*

above) presented to the research participants during the interviews and the outcome are addressed in this study.

c) Phenomenological Framework

While phenomenological research design is a popular model of qualitative approach to empirical human science research (Moustakas 1994, 1), there are other equally important models of the qualitative research (Mertens 2005, 234). But the phenomenological model was deemed necessary and chosen as the best method for answering the research questions for this study.

Phenomenological research specifically focuses on the experience of the human subjects of its study. According to Manen (1990, 6, 22) and Mertens (2005, 240), it is in the nature of phenomenological research method to seek the answers to the human problems it intends to resolve by focusing on the thoughts and experience of the research subjects – the individual or group of individuals concerned. It strives to know the world in which we live as human beings from experience and at the same time questions how that world is experienced (Manen 1990, 5). It seeks to know “the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this person or group of people” (Mertens 2005, 104). Furthermore, Mertens pointed out that experience is not just a part of phenomenological research method but its distinguishing factor. In her words: “The feature that distinguishes phenomenological research from other qualitative research approaches is that the subjective experience is at the center of the inquiry” (240). In line with the phenomenological *modus operandi*, this research was designed to explore the experience of some Catholic priests who are formators and candidates for the Catholic priesthood. The study explored and investigated the participants’ worldview of vocation

discernment as lived, thought of and experienced in their seminaries and identified additional tools to enhance the discernment process.

. In phenomenological method, interpretive reflection and in-depth analysis of the data (human experience) plays a significant role in answering the research questions. In the words of Manen (1990), it is by “bringing to reflective awareness the nature of the events experienced in our natural attitude” that “we are able to transform or remake ourselves” and the world around us “in the true sense of *Bildung* (education)” (7). Such reflective awareness or interpretive reflection on the experience of the subjects, according to Mertens (2005), does not permit assumptions on the part of the researcher “about an objective reality that exists apart from the individual. Rather, the focus is on understanding how individuals create and understand their own life spaces” (240). That is to say that it aims “to understand and describe an event from the point of view of the participant” (240). Manen refers to this as “presuppositionless” phenomenological approach by which he means “a methodology that tries to ward off any tendency toward constructing a predetermined set of fixed procedures, techniques and concepts that would rule-govern the research project” (29).

Patton (2002) states that phenomenological research is “naturalistic to the extent that the research takes place in real-world settings and the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest” (39). The real-world settings for this research consisted of face to face meetings and investigative personal interaction of this researcher with the participants in their seminary environments and places of apostolate. The phenomenological approach enabled him to obtain from the respondents their expressed views and experience that can best be obtained through that approach. And as

demonstrated later in this chapter, he avoided manipulation and bias so that the data spoke for themselves.

3. Phenomenological research also focuses on phenomena that are part of lived experience. This phenomena includes emotional or relational issues, program, organization, or culture issues (Mertens 2005, 104). Priestly formation is concerned with all aspects of the candidate that made him human: emotional and relational issues, organizational, culture issues, etc. These human phenomena, are important in the formation process of the candidates, therefore the adopted method of approach for the study is most adequate.

4. As a model of qualitative research that focuses on intangible and unquantifiable phenomena, phenomenological design utilizes qualitative personal interviews among its method of data collection. This researcher, after a review of other models, concluded that this design is best suited to elucidate the views and experience of the participants that addressed the research questions. In that respect, he utilized semi-structured in-depth interviews taught by Mertens (385f); Moustakas (1994, 114); Creswell (2003, 181), etc. as the means of data collection for the research. It was on the basis of the above qualities and characteristics of the phenomenological research method that it was deemed the most adequate approach for this study. The next section focused on the researcher's assumptions and biases.

d) Assumptions and Biases

According Mertens (247) and Patton (2002, 51), the researcher is a vital instrument for collecting data in qualitative research. The interpretations of the data are guided by his or her "set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be

understood and studied” (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, 22). As a result, it is hard to believe that the researcher’s judgments or the quality of his or her research is untainted by his or her personal opinions, emotions, and self-interests (Denzin and Lincoln, 923). For this reason, according to Mertens (2005), “considerable interest has been focused on who the researcher is and what values, assumptions, beliefs, or biases he or she brings to the study” (247). These would enable the readers to evaluate the objectivity of the data collection as well as the analysis and the final presentation and thereby determine the impact of those personal idiosyncrasies on the study (Mertens, 247). All these point to the idea of *Epoche*, addressed by Moustakas (1994), as valuable tool utilized in phenomenological research in order to reduce or eliminate researcher bias and idiosyncrasies. *Epoche* is a Greek word which means “to stay away from or abstain” and implies “freedom from suppositions” (85). According to Moustakas, “In the *Epoche*, we set aside our prejudgment, biases, and preconceived ideas of things. We ‘invalidate,’ ‘inhibit,’ and ‘disqualify’ all commitments with reference to previous knowledge and experience, ...and allow phenomenon or experience to be just what it is and come to know it as it presents itself” (85, 86). Thus, in the *Epoche* process, the researcher takes no position whatsoever, and “Nothing is determined in advance” (87). Rather he or she is inclined to receptiveness: ready to meet “someone and to listen and hear whatever is being presented, without coloring the other’s communication with my own habit of thinking, feeling, and seeing, removing the usual ways of labeling or judging, or comparing” (87, 89). In keeping with the above thoughts, this researcher disclosed his basic assumptions and biases hereunder to enable the readers to assess whether he followed the *Epoche* process.

This researcher was ordained a Catholic priest in 1988 and he hails from the region under study. His formation to the priesthood in the region took the standard minimum duration as of the time – eight years of training in the major seminary. On his admission in 1980 at the then Bigard Memorial Seminary, Philosophy Campus (now Saint Joseph Major Seminary) Ikot Ekpene, Nigeria, there were 150 candidates in his first year class. The seminary population then was over 400 seminarians, a number that kept growing year by year.

During the period of the formation, this researcher observed many candidates from different classes leave the seminary. Some left on their own volition for reasons best known to them, some left when they sensed the danger of expulsion and a few left because they would not want to serve a long term (one year) suspension penalty imposed on them by the authorities for some transgression. Depending on the gravity of the offence, a suspension period ranged from days to one year. There were also some seminarians who were advised to withdraw or expelled for reasons best known to them and the authorities who rarely disclosed the reason to the rest of the seminarians.

The seminaries in the region had “Rules and Regulations” which some candidates saw as very strict as they were often rigidly enforced. For instance, the rules stipulated time for “lights out.” This is the particular time of the night (usually before midnight) when every seminarian was expected to be in bed and every light in the rooms and other students’ activity areas like the library, class rooms, halls, refectory, etc. must be turned off until the rising bell by five o’clock the next morning. Any seminarian who turns on his light before the rising bell risked suspension if he was caught and unable to defend himself. Many students fell victim to this rule especially during examinations when they

used other little light sources to study deep into the night in order to be best prepared. This was popularly known as “cockroaching” for the fact that cockroaches (thrive at night) are known for nocturnal activities in the house. The authorities felt that if the seminarians did not get enough sleep at night it may affect other seminary activities or their performance during day. On the other hand, the seminarians did not see that as a problem but a kind of unnecessary restraint. There were other similar rules and regulations that were well intended for the good of the seminarians but which at the same time served to suspend or expel many seminarians. And there were series of suspensions and expulsions at the time.

This created the impression among the seminarians that a seminarian may be suspended or expelled for reasons that were not cogent enough or whenever an authority felt so. Thoughts of these and some seemingly unilateral decisions by some of the authorities over the vocation of the candidates become a source of fear and uncertainty for some of the seminarians. There is a popular dictum in a minor seminary that: “a day in the seminary is not a joke,” which implied that every day in the seminary was a day of struggle to keep your admission. And whoever makes it to the next day deserved a pat on the shoulders. This dictum was not heard in the major seminary but its spirit was there.

Obviously, many of the expelled or suspended seminarians may have merited the punishment they received but there were cases where the punishments were more severe and not commensurate with the offences committed. For instance, a candidate was suspended for returning to the seminary a few minutes late at the end of an external free day (EFD) irrespective of the fact that he travelled on the unpredictable public transport. Another candidate was expelled from the examination hall during his final year exam,

according to him, for being absent in the chapel during the regular morning spiritual program – Morning Prayer, Meditation and Mass. When he got home, his displeased father was reported as saying to the seminarian: if they would not allow you to finish your exams as a seminarian, why not as a Christian. For the seminarians who heard this remark, including this researcher, it was a call for the authorities to temper justice with mercy because the effects of expulsion on many seminarians were very devastating.

The *Rules and Regulations* were often talked about. Most of the time, if not every time, it was in support of some form of punishment for seminarians. Many seminarians came to dislike and sometimes made fun of the title phrase, “Rules and Regulations” because it seems as if it was not designed for their good. It seems that there are more reasons for a seminarian to be sent home than to remain in the seminary. This researcher had no personal issues with the rules and regulations or with any of the formators. He was never involved in any problem all through his formation. But he is in sympathy with his fellow seminarians because he believes that people are made of different strength and skill. He noted the failure of the seminary authorities to give some seminarians a second chance for what he thought were mistakes great or small as narrated by the involved seminarians. At the end of it all, his class of 150 members was short of sixty members at the end of their formation leaving only 90 candidates for ordination that year. Other classes had their own expulsions as well and the stories behind many of these expulsions are not the best stories.

That does not mean that all the stories were true. Some seminarians would not tell the whole truth about the incident of their suspension or expulsion. But since the authorities mostly kept sealed lips over the reason, the other seminarians would hold on

to the available information until the contrary was proved. A combination of personal observation and shared stories and experience, led to the conclusion that some suitable candidates have been expelled for reasons that did not merit such expulsion.

This researcher sees all these as the problem of inadequate vocation discernment in process of formation – human error in the divine assignment of forming future priests. This study was conceived to address such problem. It advocates for thorough scrutiny that sheds clear light on the suitability or unsuitability of each candidate. The researcher tried not to allow these issues or his belief to influence a credible outcome of the study. Instead, he took the stance of empathic neutrality that Patton (2002) recommends. The stance “suggests that there be a middle ground between becoming too involved, which can cloud judgment, and remaining too distant, which can reduce understanding” (50) in this kind of study. As a result, he worked and presented a study that is not overtly tainted by personal opinions, emotions, and self-interests (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, 923). It is however left to the readers to judge as regards the balance and credibility of the research. The next section addressed the procedures which produced the data that informed the research.

e) Procedures

Phenomenological research follows certain procedures to achieve its objective. As already mentioned above, it utilizes interviews as one of its methods of data collection. The interview method follows some verifiable procedures in order to be credible. The procedures include: selection of the participants, rationale for the selection, and procedure of data collection. Included also are explanations of how the interviews were

conducted, recorded, and transcribed as well as the choice of instruments of data collection. These are followed by the analysis of the data and report of the findings.

i) Selection of Participants

In accord with the procedures, this researcher adopted the semi-structured model of qualitative interview for the data collection. Rubin and Rubin (2005) described qualitative interview as “conversations in which a researcher gently guides a conversational partner in an extended discussion. The researcher elicits depth and detail about the research topic by following up on answers given by the interviewee during the discussion” (4). Using purposeful sampling, which is the purposeful selection of “participants that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question” (Creswell 2003), a group of ten participants were selected and engaged in personal interviews. According to Patton (2002), “The logic and power of purposeful sampling derive from the emphasis on in-depth understanding. This leads to selecting *information-rich* cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (46, 230f). From the various models of purposeful sampling expounded by Patton (230-242), this researcher utilized the “Criterion Sampling” model. Criterion Sampling selects cases that meet some predetermined criterion for quality assurance (238). As such, it was predetermined that only the priests who were involved in the priestly formation and the candidates for the priesthood would possess the current information-rich materials required to address the question of vocation discernment under discussion.

The selected participants met the above criteria and the interviews explored their various views and experience pertaining to vocation and vocation discernment within the process of formation of Catholic priests in southeastern Nigeria. The participants comprised two groups of people: five priests who were among those responsible for the formation of the candidates for the priesthood and five candidates for the priesthood. Due to their in-depth involvement with the point at issue (vocation and vocation discernment), they were notably rich with the information required for the study.

Four of the candidates were transitional deacons at the verge of their ordination to the priesthood, while the remaining candidate was a fourth year theologian. The participants were drawn from four major seminaries (Table 3.1) and two dioceses in the region of discussion. Worthy of mention here is the fact that there were more than four major seminaries and theologates in the southeastern region of Nigeria. These four seminaries, from four different states, were selected for the experience and information they had for the study. For instance, as a “young seminary” compared to the others, Blessed Iwene Tansi Major Seminary brought a new system of formation and discernment that were not practiced in the other three seminaries while the other three seminaries brought years of experience in the practice of vocation discernment.

Table 3.1 Major Seminaries Visited

Seminary	Date Founded	Population
Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu	1951	1255
Seat of Wisdom Major Seminary, Owerri	1985	775
Saint Joseph Major Seminary, Ikot Ekpene	1989	568
Blessed Iwene Tansi Major Seminary, Onitsha (Theology Students only)	2000	242

In keeping with the norms guiding the privacy of participants required of this study, the dioceses of the vocation directors and other descriptors that may directly or indirectly reveal their identities and those of other participants are omitted. All the priests that participated in the study are between the ages of 40 and 69 years and all of them have celebrated their silver jubilee as priests. In other words, they have all served more than 25 years in the priestly ministry and also a minimum of seven years in the formation apostolate. One of the priests has served more than sixteen years in the formation ministry which included ten years as rector and vocation director. It is his many years of experience that merited him the selection for this study. The participating candidates on their part, are between the ages of 24 and 35. Other descriptors of all the participants are summarized in table 3.2 below.

Table 3.2 Summary Table of Participants

Participants	Status	Rank	Place for Interview	Duration of Interview
PR1	Priest	Rector	Rectory	1.26 hrs.
PR2	Priest	Rector	Office	0.49 hrs.
PRVD	Priest	Rector and Vocation Director	Office	0.52 hrs.
PRF	Priest	Rector and Formator	Office	1.05 hrs.
PTF	Priest	Teacher and Formator	Rectory	0.47 hrs.
CDU	Deacon	Candidate	Parish	0.43 hrs.
CDS	Deacon	Candidate	Seminary	0.49 hrs.

CDE	Deacon	Candidate	Parish	1.48 hrs.
CDM	Deacon	Candidate	University at M	1.14 hrs.
CSS	Seminarian	Candidate	Seminary	1.19 hrs.

ii) Rationale for the Selection of Participants

A credible qualitative research interview requires interviewees who have first-hand experience of the research question or direct knowledge of the information sought by the researcher (Rubin and Rubin 2005, 64ff). The participants of this study are members of formation teams in the seminaries, vocation directors, and seminarians who are getting near to their priestly ordination. The participants are chosen because they have first-hand experience and direct knowledge of the process of vocation discernment due to their positions in the seminaries. Experience grows richer with years. The experience of these priests in the formation process is another reason for their selection.

On the other hand, the participant candidates are deacons and one fourth year theology student. They also brought to the study their personal experience and knowledge of vocation discernment as well as their thoughts and expectation of what vocation discernment and formation ought to be. With such knowledge and experience they are deemed among the most suitable to respond to the research questions from candidates' perspective. Each of the candidates has some feelings and personal story of discernment in their priestly vocation that helped to inform the research. The rationale for selecting these participants, was their firsthand knowledge and experience of vocation discernment in the southeastern region.

iii) Data Collection Procedures

The research followed the requirements of the ethics of research that involves human subjects (Rubin and Rubin 2005, 104; Mertens 2005, 332; Patton 2002, 270).

Prior to the interview, some of the intended participants were reached by personal, face to face contact while others were contacted by phone and informed about the research project. They were invited to participate in the project by consenting to semi-structured, open-ended interview. Open-ended interview naturally, as in a conversation, elicits from the interviewee such responses that are not predetermined as in closed-ended questionnaire where the response follows a mapped or strictly controlled course determined by the researcher (Patton 2002, 16, 20f, 39). The nature and objective of the research were disclosed to the intended participants. They were informed of the voluntary nature of their participation and assured of the protection of their identity, etc. as contained in the consent form. Those who consented and signed the consent form were scheduled for the interview. The interviews were scheduled according to the participants' respective convenient place and time (Table 3.2).

At the commencement of each interview, each interviewee was handed a copy of the interview questions (Table 1.1) to provide him an overview of the direction of the interview. Each of these conversation partners was asked seven semi-structured open-ended questions. These interview questions are a summary of the all-embracing questions listed under *research questions* in chapter one. The estimated duration for each interview was one hour, but they were free to utilize lesser or more time as their response deserved because qualitative interviews “can be wonderfully unpredictable” (Rubin and Rubin, 12). As a result, each interview ended only when the respondent exhausted all the pertinent information he wanted to communicate, therefore some of the interviews lasted longer than one hour (Table 3.2). Each participant was asked a number of follow-up

questions that yielded more in-depth results, details, and richness - thick description - sought in the interviews.

iv) Data Collection and Instrument

The data collected for this study comprised a series of first hand, face to face semi-structured in-depth interviews that involved ten carefully selected participants. The participants were interviewed for a considerable length of time (figure 3.2) that elicited and clarified their views and experience on the topic of the research. Some electronic tools such as two high quality digital audio recorders (Bazeley 2008, 44; Rubin and Rubin 2005, 110f) were utilized to capture all the information they communicated. To avoid certain technical problems, there were extra batteries and an electronic battery charger to recharge the batteries should the need arise. Additionally, this researcher took field notes to record those aspects of the interviews that the audio recording devices were not able to capture. Such aspects include facial expression, gesticulations and other body languages, as well as some personal observations, commentaries/remarks and reflections on the interviews.

v) Transcription

Transcription transforms oral data to textual data (Patton 2002, 50f; also Rubin and Rubin 2005, 203f). Accordingly, this researcher made a verbatim transcription of the recorded interviews to manageable textual data (Bazeley 2008, 44) for analysis, evaluation, and presentation of the findings. The field notes were also developed and constructed in orderly form as an added data source. The name of each informant was

omitted in the transcripts and in their place letters and numbers were used to protect their identity in respect of the dictates of the ethics of research involving human subjects (Table 3.2). Other information that would specifically reveal the identity of any of the informants was also deliberately concealed.

vi) Data Analysis

The transcribed data were imported into NVivo 10 computer software for easy management. According to Stanford University (2012), “NVivo 10 is a comprehensive qualitative data analysis software package. The software can be used to organize and analyze interviews, field notes, textual sources, and other types of qualitative data including image, audio and video files”. For better management, the data were coded in nodes within the NVivo environment.

According to Bazeley (2008, 66), “A code is an abstract representation of an object or phenomenon... used to identify themes in a text.” The code could be purely descriptive, serve as labels for topics or themes or be more of interpretive or analytical concept of information emanating from the data (66). In this connection therefore, “Coding in qualitative research, in its simplest sense, is a way of classifying and then ‘tagging’ text with codes, or of indexing it, in order to facilitate later retrieval” (66). It “is a way of ‘fracturing’ or ‘slicing’ the text, of resolving data into its constituent components” (71). In the code format, text “can be viewed by category as well as by source, and so, as well as facilitating data management, classification of text using codes assists conceptualization” (66). With the data in NVivo, this researcher preferred to perform an auto-coding of the entire data to have them in major constituent components that will facilitate subsequent coding. Hence prior to importing the data (transcripts) into

the NVivo 10 environment, he formatted the data to the appropriate heading styles required for auto-coding: *heading 1* for the questions and *normal heading* for the responses. After that, the auto-code feature of the software was applied and data were coded automatically.

The auto-coding gathered the data in various large general nodes according to the interview questions. For instance, all the responses the informants provided for question one were gathered in the first node just as those of question two were placed in the second node and so forth. And each of them had a link to its original source and thus kept track of who said what. This enabled this investigator to have and to explore in each node all the various responses from the interviewees for each particular question. Under this easily manageable format, he meticulously read the data over and over again, coding as he read through. He thus created specific codes and themes from the various ideas, views and concepts of the respondents. Bazeley (76) referred to these type of codes as “in vivo codes,” that is, indigenous or inductive codes - codes which emerged directly from the words of the participants. These formed the actual initial codes for this research. A sample of the process was presented in Table 3.3 below.

Table 3.3 Sample of Initial Coding

Interview Transcript	Initial Coding
<p>What is your theology of vocation to the Priesthood? “Vocation is a call from God. And when we talk of theology of vocation, we should be talking about our call by God to serve in the Church.” “Vocation to the priesthood is a call from God to</p>	<p>A call from God Call to serve God in the Church Call to serve God in Christ’s Priesthood</p>

<p>serve in the priesthood of Christ.” “It is not a call like Samuel was called openly. But it is a call that comes within, it is a call that comes from God to the heart. It is like an instinct that is planted in us that reminds us...” “The response to this call must be voluntary. When God calls, he calls us freely and we are free to answer the call.” “The apostles were called by Christ and they left everything and followed him. There must be something irresistible about the call.”</p>	<p>Call to the heart Voluntary response Irresistible call</p>
<p>What factors do you think are responsible for Vocation Boom in Nigeria? “We could say predominantly that God is responsible for the vocation boom. We have also our own personal interest in God. But Nigerians are very, very religious, we love God. Our relationship with God is not a private affair. It is something that is publicly demonstrated.” “...as to why we are getting vocations in this part of Nigeria, God knows best but all I can tell you, Father, is that God is doing his own thing in his own way and at his own time.”</p>	<p>God is responsible for vocation the boom Religiosity of the people Vocation is God’s doing</p>

At the end of the initial coding, a lot of codes and themes emerged. He (this researcher) went further to scrutinize, tighten, strengthen, and consolidate the codes by eliminating duplications, repeated ideas, views or terms and phrases in the category. This resulted in a reduced number of codes in the category that represented the crux of the entire data as presented in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4 Emergent and Consolidated Codes

<p>Call from God to serve Irresistible call God is responsible for vocation Young church and vocation Parental stimulation of vocation Good social status Academic fitness Spiritual fitness Health and Social fitness Pastoral fitness</p>	<p>Need for more psychologist Need for more spiritual directors Need for more well trained formators Formation of priests in African milieu The soutane and alternative wears Modern seminarian and seminary JAMB examination Self-formation system Social Interactions The expelled seminarian</p>
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Functionaries’ and Apostolic work reports Formators’ screening result	Release of transcript Ex-seminarian and adjustment issues
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Through the same inductive process (which uses emergent framework to group data according to relationships), the emergent codes were further more categorized into what NVivo referred to as parent nodes and child nodes. A parent node in this category is an overarching theme or phrase over a cluster of child nodes that comprised various related units of thought, areas of interests or clusters of information in their relatedness or connectedness. This classification placed the consolidated codes into various headings and subheading in the final coding (Table 3.5). Under these, the details of the findings of the research are expounded and reported in the next chapter.

Table 3.5 Final Coding (Themes and Codes)

<p>1. Call from God Notions of Vocation Priesthood as a Vocation Voluntary and Irresistible Call</p>	<p>5. Required Hands Need for more well trained formators Need for more psychologists Need for more spiritual directors</p>
<p>2. Vocation by Divine Providence God is responsible for vocation Young church and vocation Good economic and social status</p>	<p>6. Winds of Change Formation of priests in African milieu The soutane and alternative wears</p>

Parental stimulation of vocation	Modern seminarian and seminary JAMB examination Self-formation system Social Interactions
3. Elements of Discernment Academic fitness Spiritual and moral fitness Health and Social fitness Pastoral fitness	7. Termination of formation The expelled seminarian Release of transcript Ex-seminarian and adjustment issues
4. Voices of Discernment Rules and regulations Functionaries and apostolic work reports Formators screening result Personal discernment Parental discernment	

f) Credibility

For the fact that qualitative research involves human experience that is not quantifiable, verifiable and confirmable analysis are essential to establish the credibility of such research. This is necessary to assure the readers that the report of the research was in consonance with the expressed views and experience of the participants (Rubin and Rubin 2005, 76). Under his *Empathic Neutrality*, Patton (2002) writes that this requires the researcher to adopt the stance of neutrality during the investigation process. According to him:

Any credible research strategy requires that the investigator adopt a stance of *neutrality* with regard to the phenomenon under study. This simply means that the investigator does not set out to prove a particular perspective or manipulate the data to arrive at predisposed truths. The neutral investigator enters the research arena with no ax to grind, no theory to prove (to test but not to prove), and no predetermined results to support. Rather, the investigator’s commitment is to understand the world as it unfolds, be true to complexities and multiple

perspectives as they emerge, and be balanced in reporting both confirmatory and disconfirming evidence with regard to any conclusions offered. (51)

Lending credence to this, Mertens stated that credibility test in qualitative research should state clearly the “correspondence between the way the respondents actually perceive social constructs and the way the researcher portrays their viewpoints” (254). For Rubin and Rubin (2005), this means transparency which requires that the “reader of a qualitative research report is able to see the process by which the data were collected and analyzed” (76f). Following these instructions and recommendations, this investigator describes in this chapter, the details of the research procedures: selection of participants and the rationale for the selection, the method of data collection, the data transcription and presented schematic procedures of how the transcribed data were analyzed and coded. Tables: 3.3; 3.4 and 3.5 demonstrated how, from initial coding to the final coding, the themes and codes systematically emerged directly from the expressed views of the respondents.

h) Limitations

Although the transcripts present a large volume of data from the ten participants, the data are not exhaustive of the views and experience of the entire candidates and educators at the seminaries or dioceses visited. In other words, the study is limited in scope and cannot be generalized as representative of the views and experience of all the candidates and educators in the seminaries of the southeastern region.

i) Summary

In this chapter, this investigator expresses the intent of the study, presents the research questions, what prompted them, and the phenomenological Framework of the study. He also stated the assumptions and biases to enable the readers judge the credibility of the findings. He also articulates the methodological procedures that frame the process of data collection as well as the analysis that led to the final codes and themes of the findings. The next chapter is a detailed presentation of the findings and reporting.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND REPORTING

a) Introduction

The purpose of this study is to address the problem of vocation discernment to the Catholic priesthood in the seminaries of southeastern region, Nigeria. The intention is to provide the various teams of seminary formators with additional tools for in-depth vocation discernment in light of the proposition of the Rectors and Spiritual Directors of

the major seminaries of West and Central Africa and Church documents. The Rectors and Spiritual Directors of the major seminaries of West and Central Africa propose “to establish firm procedures and criteria for the selection of candidates at all levels so that those candidates not adapted to the ministry might be directed beforehand to seek their vocation in other areas of Church life” (Synod of Bishops 1993, 28). The above statement demonstrate that this group and the bishops of Africa are concerned about the quality of formation and vocation discernment for the priesthood. Prior to the statement, the *Instrumentum Laboris* states as follows: “The participants in this Seminar insisted that the current abundance of vocations in Africa was a grace of God to be welcomed with joy and gratitude” (28). At the same time they are concerned about how to manage the abundance of vocations in a way that it will be of most benefit to Africa and to the entire Church. Based on the data collected and analyzed, this chapter provides some insight into the issues of concern: formation and vocation discernment within the southeastern region with the intention to respond to the needs.

The study involves ten participants drawn from some of the seminaries and dioceses in the region. Five of the participants are priests concerned with the formation of the candidates for the priesthood in their respective seminaries or dioceses. Their ages varied from forty-five to sixty-nine years. Each had served more than twenty-five years as priests and their years in the ministry of forming the future priests ranged from five to twenty-four years. Some of them started as simple formators and later became rectors and now vocation directors in their dioceses. There is no doubt that they have had ample experience both in the priesthood and in the formation of candidates for the priesthood.

That is to say, they were well experienced in the process of vocation discernment in the region.

The other group of five participants were candidates for the priesthood who were drawn from some the seminaries in the region. Their ages ranged from twenty-five to thirty-two years. They have been undergoing formation for the ministry of the priesthood for a period of about nine to twelve years and were at the verge of their priestly ordinations. At this level of their formation, all these candidates but one have undergone almost all the formal formation and vocation discernment process required of them prior to their ordinations. These candidates at their current level of formation were chosen to participate in the study because of the experience they have acquired of vocation discernment. Thus, both groups of participants: the priests and candidates for the priesthood, were well experienced and provided the thick description needed for this study.

The method and procedure of data collection included qualitative interviews with the participants, transcription of the data obtained and analysis of the data as detailed in chapter three. This chapter contains the findings that resulted from the data. They have been segmented into the overarching themes that emerged from the various clusters of information that responded to the research questions. Thus, the findings were reported under six headings or themes. The headings included: i) Vocation as call from God ii) Vocation by Divine Providence iii) Elements of Discernment and Formation iv) Voices at Vocation Discernment v) Winds of Change in formation and vi) Termination of formation. Each of the headings has a number of subheadings that helped to flush out the

findings in detail. The findings were reported in the traditional narrative model of qualitative research as formatted below (Creswell, 2003).

To better understand and follow this presentation, here are some explanations of the identities of the respondents. All the five priest who participated in the study have the letter “P” which stands for “priest” as part of made-up identification to conceal their real identity as required by the ethics of research involving human subjects (Creswell 2003; Patton 2002; Mertens 2005; Swinton and Mowat 2006; Denzin and Lincoln 2005; Creswell and Clark 2007). The other letters or figures in the identifications indicate their ranks or serial number in the line of the interviews. For instance, two rectors were interviewed; the first one to be interviewed was identified herein as “Priest Rector One” (PR1) while the second rector was identified as “Priest Rector Two” (PR2). On the part of the five candidate participants, the letters “CD” which stand for “Candidate and Deacon” are common to four of them who were deacons at the time of the interview. The first two letters of identity for the fifth candidate “CS” stand for “Candidate and Seminarian” because he was not yet a deacon at the time of the interview. The various third letters of their identity indicated the places where the interviews were conducted. The places of the interviews were purposely concealed in respect for the same reason of ethical issues of research. The formulation of the above identities were solely for this research. Other details on the identities were stated in chapter three, Table 3.2.

b) Vocation as Call from God

This heading is a phrase from the participants’ response to one of the interview questions: “What is your theology of vocation to the priesthood?” This heading came about as one of the overarching themes in response to this question because all the

participants expressed the similar views that vocation is a call from God. Some of them started their response by tracing the origin of the word theology and vocation before delving into the question proper. One of them (CSS) expressed how his initial view and understanding of vocation has changed for the better while CDE tried to correct the one sided view of vocation many people still have: that vocation is all about the priesthood. They pointed out that vocation is as diverse as there are professions or talents and the priesthood is only one of the vocations. According to some of the participants like PR2, vocation to the priesthood is and should be voluntary, a choice a person may willingly make while for others there is no option, no better alternative to positive response when God calls a person to the ministry of the priesthood. And that the person who tries to resist it – God’s call – always loses. The views as expressed by the participants under the above heading were detailed below under the following subheadings:

(i) Notions of Vocation (ii) Priesthood as a Vocation and (iii) Voluntary and Irresistible Call.

i) Notions of Vocation

In various expressions, the respondents held the similar views that vocation, in general, is a call from God to various ways of life, while vocation to the priesthood is a call from God to serve in the priesthood of Christ or in the Church – the Body of Christ. The candidate, CDE traced the origin of the words vocation and theology in his response thus:

I look at vocation as a call from God. The derivation is from the Latin word “voco,” that is a call. So, when you relate it to the vocation to the priesthood, you see it has to do with God calling the seminarian to the priesthood. And the word

theology refers to God, because it has to do with the study of things about God – “theos” and “logos.” When one is said to have a vocation, it means God is calling the person...

Similarly, PR1 started from the origin of the term, vocation, thus: “I believe the priesthood is a call. It originates from the Latin word ‘voco’ which means to call or a call.” Drawing from the root meaning of vocation, most of the respondents stated that the priesthood therefore, does not and cannot claim a monopoly or ownership of the word “vocation” and its meaning as some people seem to believe. Rather the priesthood is, generally speaking, one of the many vocations God assigns to people. According to the “Priest, Rector and Vocation Director” (PRVD):

Generally, vocation is a call just as Abraham was called, Moses was called; the prophets were called in the Old Testament; and in the New Testament Jesus also called his disciples. So vocation is a call from God and God calls his people to work in specific areas. He calls some people to married life, he calls some people to single life, he calls some people to the priestly life or to the religious life.

Similarly, for CDE, everybody has a vocation destined for him or her by God and the priesthood is just one of the vocations. In his words:

In my own understanding, I see vocation as a call to any profession in life. And I see it as something divine because once one is created by God, God has destined that person to be something in life whether to become a priest or to be any other thing for example to be a medical doctor, to be an engineer even to be a married person. So vocation is a call, God calling us to a particular life style.

Similarly, for “Priest, Rector and Formator” (PRF), the priesthood “is a call like every other vocation: engineering, teaching, law and others.” But as regards his theology of the priesthood, he stated, “My theology is borrowed from the Old Testament calls, how the prophets of old experienced their call, how they were taken from their previous assignments to go and preach, to convert or direct the Israelites of old to the right path because they have been derailing and were not happy with God.” On his part, CSS was grateful that his seminary formation has, among other things changed his initial one sided understanding of vocation. As he put it:

Initially, before I came to the seminary, I understood vocation to be only a path towards the priesthood. That was how I understood vocation. I did not see any other field as a vocation besides the priesthood. So coming into the seminary, I have found out that there are other aspects of vocation that do not necessarily mean that one has to become a priest. One could have a vocation to work in the hospital, one could have vocation even as a nun.

From the above, it was found that the notion of vocation as a call from God is not limited to vocation to the priesthood or to religious life alone. Rather it generally applies to every other profession and way of life because God has plan for all God’s children, a purpose for everyone God created. Hence God destined a vocation for each person.

ii) Priesthood as a Vocation

Having expressed vocation in the general sense that includes the priesthood, the participants went further to express the nature of the priesthood as a vocation and what is special about it. PR2 stated that even though “vocation is a call, generally speaking,” that every vocation is not treated under the theology of vocation. For him, theology of

vocation pertains to vocations in the Church and that sets the vocation to the priesthood apart from the rest. In his words: “when we talk of theology of vocation, we should be talking about our call by God to serve in the Church. And there are different services in the Church. Some are ordinary ministers, some are ordained ministers.” And one of the most prominent services in the Church is that of the ordained ministry or the priesthood.

For DCM: vocation to the priesthood is a call to become a priest. Even though it is a vocation like every other vocation, as has been observed above, it is a vocation with a difference or a special kind of vocation as CDE expressed: “The vocation to the priesthood is quite different from every other vocation. Like Heb 5:4 says, it is God who calls: for no one takes this honor upon himself rather each is called as Aaron was called.” The priestly vocation is also different because “it is a spiritual call” (PRF). It is “a call to share in the priesthood of Christ. Christ is the priest par excellence and all of us are called to participate in that priesthood of Jesus Christ” (PRVD). It is also different from other vocations because certain unique functions of the priest as expressed by CDE who saw it as an exceptional vocation:

Priestly vocation is exceptional because the priestly vocation has to do with mediating between God and man and bringing people’s needs and problems, people’s worry to God and then calling down God’s mercy, God’s blessing and God’s intervention in people’s needs and life. Priestly vocation is exceptional because it is sacred.

Inferring from the letter of the Hebrews 5:4, CSS added that priesthood as a vocation is a gift from God to humanity. In his words: “Actually, vocation to the priesthood is a gift. It is a gift from God. Sometimes people are tempted to look at it from the point of view of

man making a gift of himself to God. But I see it more as a gift from God who calls and it is only He, God, who calls and no other person. So that is why it is different from profession, career or anything of the sort.”

On his part, “Priest, Teacher and Formator” (PTF), agreed with the general notion of vocation as well as with the view that the priesthood or religious life is a special call to minister to the people of God. At the same time he added a slightly different view that the priesthood is a personal choice. According to him, to become a priest or religious “is the choice one makes in life.” But his next sentence did not seem to synchronize with this previous statement. He said: “In that case vocation here means that one has been specifically called to this particular way of life of serving God and people.” This latter view did not seem to give room for choice as the former view presented it. This evokes the question of the nature of vocation to the priesthood; is it by choice, that is voluntary or destined, mandated on a person by God who calls. These were the views as expressed by the participant. The next subheading provided more insight into the issue.

iii) Voluntary and Irresistible Call

The participants presented differing views on the voluntary and irresistible qualities of vocation to the priesthood. For some of them, the call to priestly ministry is voluntary and for the others, the person whom God called to the priesthood has no choice but to respond positively and take up the ministry. The participant, Priest and Rector Two (PR2) believed that the call to priesthood should be voluntary. According to him: “...it is a call by God to serve in the Church and the response to this call must be voluntary. It is not forced if it is to be done well. God does not go about forcing people to respond to him. When he calls, he calls us freely and we are free to answer the call.”

Candidate CDS also held that: “In creating man God gave him free will and he does not necessarily interfere with that freedom unless due to some necessary interventions that could help us use the free will wisely. He does not choose for us, he still allows us to choose. It is for this that every action has consequence. So he allows us to choose and we bear the responsibilities for our choices.” On this ground, it is possible that God could call someone and the person continues to resist by exercising his freedom to choose.

For candidate CDE, the idea of forced vocation is not a violent force but a gentle spiritual or divine influence. It is a stimulating instinct luring a person towards something greater. According to him: “when the call comes to you, you feel a kind of inner voice worrying you. You find yourself abandoning the decisions you have already taken toward a force stimulating your interest towards something you know nothing about.” While buttressing his stand that God does not force anybody to respond to God, CDS added that at the same time, God needs a response from the called and God also enables the called to respond. As he put it: “Vocation to the priesthood is a gift from God who calls. And when he calls what he needs from us is our response, our willingness to answer the call and he will give us the enablement to do that.” Similarly, the candidate CSS voiced that a call to the priesthood “deserves an answer and that answer is to be given by the one who is called. And when God calls he puts in place people to help the called to answer the caller.” While CDS spoke of the enablement God gives the called to respond, CSS spoke of God putting in place some people to assist the called to respond. The latter is another form of enablement but this time it is communal because it involves people other than the called for a common purpose – to enable the called to respond. This pointed to the seminary formation and vocation discernment process as well.

On his part, PRF who borrowed his theology of the priesthood from the Old Testament states that Jeremiah “confessed really that it was a burden but he was destined to accept the burden. It was a struggle for him to answer the call. In the end he, Jeremiah said: you have overwhelmed me Lord, you are the stronger. That was the last confession he made in accepting the vocation.” According to him, Jeremiah had a true vocation because that was not what he wanted to do, “he resisted it but ultimately, the one who calls overwhelms you and you are sort of spiritually forced to accept it because he has a mission for you.” Further, PRF stated: “We can also refer to Jonah who wanted to escape from the call to preach as well as what the Lord said: those I have chosen, no one will be able to take them from me because the Father who gave them to me is stronger than anyone. No one can steal from the Father. I and the Father are one.” On the New Testament version of vocation he added: “In the New Testament, the apostles were called. Christ chose them and they left what they were doing and followed him. There must be something in this; some irresistible force calls you to come.” From the above, PRF aligned himself with the letter to the Hebrews in the sense that no one arrogates to himself the service as a priest but by God’s call. Those who resisted or struggled with the call were in some form infused with the grace or enabled to accept it at last. The key word here, as CDS stated is the enablement. Further CDS added: “Actually we should not look at the call as something physical, as in actual call where God would stand somewhere to call. It is a prompting in the heart of man, deep within him. God calls, God speaks to us in different ways and through different media.” Here the spiritual force takes the form of prompting deep in the heart.

On his part, PR1 saw the spiritual force, the irresistible force mentioned by PRF as mysterious and “divine hand” when he said: “vocation is not something that you can explain clearly. There is some mystery in it, there is divine hand that you may not even know but you are motivated to follow the call.” That is a mystery of the divine will wishing to employ human instrumentality for divine purpose: to extend God’s salvific ministry to the ends of the earth.

When a person is “motivated to follow the call” to the priesthood as PR1 stated, he may find himself in the seminary. But there should be some initial signs to show for it. As CDU puts it, to have vocation to the priesthood “means God is calling the person and there will be signs in the person that God is calling him. Then those signs may lead the person to go to the seminary. People can go there and begin to abide by the rules of the place to see if God is actually calling them.” And for PRVD “that is what we are here trying to find out: whether these young people here with us have received such invitation, such a call from our Lord Jesus Christ. And I think that is why the young men are here too.” Continuing on the candidates under his formation, PRVD stated: “They felt they have been called but then, as Jesus said, he is the one that calls: you did not choose me rather I chose you and appointed you to be my prophet. So, he is the one that chooses.” He drew this conclusion because of his conviction that there are some persons who are in the seminary, but are not really called. Many of such candidates do not make it to the priesthood. According to him, an “individual may try to do it by himself; if he does that himself, he runs into trouble. I chose you, you did not choose me, says the Lord. I think that is the operative guiding principle” he reaffirmed. The trouble he meant included the inability of the individual to abide by the rigorous seminary formation.

Regarding formation he went further to say: “Here at the formation house, we are trying to make sure really, that the voice the candidate is hearing, the invitation he is receiving is one from God, not from himself or from his parents or from people who are pushing him into the priesthood.” Similarly, PR1 stated that the formation house or “Seminary is a nursery place for vocation and this nursery place looks at the people who felt called. They have come with the feeling and motivation that they are called. ... We ask them: why do you want to be a priest, do you want to serve God and humanity?” For PR1 and PRVD efforts are made to ascertain the motivation and to see that only those with genuine vocation proceed to the different stages of the formation.

The above points: vocation motivation and formation of the candidates were explained in subsequent sections of this chapter. In this section it can be stated that the word vocation means a call; not a call solely to the priesthood but a general call by God to different ways of life and professions both secular and religious. As such, the vocation to the priesthood is only one of the vocations God destined for God’s people. This section also establishes that the priesthood is a special vocation to serve in the priesthood of Christ in the Church. No one arrogates this privilege to himself rather it is by God’s call. It is also affirmed that God’s call to the priesthood can be voluntary and it can also be irresistible. When God calls a candidate for the priesthood, God already has a mission for the person and would want him to respond voluntarily. Those who did not understand or find the call difficult to embrace, God gives them the enablement to proceed in the ministry. The next section focused on priestly vocation as a blessing from God in the region of study.

c) Vocation by Divine Providence

From the respondents' views, it is God who calls people to the priestly vocation. When they asked about what is responsible for the vibrant vocation in Nigeria, they attributed it to God. For them, it was a divine providence. Narrative of their responses to the question were reported under the following subheadings i) God is responsible for vocations ii) Young church and vocation iii) Good Economic and Social Status and iv) Parental stimulation of vocation.

i) God is Responsible for Vocations

The thought that God is responsible for the vibrant vocations to the priesthood in the region under review was well expressed in various ways by most of the participants. It is not that God loves the region or country more than some other countries as to bless the country with vocations and deny it to some others. Rather it sprung from the general and personal interests the people have in God and religious practices. CDE paraphrased a renowned African author, Mbiti, as saying that “an African man is a religious man despite everything. An African man goes to his farm with his religiosity, an African man goes to beer parlor to drink with his God, an African man visits his friend with his religion, an African man does not forget his religion in his daily interaction... Everything about the African is religion and God.” Thomas Aquinas once said that grace builds on nature; it does not force itself on nature. Nature has to dispose itself for grace and grace grows and flourishes even more abundantly on nature depending on the fertility of the nature it is building upon. In that regard, if the nature is rocky or stifling (unconducive) for grace, to build on it would be a herculean task. The respondents believed that Nigeria has what it takes: the fertility that vocation needs to grow and flourish; and that is, their fervent religious adherence. According to PR2: “we could say predominantly that God is

responsible for the vocation boom. We have also our own personal interest in God. But Nigerians are very, very religious, we love God. Our relationship with God is not a private affair. It is something that is publicly demonstrated.” For PR1: “God has given us the background, the religious background. We have a very fertile ground for vocation to the priesthood because of our religiosity.” And for CDS “Nigerians are highly religious. We interpret everything that happens to us in the light of religion. We are very open, more attentive to the voice of God speaking to us and calling us to the ordained ministry.” On the part of CDU: the religiosity of the people in the region was not because of Christianity, they have culturally lived and practiced their religion from time immemorial, long before the advent of the Christian religion in the area. And it was even this practice that enabled them to embrace Christianity more easily because of some similarities. For instance, the concept of the priesthood was well known and accepted in their traditional religion. With particular reference to the Igbo areas as the epicenter of the vocation boom in Nigeria, PTF simply stated: The reason we are “having this level of vocation is for the fact that from our own backgrounds as Igbos, we are so religious.” PRF also emphasized the Igbo tribe as the center of the vocation boom. According to him, “in Nigeria, there isn’t vocation boom all over the country. For instance, in the north, the west, and especially where Muslim religion has influenced the culture. There, they do not have priestly vocation boom but over here in Igbo land. So, the Nigeria you are talking about here is the Igbo people, Igbo country.” CSS equally stated: In Nigeria I believe that we are religious, especially in the East. You see a lot of churches and you see a lot of the Catholics, like in Igbo land and they have the zeal, the strength to serve God.

In his own response, PRDV did not emphasize the prevalent view that fervent religious inclinations of the people played significant role in the vocation boom they currently experience. But he concurred with the view that God is responsible for the vibrant vocation in the region. As he put it: “What is responsible for it is something I am not able to say but I think the hand of God must be in it since he is the one that calls.” He expressed various views as to what may motivate a young man to seek the ministry of the Catholic priesthood. Some of the motivations were expressed later in this chapter. But the reason for the large number of aspirants for the priesthood, he said only God knows. In his words: “So, as to why we are getting vocations in this part of Nigeria, God knows best but all I can tell you, Father, is that God is doing his own thing in his own way and at his own time.” It could be recalled from this statement that there was a time when Europe had the vocation boom. This time is for Africa and Nigeria is savoring it. But will there be a time when Nigeria would face vocation glut like Europe? Time will tell or as PRVD stated: “only God knows.”

In Nigeria, God is religion and religion means God, they are not separated. To be religious is to be godly. That was why the respondents freely associated God’s providence with religiosity. The next subheading reported some other factors that are responsible for the vocation boom in the southeastern region of Nigeria.

ii) Young Church and Vocation

Apart from the religiosity of the people, the respondents pointed to some other factors that they believed contributed to the vibrant vocation to the priesthood in the

region of study. The points raised were a mixture of social issues but they were not completely bereft of religious undertone. The points were a combination of issues of both social and religious dimensions in consonance with what has been stated: everything about the African has some religious connotation.

One of the points raised here was the age of the church in Nigeria. According to PR2:

Our Christian religion in Nigeria is still within the hundred age period. The church in Nigeria is a very young one, not yet old. You know sometimes, when you are old you are tired. So we are still young, and many a times when you are young, you are strong. So that is why, we are a young church, we are a strong church.

The church in the entire Eastern Nigeria has a common history and she celebrated the centenary of her evangelization in 1985. Compared to the churches in Europe and America, she is really a young church as PR2 stated. PRVD expressed similar view:

For us here, I think we are still at the dawn of Christianity; like over here in the southeast, Christianity came in 1885. So we are still a very young church; you can see the novelty is still there. I know in Ireland there was a time they used to ordain priests in good numbers: 20, 30 or 40, in a diocese and so many of them were coming out here in Nigeria to help us. But now, I wonder if there are still any diocese in Ireland that ordains 20 or 30 priests at this time. The same thing is applicable in the United States.

The participants also believe that the situation or environment prevalent at a place can help to boost or stifle its vocation. Such situations include but not limited to: the

philosophical and theological, scientific, technological and developmental as well as the economic and social environments. PR2 speaks of the devastating blow modernism dealt to the modern world, the “anti-God” environment it created. In his words: “You know one of the excesses of modernity is the throwing overboard, dismantling of the medieval age which was faith-centered and God-centered age in place of man-centered – anthropocentric age (anthropocentrism) where everything begins and ends with man, that is modernity. You know, this has its own influence, so it makes it difficult for people to take interest in religion.” For him, the “decline of interest in religion, led to the decline of interest in vocation, in the call to serve God experienced in many countries” (PR2). But Nigeria is different. It is like she is still living the medieval faith-centered and God-centered experience. According to PR2, “we are not in environment where religion is privately practiced. We are in an environment where religion is publicly practiced and we are proud of our religion.” Modernism and secularism are closely related and the crisis of identity they created for religion are on record. As modernism has caused decline in vocation in some countries so has secularism. With this knowledge, PRVD mildly stated: “secularism seems to have taken hold of many of these countries where the church is experiencing shortage of priests. Secularism has really crept in.” But CDU was emphatic about it: “secularism is so high there.” Both respondents were appreciative of the fact that the young Nigeria church has not been affected by the ills of those schools of thought. Hence the current vibrant vocation to the ordained ministry.

While some participants described the church in Nigeria as a young church, Nigeria would not be described as a young country, but rather an underdeveloped or a developing country. Some of the participants voiced that the poor level of development of

the country is one of the factors why she has vibrant vocation to the priesthood. “And again,” said CDE, “development has not come very close to our country, so we are not all that exposed, we are still experiencing what I may tag as lack of exposure.” According to him the exposure to modern development has its own challenges which could strengthen or ruin a people’s way of doing things; challenges that could really challenge and pose danger to faith. For him “What we believe challenges our faith; what we see challenges our faith, the discussions we hold challenge our faith; even all the things around us challenge our faith.” Nigeria seems to be on safe ground for now because “We are not exposed to that extent” of modern wonders and awe. Going further he said: our “science and technology has not developed to the extent of taking care of some of the things we need towards solving most of our problems. And because of that, we always turn to God for everything.” That is a favorable condition for vocation to thrive. CDS shares the view that the general state of affairs (wellbeing) of a place can determine or lead to the increase or decline of its vocations. He cited Europe as an instance to buttress his point as follows:

When they were still developing nations, they had many vocations to different kinds of priestly life. Now with industrialization, with revolution, renaissance, existentialism and other philosophical trends and of course the improvement on the economic status; so many people do not feel called by God any more. So it has to do with the mentality of the people, the situation of the place and what is obtainable at the time and place, the environment in which the people find themselves.

These seemed to affirm an earlier assertion that the current vocation boom enjoyed by the young Nigeria church is not permanent but a situation that would change with time.

Incidentally, not all the participants agree with this statement as expressed in the next subheading.

iii) Good Economic and Social Status

Some respondents agree that economic and social wellbeing are factors favorable for vocation growth. In his response to the question of vocation boom in connection with economic wellbeing and social status, PTF stated: “The priest is highly respected and what he does is equally highly respected. This is what actually helps in the increase of vocation we have in Nigeria and in most of our dioceses here in Igbo land.” Naturally, humans would love to work at places where the services are appreciated or respected and not so much the opposite. Added to that, some of these priests have personal friends, friendly families, and benefactors. They go the extra mile to express their love, care, and appreciation of the priests and their ministries. According to PRF: “There is no priest here who has no family friends... the people like priests and help them. I know rich families that have built houses for senior seminarians as they approached the priesthood.” He went on to say: “Yes, poor, very poor families where the seminarians have not even their own private rooms. But seeing that the seminarian is nearing his goal, these benefactors came and helped out.” Such generosity can influence a lot of people who are economically or material minded to aspire for the priesthood as PRF stated further:

So this area is where we have economic reasons that influence candidates. He thinks about what his status will be as an ordained priest: after two or three years, he is given a parish, well-furnished building, and of course a car, often brand new

at his ordination. He is well fed, has good food, and makes many friends in the parish, because our people love priests, who will help them even financially without asking.

According to him, this may encourage the candidates who were planning to leave the seminary to change their mind. As he put it: “In this case, some seminarians, though in the minority, would say, let me continue in the seminary, I would do better economically as a priest. I will have a car, I will have this and that, and also power, prestige. The priest is respected here even if you are only one-day old in the priesthood.” The view of staying put was equally articulated by PR1: “In our discussion this morning, someone was saying that in those days in the seminary, when candidates don’t feel like continuing their priestly formation, they just leave. Nowadays it is rare. They stay put even if they know they can be expelled; they stay until they are told to leave. They feel that if they are able to even pretend until the end, that the reward will be great. These can make negative impact.” He concluded, “so, there is the possibility that people are attracted to the priesthood by material welfare.” And the reasons are not farfetched as CDE voiced: “We are still experiencing economic meltdown despite what the world is experiencing now. Right from the word go, Nigeria has been experiencing economic meltdown, because of that many people are suffering and there are unemployment in every sector. So, because of that, people in search of the Golden Fleece or greener pasture go to places where they would be a little comfortable in life.” And the priesthood is one of those places because according to PRI “The priest is not unemployed. The priesthood is stable; those who succeed in reaching priesthood do not lack employment. Those of your own classmates or age grade/mate who did not go for the priesthood; after you become a priest

you see them almost dwarfed. The level the priest ascends to, arrives at in the society can also be an attraction for the young people.” In this light PR1 asserts: “nowadays the priests’ lifestyle and the national financial crisis have a negative turn on vocation.” He however sympathized with the unemployed young men who, according to him, “going from place to place for your studies for almost four or five years and after that you have no employment.” Sad as he felt and as it really is, he was aware that he could do little or nothing about it as a priest.

On his part, PTF presented the case of poor families who cannot afford the regular university education for their son and decided to take economic advantage of the seminary by sending their son to the major seminary where the church sponsors the seminarians or makes it very affordable for them. Here, under the pretext of wanting to become priests, these candidates would obtain their first degree or Master’s degree, and then leave the seminary for better life in the world. But according to him, “Often times they come into the seminary with the intention of acquiring education but in the process they end up being priests because they are converted and then their intentions are changed.” This becomes the case of double-edged sword or a cheater who got cheated.

For CDE, even though there are economic and social wellbeing in the priesthood, there are seminarians for whom the priesthood is a second option. That is, there are some seminarians for whom the priesthood is not their first choice, but only an alternative should their first choice fail. “That is why some people in the seminary once they are opportune to have connection with people outside the Nigeria world, they pull out of the seminary.” Further he, CDE, added: “some people were saying, ‘If I see somebody who would promise me the amount of one, two or three million naira, I would just bow out

from the seminary and use the money to become something else in the society.” PRF presented a similar case: “the economic situation in our country is very bad, you will not be surprised to hear that a young senior seminarian who was nearing the priesthood has been struggling for the past two or three years to secure admission to any foreign university that is not seminary at all. He decided and thinks that he is going to make better economic living outside the priesthood.”

On his part, CDU differed from the prevalent views. He did not agree that economic and social status were the reasons many candidates go for the priesthood. His though was born out of his experience at his seminary. He attended a seminary that used a different method of formation from the rest in the region. They generally refer to the method as auto-formation, that is, self-formation. The method opens the seminarians to all the avenues of what it means to become a priest and were allowed to form themselves in all conscience and sincerity and holiness of life. In the seminary, there was no “policing” the seminarians around or monitoring them every minute of the day. There was no ringing of the bell, which other seminaries regard as the voice of God that must be obeyed. Instead they regulated themselves with their watches. Personal vocation discernment was highly encouraged. No candidate was ever expelled, but many of them discerned that the priesthood was not their vocation and happily left the seminary on their own. The formators were there to assist them in formation, to open up or “multiply options” for them, and offer candid advice in response to their questions. It was from this background that he (CDU) said:

For me, economy or social status is not influencing the boom as I see it. The people who are there are determined. When they go to the seminary, they begin to

follow the rules and the regulations and those who cannot fit in, because it is not easy to be in the seminary, they normally leave on their own. But for those who insist that they will reach the end; you will notice that they have the vocation in them.

For him a candidate who is not genuinely called to the priesthood would be unable to make it through the rigorous process of formation. The rigorous nature of the formation process here was not accidental. It was purposely designed for thorough formation and adequate vocation discernment. Without that, formation may not be thorough and vocation discernment may not be adequate.

Related to the above was PRVD's view that the economic issues were not as problematic as they were portrayed. According to him: "The economic downturn here in Nigeria may have contributed to vocation but if God uses it to raise vocation, I don't think we should quarrel with God about it. God writes straight even on a crooked line; if God is using hardship to raise vocation, I think we should be grateful to God." For him, the God who turned the rock into a pool and flint into a spouting of water (Ps 114:8) can use material things to entice and turn a selfish and materialistic candidate into one of the best priests. CDE has a similar view which he stated thus: "When we were in the seminary we were told that vocation could come from any angle: vocation could come as a result of the flavor of the stew coming out of the Father's kitchen, vocation could come because of seeing a priest driving a nice car and vocation could come because of the priest's dress." He would refer to these as some initial inspirational elements of vocation which would be purified when the candidates enters the seminary formation.

When asked if Nigeria's development in the future: economic and social advancement, scientific and technological development with their attendant various philosophical, theological and secular schools of thought, would diminish her vocation interest to the priesthood. CDE responded: "I believe that even if Nigeria develops like the western world, we will not lose our faith as they have lost their faith because of the fact that our own orientation is quite different from theirs. Our orientation is also contributing to that; we are more divine conscious than the western world." Similarly, CDU stated: "even if Nigeria becomes highly advanced technologically and infrastructural: internet here and there, good employment everywhere and people making huge sums of money and living big, there will still be many young men who would like to go to the seminary to undergo the crucibles and become priests because we always like following this noble way of worshipping God – becoming priests.

Under the same environmental circumstances, many candidates have left the seminary. Seminarians are still looking for an opportunity to bow out because there are still candidates there who have no intention of becoming priests. At the same time, there are many who are exploring various avenues to enter the seminary. That affirms that not every candidate who enters the seminary would make it to the priesthood. God calls people to the ministry of the priesthood in various ways and through various inspirational means and there are others who called themselves. God also calls some people to the ministry through the instrumentality of others. This latter group were presented in the next subheading.

iv) Parental Stimulation of Vocations

Some of the participants argue that parents are major contributors to priestly vocation through the home formation they give their children. According to PR2, “just like we talk of socialization which has primary and secondary and tertiary agents. The primary agents are the families: your parents and siblings and peer groups. If one comes from a well-organized Christian family, it is quite easier to hear the voice of God.” Continuing he said, “And our families are happy and still cohesive; we have cohesive families, we love children. Families are encouraged to have as many children as they are able to nurse and bring up. So this also goes to influence vocation.” Similarly PRVD stated: “I think that our families are still a bit intact. The father is still the head of the family and the mother, without being enslaved, is still subservient to the husband and the children listen to their parents to some extent. So our family life is still something we should be proud of. And it is from such families that vocations come up.” These two statements came at the backdrop of reports of instability of marriages. There are rampant cases of broken marriages and divorce in many countries as PRVD also pointed out:

You know, vocations come from families and I know in these places where we are having dear vocation many of the families are no longer together. There are so many broken families and people now get married not so much for the love of children but for friendship, they want companionship, they are not procreating, etc. So it is from these broken families that vocation is supposed to come from, and if a family is broken, vocation is not going to come out of such place. So, family life is no longer together in some of those places and I think it has affected vocation in these places.

PR1 stated similar view thus: Many “families in the western world of nowadays do not want to have many children. And the ones they have are very much attached to them and they may not provide them the opportunity to choose the priestly way of life...the family and the number of children the parents have can help them to make a choice of allowing one or more of their sons to join the priesthood.” priestly vocation is a religious matter, the closer the parents are to the church by the practice of their faith the more probable their child may develop some interest in religious issues. This is because “When parents go to church they take their children along with them at a very tender age; it is part of our culture” (PR2). In that regard, with most parents “as the first church leaders and as formators of their child, they could educate the child religiously, that the child feels the call of God to the priesthood” at a tender age (CDS). This is generally referred to as early vocation. And for PRF, “Early vocation is strictly influenced by family environment.” His explanation was: “If for example your parents are very active in church; right from infancy you continue following them to Mass, join in the family prayer; you are brought up in that environment, and you are close to the parish priest; may be the young fellow joins the altar servers, very close to ‘Father,’ and likes it. Unconsciously, you will like to be like ‘Father.’” PR1’s shared personal story to buttress this point:

I remember when we were children, my father used to, on Sundays, after night prayers begin to ask us questions: what was said today in the church; do you know the first reading, the second reading, the gospel. What did the Rev. Father teach, the catechist made some announcement, do you remember some of them. So when you remember each Sunday that these questions are coming to you; when I go to the church I will stay in front of the pew while other children are

joking outside. I will be seated to get every moment, every bit of it. I say, may be this attention to the altar and all this, may have attracted me to the seminary.

When I heard about the entrance to the seminary, I said: papa I'm interested. So I took the entrance exam and so on.

Bringing up children in the Christian way of life is a responsibility that parents publicly assumed on the day their child was baptized and those who take the responsibility seriously do not regret as CDE put it:

Family factor contributes a lot to influence the early priestly vocation of their son. Like if your parents are Catholics, first of all they launch you into the church through baptism while you are still a kid. Later, they teach you how to pray in the manner of Catholics, taking you to church exposes you to the church environment. Then, from there you may begin to nurture the idea of getting more involve in the church, like joining the altar servers. And from there the call to become a priest may come.

And if the vocation is discerned as genuine vocation, the young man becomes a priest like PR1 above.

As indicated earlier, there are also candidates or priests who were inspired to the priesthood by relatives, experience, circumstances or events they encountered. According to PTF: "One of the things I consider as an influence to early vocation is observing the life of a priest or a religious." This was the case with CSS who shared this personal story:

I have my own early vocation because I lived with a priest and from there, at the age of eight, I got that early vocation. I was an altar boy and what really interested me in the priesthood was the service. I notice there were many respected persons

in the church who were coming to kneel down before the priest and the priest will pray and bless them and lay hands on them. So I really had that inspiration. I had really wanted to become a medical doctor which is also to serve. But seeing medical doctors come to the priest and kneel down before him and he blesses them and prays for them, I wanted to serve as a priest to serve humanity as a priest. So that is really why I came here to make that fulfillment.

Some kids have also received their call through what was referred to as prophetic utterance due to their behaviors: “You see them very interested in the church activities where they worship with their parents. They are very pious from childhood,” said CDM. According to CDS, somebody may come to them and say:

This boy you are behaving well, I think you should go to the seminary and become a priest. Those types of prophetic utterances sometimes prompt them. Sometimes they could be moved by the decorum they find in the liturgy of the church: the way the priests and the ministers conduct themselves, so they feel moved, they feel touched. Sometimes, it could also be an experience in life.

Some circumstances may also prompt a candidate to want to become a priest as PR1 narrated: “A seminarian said that one day the bishop was talking and a particle of the bishop’s saliva touched his lips and someone said he may become a priest.” That was an experience the seminarian had as a little boy who sat with other children listening to the bishop as he spoke and it has remained with him. It was also a thought among the respondents that when priests have high regard in a family, are well-spoken about, and appreciated for their ministry. The children in the family may want to become priests. It was PTF that put this view forward thus: “In the family that talked good about the

priesthood, has a high regard for the priest, and what the priest does. Then from there, their child might pick up the interest to enter the seminary.” For the child, this may be to please his parents or to earn such high regard from them also. In the process he may find that he is really called for the ministry.

One may ask here, what about those children whose parents are not “good” Catholics: do not pray, go to church, talk about God, or priests. Since they do not have that religious family environment, one wonders how they receive their own inspiration or if they ever become priests. PR2 gave this response:

Here in the seminary, some came in because their play mates were from more dedicated Catholic Christian families. In their primary school they heard that there was going to be an entrance exam to the junior seminary and they decided to go with their friends; not that the parents of these young boys encouraged them but their friends, their peers whose parents were already conversant with the system of priestly formation. And so they just followed their friends to the exam and passed. That’s how their journey started and it ended in priestly ordination.

Incidentally, PR2 is one of those who did not get vocation inspiration from the family but from school. He shared this personal story: “My parents never told me to enter the seminar. It was in the school that one seminarian came to teach us one day. He was talking about the seminary and we were gaping at him. He said he was a seminarian. We asked him: brother what is seminary and he told us about it. So it was in school we heard about the seminary and we decided to give it a trial and it has worked out well.”

It really worked out well because in the end, he became a leading priest in the region. He is currently in charge of hundreds of seminarians who are seeking the approval to serve

priests. According to PR1, “this idea of formation at a very young age is a very important element in the vocation boom we have.” All the same, whether a child is inspired for the priesthood by his parents or peers, the importance of parental support cannot be overemphasized.

The intention of the diocesan minor seminary program was for the training of likely future priests. It was discovered that this is not always the motivations for the parents who send their children to the junior seminaries. According to PRF: “Today, we are not going to deny that there are some, not too many who right from the beginning have been sent by their parents to be formed academically in the seminary” and not for the priesthood. This, according to him is “because the public school system is crumbling. The church has maintained that discipline and quality: boarding school and religion is still emphasized, and quality learning is there. So, many parents like their children to join the seminary to acquire qualitative education. When they get the good certificate they leave. But this does not trouble the authorities. We have a good number to choose from and many are even sent away.”

On the other hand, PR1 expressed similar view which he said would sometimes turn around in favor of the intentions of the seminary. According to him: “In the junior seminary we have little boys who just entered the seminary without any personal motive to become priests but only that their parents want them to be there. May be they want a very nice school for qualitative education, that the seminary offers. But with time, the word of God, good manners, good training, discipline, begin to reshape them and little by little they start to become interested in the matters of priestly training and later become exemplary priests.” CDU expresses the same view in almost the same words: “some

parents just want their children to go to the seminary whether they want to become priests or not. And when they reach there they began to develop the interest to become priests and follow it up to the priesthood.” CDS saw it as unwarranted use of parental force when parents send their children to the seminary irrespective of the children’s area of interest. According to him:

You hear of cases where parents tell their children, like the home movie that says: ‘John Bosco, to the seminary, you must go,’ and actually force their children into the seminary, but that shouldn’t be the case. If any parent feels that he or she wants to make a gift of one of his or her children to God, such a parent should encourage the child as the scripture says: train up the child the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it instead of forcing them to the seminary they have no idea of what it is all about.

CDS’ view is understood but the supporting citation taken from Proverbs 22:6, does not seem to be contrary to what the parents are doing. The difference is that the parents sought the assistance of the seminary instead of doing the training by themselves.

From the respondents’ perspective, it was found in this section that: The vocation boom currently experienced by the southeastern region was an act of divine providence. It all originated from their God-given religious background from which they view and interpret most things in their life. And for the fact that vocation to the priesthood is a religious issue, only God can be responsible for that. God inspires the interest for the vocations in various ways: through human instrumentality, inanimate objects, events, circumstances or experiences of life as it pleases God. The church in this region is a young church still unaffected by the ills of modernity. Most of the scientific,

technological, and infrastructure development that lure the youth away from religion have not taken root in the country. Some respondents believe that even if they do take root, their inclination to fervent religious adherence will remain intact as well as their interest to serve God in the priesthood. Priests are highly regarded and appreciated in Nigeria. They are well supported economically by their home parish and parish of apostolate. These gifts are intended to support their ministry and to encourage more vocations to the ministry and it is working. At the same time, the economy of Nigeria is not in the best condition. As a result, many youth are attracted to the ministry for the economic comfort and the social status it offers. But some participants argued that those who intended to enter the ministry with the wrong intention are screened out during scrutiny in the vocation discernment process. Parents are the stimulants that propel their little kids to the minor seminaries. The minor seminaries in turn feed the major seminaries with a great number of candidates for the priesthood. This leads, at the end of their formation, to the ordination of many priests. Thus, parents are major contributors to the vocation boom in the region, even though not all those who were admitted are able to make it to priesthood. The difference would be clear if parents refuse to send their children to the minor seminaries.

This section articulated how God is responsible for the vocation boom in the southeastern region with the help of human endeavors and historical incidents. While the region continues to rejoice in the divine favor of vocations, it is equally pertinent to point out a few problems associated with the vibrant vocation. These include shortage of qualified formators to handle the population of seminarians, spiritual directors, psychologists, infrastructural materials and the finance needed to maintain and keep some

of the seminaries in good condition. PR2 stated some of these problems in his closing statement as follows:

Actually, here in Nigeria, we have experienced the so called vocation boom. But these seminarians have to be cared for. It is financial need that is our biggest headache. We do receive some financial subsidy but it is not sufficient to take care of these young men adequately. The buildings too, need maintenance that are not so cheap to handle. So, it is good that we have this vocation but if these candidates are not well-looked after, it is just like no vocation; it may be a disaster.

These are problems the authorities need to give serious consideration. The next section on discernment issues presents the views of the respondents on what it takes to be fit for the ministry of the priesthood. This included the process of formation and discernment.

b) Elements of Discernment and Formation

Vocation discernment for the priesthood is human attempt to ascertain the authenticity of supposed calls to the ministry of the priesthood. The candidates who present themselves for ministry are scrutinized from time to time. According to PR1, “We ask them: why do you want to be a priest, do you want to serve God and humanity.” Before a candidate comes to this question stage, he must have gone through some process. According to PR2, “When one notices that he is called by God as a young man, he goes to a diocese to confer with the vocation director because every diocese has a vocation director or a board of vocation directors; and then the discernment will begin.” This phase usually starts at the completion of high school studies, the equivalence of minor seminary. And it involves different stages like “Prefecting” or probation and then

the “Spiritual Year” program, which is the first step into the preliminary stage of the major seminary, and series of scrutiny. According to PR1:

Generally, there are stages and series of scrutiny the candidates undergo during the period of formation. After the last stage of their high school they do prefecting. During their prefecting they are screened before they are sent to the Spiritual Year. In the Spiritual Year they learn a lot about spiritual life, a little bit about philosophy and theology. Then their own conduct will determine whether they should go ahead into philosophy or not. When they finish the four years of philosophy; they are given one year apostolic work, you have a priest there to direct and monitor each candidate. Many of them leave the seminary at this point. Then after the apostolic work, those who performed well are sent back to the seminary to do theology for another four years leading to their ordinations if everything went well.

The scrutiny or discernment process last all through their years as candidates. According to PRF: “Discernment is not something you say this year we will try to discern the seminarians who will make it. No, it is a continuous process and we have so many ways here of trying to do it but not only one man not only one person, the Rector, should do it.” However, some formators seemed scared of the sacred duty of screening as indicated by PR1’s expression: “We have screening and with the number of candidates it is a herculean task. Not everybody can afford to do it. It is an issue of conscience, it is a conscience question. Not everybody wants to participate because you have to decide on someone’s vocation.”

For the major seminarian, discernment is a daily struggle. The seminarian must keep up with all the requirements and expectations to remain accepted in the seminary. According to PR1, “there are many ways to tell a seminarian to leave the seminary. If he does the right thing he will stay and if he does bad thing, even if it is little, it means the sign has been given to us to tell him to leave.” The four pillars of formation were presented here from the perspectives of the participants as: (i) Intellectual and academic fitness (ii) Spiritual and moral fitness (iii) Social and Health fitness and (iv) Pastoral fitness.

i) Intellectual and Academic Fitness

There is a certain standard of intellectual and academic capability a priest is expected to attain and maintain so as to perform his duty efficiently and effectively. According to PRF, things are changing, the priest should “have encyclopedic knowledge.” He should also pass his exams as proof of some intelligence. PR2 states: “a candidate for the priesthood is expected to do well in his academic life. And if one is incapable of passing his examinations, he is withdrawn from the seminary.” PTF expressed the same view: “academics play significant part in vocation discernment in the sense that if somebody is completely a dummy, always below average, and there is no sign that this person will improve, then he could be encouraged to seek his career elsewhere.” PRVD voiced as follows:

If a seminarian is not passing his examinations, we advise him to take a second look because philosophy and theology are not easy subjects and we are no longer in the pre-Tridentine era. Now, people are getting educated and these future priests are going to deal with people who are educated. And the Church is a

teacher right from the beginning: Christ said to the disciples, go and teach all nations. So you have to know to be able to teach. That is why we take academics into consideration.

He went further to say: “We know there was a priest like Curé d’Ars, who could not pass his examinations as a seminarian. But today he is a saint and the Patron Saint of Parish Priests. Well, that was during his own time, things have changed.” CSS equally spoke about Curé d’Ars (John Vianney). According to him:

Academics play a role in the discernment of vocation because, like some of our formators will always tell us that we don’t want a modern day John Vianney. That means that if you don’t do very well in academics, definitely it will be interpreted that you do not have vocation. Because from what people have said: if God calls you to be a priest, definitely he is going to give you the knowledge to understand especially his past and futures. If a seminarian doesn’t do well in academics owing to the fact that he doesn’t apply his intelligence and even if he applies it, he doesn’t make it. Then I don’t feel he should be ordained because to be ordained he will really need academics, you will really need to be a learned man.

On his part PR1 states: “We are concerned about the candidates’ academic performance and that is why we have it as a principle that if a candidate failed three major courses he repeats the class. It can also lead to his expulsion or we inform his bishop that such candidate is not coping with the academic requirements.” He explained that this principle does not apply strictly to new candidates who may be struggling with a lot of things. According to him: “Sometimes when a candidate is new in the seminary, he may fail

some courses and pass them in the second semester; that first failure does not count. So, they have been escaping it.” That is escaping the burden of repeating a class or expulsion due to some failed class subjects

To emphasize the importance of meeting the intellectual and academic standard, PTF stated one of the benefits of being intellectually well formed in these words: “There is an influence good academic life has in the life of a priest. If a priest is well educated and open to education, the way he reacts, the way he relates with people will be quite different from that of somebody who is not.” PR1 elaborated on this issue as follows:

A priest who is not intelligent is a liability to the church. There is the need to have intelligent candidates for the priesthood because there are many of the priests who do not have the prospect of furthering their education even if the opportunity is given. When they are posted to the parish, they are very authoritative, impose themselves on people, they don't even allow people to give their own opinion. They feel marginalized or inferior; if you are making an important point they feel you are trying to over-shadow them and they would react violently. So we have it as a policy: if a candidate is not intelligent, he can't do the priestly work because he is going to meet intellectuals. He has to understand what he is going to talk about before he can communicate it intelligently.

In that case according to PRF: “if they don't measure up intellectually, they are expelled.” CDE supported the views with the following thoughts:

I think poor academic performance should be a disqualifying factor. I strongly think so because a priest is supposed to be an oracle of God and he is to do so in human language. He is to speak intelligently to people because it will be an insult

to the congregation, the people of God if a priest stands there and not deliver a good homily. So I think academics should be strongly considered though it should not be emphasized at the expense of morality and spirituality.

For CDU, to be a balanced priest, the candidate needs good level of education. Thus he stated: “Those who wish to become priests should be balanced persons. They should be balanced academically, spiritually and socially.” In response to the question of exam malpractice due to much emphasis on academics, CDS stated: “there should be no exam malpractice in the seminary. And if it is treated with kid’s blows such malpractices could also extend to other spheres of life in the ministry. Cheating, non-transparency and non-accountability could come to play as a result,” he concluded. The participants argue that good level of academic and intellectual abilities are necessary for the priestly ministry. At least it must be above average, as PTF implied.

ii) Spiritual and Moral Fitness

Spiritual fitness in the seminary deals with the candidate’s appreciation and participation in the spiritual exercises required of him. According to PTF, “we attend to the spiritual life of the candidate and how the candidate is committed to activities of the seminary. Is he committed to formation, is he open to it or is it just a question of being there.” Then he gave instances: “Take for example, somebody who does not attend Mass regularly, or he doesn’t go for prayers, with flimsy reasons. But he is always asking for permission to do this and that outside the seminary.” For him, such a candidate should not remain in the seminary. But to give the candidate benefit of the doubt, he continued: “we would have to look deep down to find out the cause for the frequent *exeat* and for not showing up for spiritual exercises.” At the end, it may be concluded that he is not quite

open to the formation. To help him further, if that was the conclusion, PTF added: “He would have to go and square his problem with his spiritual director. It might be a big help for him to discover whether the person has the vocation.” if he improved the candidate would remain in the seminary, otherwise he would have to “seek his career elsewhere.” CDS expresses a similar view over a spiritual and moral issue he said was never thought of in the past “like having a kleptomaniac in the seminary was something unheard-of; or someone who is simply incorrigible, after many attempts to correct him. That’s a clear sign that his vocation lies elsewhere. And there are other acts that says a person is not called.” For him these are disqualifying factors.

For PR2, in the process of vocation discernment in spiritual matters is very important: “If we observe that it is difficult for a seminarian to take interest in spiritual exercises: Masses are daily every morning. If a seminarian continually absents himself from Mass, from other spiritual exercises, it is an indication for us that the seminarian is not suitable for this way of life. And morally: if a seminarian’s character contradicts priestly character then it is not going to be conveniently possible for the candidate to be allowed to continue to the priesthood.” On the part of CDM, not only should the candidate’s attendance to spiritual exercises be monitored and scrutinized, but also how actively he participates in them and if he voluntarily undertakes some personal spiritual exercises. Because it is not sufficient nor is it appreciated for a candidate to attend Mass or any spiritual exercise and just sit there passively, absent minded. According to CDM: “Under spiritual formation note is taken of how the seminarian prays; how often he goes for discussion with his spiritual advisor; how he carries out his everyday spirituality; his connection to personal spirituality and the church leveled spirituality, and how actively

he participates at Mass and appreciates spiritual exercises.” For CSS, discernment of spiritual and moral fitness demands good moral and spiritual character. According him:

One basic aspect of how to discern the call to the priesthood is the seminarian’s character. A seminarian has to be one who does things that should be positively emulated. And the seminarian has to be a man of spirituality because whether he likes it or not, as a priest, a lot of persons, will look up to him as somebody who should guide them in spiritual matters. So he has to develop that high sense of spirituality. He does this not only as a participant in the community prayer but also by his private devotion.

Similarly, CDU stated that spiritual fitness means “you must be good spiritually because when you say that you want to be a priest of God, the Supreme Spiritual Being, you need to have good spiritual connection with God so that you can easily teach the people of God.” It is through spiritual connection with God, prayer, that God’s assistance is sought and obtained. In this vein CDE held the view that prayer for God’s intervention and influence in vocation discernment is vital so that the discerners would not judge by outward manifestation or physical appearance of a candidate. For him, “It is not always good to say this person is qualified to be a priest by mere sight. Or by looking at somebody you just conclude that tomorrow this person will be a priest and the other person will not, and you nip his vocation in the bud. It is always good to continue directing the person until he realizes he does not have the vocation.” For instance, PTF believes that one of the ways to help a candidate who continues to be absent from spiritual exercises is to send him to his spiritual director. He should not be expelled immediately because he may be changed.

However, these views do not rule out some cases of reckless breach of the rules and regulations of the seminary. There are breaches that usually attract immediate expulsion from the seminary. PR1 gave some instances: “when others say, this seminarian steals and it is confirmed that he stole, he is sent home – dismissed from the seminary. Or during examination, a seminarian copies and there is evident that he copied, he leaves the seminary from there.” These are moral ills that cannot be tolerated in the seminary. For the formators, this is evidence that the candidate has no vocation for the priesthood.

iii) Social and Health Fitness

Social and health fitness as presented here from the perspectives of the participants considers the capability of the candidate as a human person. This concerns his health and social ability to carry out the priestly ministry. It includes how he relates and interacts with his fellow seminarians and the people of God in general. It is believed that when a seminarian develops good interpersonal relationships with his fellow candidates, he would likely have the good social relationship he requires for ministry. This aspect of formation is taken seriously by the seminary during assessments and evaluations. According to CDM, at the scrutiny, it would be noted if a seminarian: “is a person who flares up at a very slight mistake, gets angry easily, or he can’t relate well with people, keeps to himself and a little thing discourages him. Is he someone who would stay here and his flock stays over there which is not good for a pastor? So, the seminary will try to know and note how closely he associates with others. It will help him in his ministry to be open to people.” In the same light, CSS states: “A seminarian must have this spirit of communal life; if he doesn’t have that spirit, then I don’t think he will

function very well as a priest.” To support his view CSS narrates a dialogue he had with someone:

Somebody was saying that if he was to be made a bishop, all those who become priests under him should be extroverts and not introverts. When I asked him why, he said one reason is that the extrovert goes out to meet people, he goes out to mingle with the people from there he will know their problems and probably also know how to settle their problems. But if one is an introvert as a priest, he will go back to his room shortly after the Mass and people will be out there looking for him for some pastoral need.

Additionally, he states: “Because I believe the priesthood is a call to service, we just have to be there for the people whenever they want us because problem may come up even at the middle of the night. Somebody may come for sick call at that late hour, the priest should have that self-emptying to attend to that person first before he thinks of himself.” For CSS, good social interaction is related to active pastoral services.

According to PR1, during scrutiny, social behavior remarks on a seminarian are noted for future reference because they also rely on verified information from others as additional materials for discernment. In his words of PR1: “The seminary also checks and notes what others say or have written about him, such as: this candidate is humble, he likes voluntary work, he is corrigible and all that. We note down all these things because we write report to the bishops every year about each candidate.” On the other hand, the report may be negative. According to PR1, it may read:

This seminarian is very stubborn, he insulted the auxiliary or the labor master or he is disobedient or he has disobeyed publicly or he is often outside the seminary

with or without permission. Or he was given permission to travel and come back the next day but he prolonged it for two or three days. When seminarians were supposed to come back to the seminary, he would not come back that day, he comes back when he likes. Is that the spirit of a candidate who is going to be a priest?

At that, PR1 continued: “We look at him and say: this place is not for him. If his misdeeds are so glaring, we recommend to his bishop to please withdraw him. Otherwise, we may vote to give him one year to go and rethink whether he wants to be in the seminary as a warning.” For PR1, those negative social misbehaviors, no matter how little they may appear, are traits of worse things to come. He narrates the case of his former class mate whose negative trait was overlooked but is now regretted by all. According to him, there was “my classmate who used to perform some magic in the seminary but they said it does not matter and was given little or no attention. But now he claims superiority over the church authorities. He has ordained himself a bishop of HG and even ordained some priests and has his own diocese.” Further PR1 states:

There are certain things seminarians do and they say o’ he is only a jester, they don’t observe it clearly to see that this is a negative trait until one day he does something strange. So those little things seminarians do as jokes say something about the candidate concerned. That’s why for me, when I see this candidate that is stubborn, and he has manifested his stubbornness in many ways, it is better tell him to leave the seminary because the time may come when he will exhibit his stubbornness and scare people away. I believe that a lot of negative things people do later were there latently but nobody noticed it that is why when seminarians

begin to complain negatively about a candidate I feel he better leaves the seminary.

According to him, “People cover it, some pretend about it but someone who has that spirit of vocation discernment would know that negative trait can rock the church, can destroy the priesthood in the future and should be addressed.” For him, to address the issues should not be less than telling those “who have those negative traits and are not corrigible to leave the seminary so that they don’t corrupt others.” According to him (PR1), “the whole work of the discernment expects that a formator should be able to know those who have come with the right intention and then help them. While those who didn’t come with the right intention are made to see the reason to leave.” This points to the role of adequate vocation discernment does. It lets candidates see the reason to continue or withdraw from the seminary.

On his part, CDS describes issues he designates as “dangerous patterns of behavior that have come into the church now that were not there when these rules were formulated and so were not give accent in the rules.” And that according to him is “we have now the issues of homosexuality,” which for him “is anomaly that should not be tolerated in the seminaries at all. So if one has these tendencies, one should be advised to choose a different vocation.” PRF held the same view when he said: “somebody who has poor orientation of sex, man to man – homosexual orientation has to be told: you cannot make it to the priesthood. That will be one of the reasons for expelling somebody. Likewise in other things like lineage hereditary sickness or disease, like mental problem.” The respondents held that the homosexuals should not be allowed into the priesthood as

the church teaches. They did not suggest that such people should be ostracized or debarred from every social interaction because they too are children of God.

iv) Pastoral Fitness

Pastoral fitness in this subheading addresses the practical application of the knowledge of theology, liturgy, and pastoral services the candidate has acquired from his formation. Jesus said that a well-trained disciple will be like his master (Lk 6:40). In pastoral fitness as a discernment process, the candidate demonstrates practical imitation of Christ in prayer life, preaching the good news, teaching the word, visiting the sick, taking care of the Lord's poor, and general ministering to the people of God with emphasis on his interest in and at the service of the Eucharist. It is like acting preemptively on mandate of the Church that is heard at every deaconate ordination: "Believe what you read; teach what you believe; practice what you teach." The seminary allows a seminarian an ample opportunity each year, during a seven week period of apostolic work, to demonstrate his ability to take on the pastoral ministry in the matters listed above. The result of his performance and the life he led during the period is used in the discernment of his vocation. The report of good performance may be discerned as real vocation.

Most of the respondents view the apostolic work period as a good opportunity given to those who are not members of the formation team, to function as formators and discerners of the vocation of the seminarians. As a result, the report of the work is seriously considered in the discernment process. In preparation for the apostolic work, the seminarians, especially the first timers, may be instructed, according to PRF:

To master the catechism because they are going to teach catechism: you will lead the people and become the catechist if the catechist is not around. You are the lay reader, the lector, you are to prepare the Altar servers, you have to teach them the right thing, what we do here; even songs. Now you are an evangelizer and they will not call you by name anymore, they will call you ‘brother.’ If you do well, they will say this brother who was sent to us this year is wonderful. He does that and that. But if you go there and you can’t lead them in prayers, what kind of priest are you going to be?

In this, the ability of the seminarian to lead, teach, and serve among the people of God is put to the test during the apostolic work.

At the place of apostolic work, they would meet and work with different people. Those coworkers and other observers in the ministry of the Lord would also serve as agents of discernment for the seminarian’s pastoral fitness through their reports.

According to PRVD:

When they go on apostolic work, those people they work with are also instruments of God for discerning their vocation. So you can also say they are, by extension, formators of the candidates. So to the question of how we determine which vocation is genuine: we try to pray: asking the Holy Spirit to help us know which ones that have been called. And then we try to use some of the social, psychological tools to determine the type of persons we are dealing with. Also, we rely on the testimony of the places they went for apostolic work: the catechist, the parish priest and of course their parents.

The inclusion of parents is understood because according to PRF, “Some parents are very honest about the vocation of their son.” He relates the story of an honest teacher who wrote against her son: “He doesn’t look like he will become a priest and that is all I have been praying for. In short, I don’t recommend him.” Continuing PRF said “I read the report, called the seminarian and said to him, can you defend yourself. He said no, I expelled him after the required investigation.” This is indicative of the fact that some parents assist to discern the vocation of their candidates.

For CDM, during the scrutiny, to ascertain how well the seminarian performed at his apostolic work, the seminary will probably inquire from the pastor:

how did you see the seminarian: does he come to church, does he come early to activities or does he always come late because the priest is expect to be someone who always come early to every activity; does he teach what the church teaches or does he teach his own doctrine and dogma, what he thinks. So, when they get all those information positively, they know that this person has really done his part; it therefore belongs to them to credit them to him.

The rectors would also synthesize and send to the bishops, on behalf of the formators, the report of their annual screening of each candidate. This report contains the seminarian’s pastoral fitness and a comprehensive account of his scrutinized activities for the year. The report concerns his fitness in the different areas of his formation. In the words of PR1: “every year these reports are written for each individual and sent to his bishop and his bishop during the few days’ reunion with his seminarians may generally address some of the issues raised in the report. But during a private consultation, the bishop then reads to each seminarian his own report and that is the time he can tell the seminarian to go on

with his formation or you are no more going to continue in the seminary.” The annual apostolic work period is a duration so much anticipated and enjoyed by most seminarians for the freedom and the joy of exercising one’s ministry among very appreciative and generous people of God. But the reunion with the bishop at the end of the work is often tense for most seminarians. There are reports of unknown content waiting for each candidate on the bishop’s desk for his private consultation. As stated above, it is at that time that the bishop tells a candidate to continue, repeat the apostolic work, go on probation, or to withdraw from the seminary formation. Sometimes, a brief explanation for the action would be given or the bishop may decide to keep silent.

d) Voices at Vocation Discernment

The section responds to the question of who should be involved or be heard in the process of vocation discernment. But from the responses of the participants, those who should be involved are categorized under the following subheadings: i) Rules and regulations ii) Head Functionaries’ and apostolic work reports iii) Formators’ screening result, and iv) Personal and Parental discernment.

i) Rules and Regulations

In the seminaries great emphasis is laid on rules and regulations. They are important in the formation and discernment of vocation. Everything the candidates do or say ought to have a place in that guiding principles: rules and regulations. They are often cited by both formators and candidates to claim that a particular incident was or was not in line with the guiding principles. They are key voice and major point of reference in the process of vocation discernment. PTF expresses their importance in this form: “Naturally, every seminarian, every candidate in the seminary must not be a priest and so we help to

discern who has vocation. We have the rules and regulations for that.” For CDS, it is “We have seminary rules and regulations and then things that are stipulated with outright penalties: some of them are either expulsion, some of them different penalties that are spelt out for breaching of the different rules we have.” PRF referred to the rules and regulations as code of conduct. And for him: there is a code there and you must follow the code otherwise you are not called, you don’t belong.” He also said: “We try to instill the codes of conduct in the seminarians from the beginning; if you go contrary to them consistently you are dismissed.” Thus, they serve as discernment tools that the candidate was not called to the priesthood. According to him, it is not only the seminary that has code of conduct: there is the “Lawyers’ Guide” for the lawyers. There is something you do and they say this is unprofessional, likewise the doctors have their code of conduct, and somebody may lose his license for acting unprofessionally.” So if a seminarian breaks the law, the regulation, the way of acting: if he does not get up on time to attend morning Mass, if he absents himself from common exercises, if he is stubborn and has negative trait, “then we don’t need the Holy Spirit to come down and perch on him before we decide that this guy is not for this place therefore he should leave,” said PRF. When everything is thus concluded, then the letter will go out to his bishop: “this seminarian does this good and that good, but there are some negative traits we noticed in him: this and that. So, the formators have voted to withdraw him and the bishop usually withdraws such candidate,” according to PR1. The rules and regulations are not written with any particular candidate in mind. Therefore, the candidate who finds it a lot of inconvenient to observe the rules and regulations may have to reconsider his presence in the seminary.

ii) Head Functionaries’ and Apostolic work Reports

The seminaries in the southeastern region have various functions the seminarians perform each day. Each function has a head-functionary who sees to it that each seminarian does his function on regular basis. The head-functionaries report to the priests who oversee their functions. Before each head functionary leaves his post at the end of a semester or two, he may have written reports that would be used during the screening exercise. For this, when PR1 was asked about the process of vocation discernment he responded: “First of all, we have head functionaries.” He mentions a few of them: “we have auxiliaries, we have labor masters, we have choirmasters, we have class prefects, we have housemasters, hostel masers.” And he went on to express their importance and some of their functions: “These functionaries observe what we can’t observe as priests and formators. House masters will check whether a candidate is in the seminary or not; if he went out of the compound, whether he has come back or not. In the chapel he has his own seat with his name written on it. If it is empty, he is not there and will be asked: where were you. He would be excused if he had provable and excusable reason.” Continuing he says: “Then we have the infirmarian. If a candidate is sickly, the infirmarian can say that he is sickly. The labor master is in charge of manual labor and makes a record of each candidate’s attitude to manual labor: does the candidate always come out for labor or is he a lazy someone who cannot work. Can such a lazy candidate make it to the priesthood?” He goes on to say:

There may be cases where a seminarian does not do his function, does not comport himself in the class room, he is always talking when he should be silent. Each of the head functionaries writes report on each candidate under him and when we are having the screening, we read the reports on each candidate. In the

reports, the auxiliary will say something about each candidate, likewise the housemaster, the labor master and even the administrative dean has his own report on individuals.

The formators would take note of the information on each person, discerning the type of person he is and the type of priest he may become if allowed to the priesthood. The setup is that every minute of the day and at every activity in the seminary, someone is looking out for the seminarians. The information the head functionaries submit to the formators are taken seriously. They assist the formators in the formation and discernment process. This is especially true in their screening exercise. The head functionaries also serve, unofficially, as the advocates of the seminarian. In the event of some unintended occurrence. The rector, or any of the formators can call and question the head functionary in charge of that specific area. The head functionary, who may have found the details would relate the facts. At the same time he may defend the candidate to save him from any trouble unless of course the case is indefensible.

Seminarians spend seven weeks demonstrating their worth as future priests during the annual apostolic work. Some of them spend more than seven weeks by special agreement with parish priest of the place of work. The parish priest would stipulate for him the type of the ministry he wanted him to perform depending on the needs of the parish or the priest himself. Usually, there is always enough room for personal initiative. This tests the seminarian's intelligence, his ability to serve as a priest without the kind of seminary supervision. Most often the parish priest would send the candidate into the village to live and work with the people. That was always an opportunity for the people to evaluate him according to CDE:

Because during an apostolic work, he is left alone there in the village, the villagers also contribute to his formation and vocation discernment because at the end of every apostolic work, some of the parish priests concerned would ask their parishioners about how the seminarian lived in their various villages and how he intermingled and associated with people. Based on that he writes his apostolic work report. In that case, the priest of his place of apostolic work also contributes to discerning his vocation.

PTF expresses the same thought in a slightly different format about the seminarians on apostolic work:

When they go on apostolic work; at the end the parish priest writes a report about the seminarian. He would write the report from the point of view of the submissions made by the faithful where the seminarian worked. He would put everything together in the report such as: his spiritual life during the work, his personal relationship with others and so on and so forth. By this means, that is the report from apostolic work, the parish priests contributes in discerning the vocation of the seminarians sent to them.

According to PR1, the reports of priests do not always meet the mark. In his words:

“Often what the priests write is shallow or they write something just to please the seminarian. But some seasoned priests write very good reports that will help the seminarian to improve.” But it is not only the parish priest that can write the report, some of those who worked with the seminarian may for some reason want their voices to be heard and decide not to write through their parish priest but directly to the seminary or the bishop. And they are free to do that according to PRVD: “The people they work with

are also involved in the formation and discernment of the seminarians' vocation. Because these people after the apostolic work also write a report about how a seminarian performed during the period." Only one report of the leader is normally expected from the place of apostolic work. More than one report for the seminarian may serve as emphasis on the reports. Or they may counteract one another and thereby alert the authorities of some discrepancy that should not be overlooked.

iii) Formators' Screening

Many of the respondents express the view that discernment of vocation, popularly known in the seminaries as screening, is not an easy task. According to PRVD: "It is a very difficult issue even though it is our business here." For PR1: "we do screen and with the number of candidates it is a herculean task." And for CDS "it is a very, very difficult issue." And the reason for him was, "because only God knows the heart and only God knows who he wants." Trusting in the intervention of the Holy Spirit he went on to say, "we should not doubt the role of the Holy Spirit here as we leave it to the Holy Spirit to do the proper discernment...through human agents." However, as it is often with human endeavors, CDS stated further: "it is possible too that the human elements sometimes would come into the discernment of vocation. I think the seminary formators should be more open to the influence of the Holy Spirit in the discernment." But for PRVD, discernment of vocation is not solely the work of the formator. Rather, the formator is a helping hand as he states: "A formator is supposed to be able to help a candidate for the priesthood discern his vocation." He acknowledges that discernment is not easy task. He also states that it is the work of the Holy Spirit with the formators and others as the instruments. As he puts it: "Discerning a vocation means helping an individual to find out

God's will for him. It is a very difficult thing to do. But I think it is the work of the so called formators. I said so called because strictly speaking, we are not the formators, it is the Holy Spirit who forms all of us, we are just instruments. So it is our work and the work of God and the work of the candidate himself, his family and the people of God around." By this, he implies the need for collaboration in the formation and discernment of vocation.

Usually, the seminary authorities gather at least once a year for the screening that reviews and evaluates the progress reports of each seminarian. They also review the reports of the formators about the candidate. They equally read the reports from the head functionaries, from other candidates' personal reports or complaints, and any report that may have come from outside the seminary for or against any seminarian. Some seminaries devote an entire month to complete the process due to their number of candidates. According to PR2: "We gather and screen the students, we assess, we evaluate the students. Those we consider not competent enough, through serious prayers, we recommend to their bishops for redirection to other life styles that will be suitable for them. What we can do as seminary authorities is to make recommendations, only the bishops have the authority to withdraw and help these candidates to reorganize themselves. The evaluation is done by the entire formators." Under this process, the formators' decisions are final. Many seminarians devote themselves to prayer at the time so that they avoid mistakes because any mistake could be disastrous for the candidate. CDS expresses some of the tense feelings in these words: "I think the formators should be very careful there and allow the Holy Spirit to work in the final analysis. God himself

who calls knows ways of revealing to the formators those that have genuine vocations though we do completely deny the place of mistakes, human frailty taking its toll too.”

Many persons can lend their voices to the process of vocation discernment, with the result that many reports may accrue for a seminarian. One of the weightiest of the reports is the one from the seminary formators. This thought is expressed by CDE as follows:

“Everybody can contribute to vocation discernment, but the decision lies majorly on the rector, the vocation director and those placed in charge of the seminarian. That is why the report from the seminary is always stronger than the reports from any other place because people can act out of malice; out of bad will they may decide to terminate the seminarian’s vocation. But the report coming from the seminary is seen as very authentic.” CDE sees the reports as various people’s contribution to vocation discernment. But he feels that discernment is best done by persons who know the candidate very well. According to him:

Fellow seminarians also contribute to vocation discernment because the closest friend I am supposed to have as a seminarian is my fellow seminarian. And because we are in the same process, I disclose myself one hundred percent to him. In that case, it is the seminarian that knows me the best. In some seminaries, head functionaries: the class prefect, auxiliary, labor master and even refectory prefect contribute in discerning seminarians’ vocations because they write their various reports. Luckily, other seminarians do not. And so discerning the vocation of the seminarian is possible by everybody who must have had some interaction with him.

Seminarians who are not head functionaries do not write reports because they were not required to write and they are not prohibited to write as well. But each writer should be ready to defend it before the authorities.

At YFT seminary things are different because of a unique method of formation they adopt. The method is self-formation system. In the seminary, the formators base their formation and vocation discernment on the conscience and personal discernment of the candidates. As such, they have room for only one report. In the words of CDU:

When I was at MTS many head functionaries used to submit their reports on the seminarians. And then, these reports were forwarded to the vocation discernment panel and they will use it to judge the seminarians. But there at YFT nobody does that, you don't forward any report. The only report we submit was when we go on apostolic work. They would give us a printed form, a kind of list of questions. You just give it to the priest at the place of apostolic work. The form has captions and in sections. There is one on spirituality: how did the seminarian relate with women, his relationship with drinks and the rest of them. The priest will fill it up and you submit one to the diocese when you go for your reunion and then one to the seminary. This was the only report they use for discerning our vocations.

Using the self-formation system, the formators at YFT seminary allow the candidates sufficient room for in-depth personal reflections and discernment. In this method of formation, the formators prefer listening to the voice of conscience to the voice of people (reports).

Generally, the reports afforded people other than the formators the opportunity to contribute to the formation and discernment of the candidate's vocation. It is possible that

someone may decide to drop in negative reports but they are not taken at face value, but with verification. When reports correspond to what the formators thought about a particular candidate, they see it as the work of the Holy Spirit speaking through different persons at different places and time for a common purpose – discernment of vocation.

The next subheading presents the situations where parents attempt to discern the vocation of their children and where candidates face the need for personal discernment.

iv) Personal and Parental discernment

The importance of the role of parents in the formation and vocation discernment of their children are noted by some of the respondents. Normally parents in this region and in the country are very happy to have their children in the seminary to become priests. As a result, they offer them all the supports they can afford. CDM states a bit of the supports parents express to their seminarian son as follows:

The parents promote him, they say: we are praying you, and they provide him with what they could and often take him back to the seminary at the end of his holiday with them. When he was at home, they make sure he was in connection with their parish priest by asking him: have you attended Mass today. I saw our parish priest, he said he has not seen you, are you going to see him today or tomorrow. In these and other ways, the parents show the seminarian their interest and support.

Due to the encouragement, supports, and some objections they raise, it is believed that parents are essential figures in the formation and vocation discernment of their seminarian. From CDE's perspective, it is "because seminarians spend their life partly in the seminary, partly in their homes and partly in the parishes they do their apostolic work.

They behave differently in those other places. But when they are in their families, most of their real behaviors are manifested before their parents. From there, the parents would discern if their son will make a good priest.” Further he narrates an incident where a family objected to the ordination of their son because they preferred the good reputation of the priesthood and their family to the ordination of their son who was not living the priestly life he wanted to enter. In his words: “I have seen a situation where some parents objected to their children going into the priesthood because of what they have observed, the type of life they have seen the seminarian living. So, because of that they vehemently objected to the ordination of such a son.” CDM states similar incident in his seminary experience: “some parents reported their son to the seminary that he does not practice what the seminary teaches him when he comes back home. That sometimes, the group he follows and what he does do not depict what they thought a seminarian should do.” The seminary does not take such report from parents lightly. From PR1’s perspective, at the end of the investigation, he could be expelled from the seminary or sent on one year probation or given few weeks suspension or simply warned depending on the findings.

PRVD shares an encounter similar to the above regarding parents discernment of their children’s vocation:

Of course every parent will give hundred percent score to his child. But there has also been the case where it is the contrary. I was telling a parent that: your child is not doing well; I don’t know what you think about him. And then he, his father said that he is not surprised that he is not doing well because even at home he does not listen to them, his parents, he does not obey anybody. That it was their other child who left the seminary who was the one they thought will continue but

this one, they are not sure of him. Eventually, that seminarian was not promoted to the next stage. So that type honesty; if the parents are honest, they will tell you the truth about their son under formation.

On the other hand, there are parents who would not report or accept the report of their seminarian son's wrong-doing because they just want him to become a priest.

According to PR1: "When their seminarian is not behaving well, parents should confront him or tell the priest or the rector: this my son is doing this type of thing. But some parents nowadays are interested in becoming 'Father's parents;' they do not want to report their son because they know that if they report he may be expelled." CDU shares a similar thought: "The parent should first of all talk to the seminarian and if he does not improve, the parent should then report him to the seminary. But the problem is that some parents will just keep quiet and allow their child to reach the priesthood in order to be called 'Father's mother' or 'father' but they would write about another person's child who is in the seminary formation." However, for CDS, the family and good friends play almost the same role to assist or encourage the seminarian in his formation and discernment of his vocation. Both of them according to him, "could help the seminarian to avoid certain patterns of behavior that are not compatible with his chosen vocation. In that sense they help him to dispel all distractions so that he can be more focused to discern properly if that is actually his vocation or not. Because with distractions from the world, we could lose sight of our vocation and think that we do not have vocation to the priesthood. On the part of the family precisely, CDS continues, they "would be there to give him, not only moral or spiritual support, but also financial support and psychological support. Sometimes seminarians fall into vocation crisis and need the family to be there

for them to help them understand that it is a normal thing for somebody to really consider what he is giving his life to, and so encourage the person: give pieces of advice and give all the kind of support that is possible.” This is very important because according to CDM: “So many seminarians leave the seminary because of their friends and peers. It happens mainly during the short holidays when they meet with those so called friends and saw the progress they have made in their jobs and listened to their girlfriend and boyfriend stories and how much luxury and freedom they enjoy.” Continuing he reasoned: “The seminarian who has not made a firm discernment may lose his vocation with such insinuations. That is why the seminarian has to pray daily and be convinced in his resolve.” Whenever he was out of the seminary compound, the seminarian was no more shielded from the world, friend and peers. That would be the time to show himself a seminarian to those people and the world. It would be the time for him to fight for the life he had chosen to live if he was convinced of that. It would be time for him to practice some personal discernment about what he wanted to do with his life because it is he and not any of his parents, siblings or peers that is being formed to become a priest.

CDS presents knowledge of similar instance. According to him, there were “situations where seminarians went home and their friends came just to dissuade them from continuing their seminary formation with discouraging words: you are in the seminary with all that your intelligence, you are not ugly and it all means you will never get married and have your own children; that will be wasting away.” A weak and undecided seminarian may fall prey to that. But it is about his life, it is his right to choose who to live it. This is contrary to what CDE said and should be expected from real friends: “When the seminarian goes home on vacation, some of his friends, his own

parishioners, those he grew up with and the parish priest contribute to his vocation discernment.” The implication is that the seminarian, who has really discerned that he is called for the priesthood, should seek friends among those who support and encourage his vocation. However it does not mean that every candidate for the priesthood will succeed. And so PR2 states: “a candidate can decide to leave the formation at any time if he has so discerned.” Just as it was the case at YFT seminary where there was no expulsion rather each candidate, after free in-depth personal discernment would leave or continue in the formation (CDU). For CSS, when parents and others give all the support they can afford for these candidates:

They strive very well to serve God because of the encouragement given to them either by their parents or their siblings, their friends or the catholic faithful. They feel so encouraged and you see some of them striving to become priests. At the end you see in a parish the ordination of up to three or four priests at the same time. It is the parental and other encouragements they received that really made them to forge ahead, going further to becoming priests.

Speaking on the continuity of vocation discernment, CSS stated: since discernment is an ongoing process: “My bishop always tells us that answering God’s call or to discern your vocation is not complete until the day you are being ordained. That is, when the candidate hears those words of testimony: at the ‘presentation:’ after due consultation with those concerned with his education and training, I testify that he has been found worthy. Followed by the bishop’s acceptance.” Even after the candidate “has been found worthy” but the bishop refused to accept the testimony for whatever reason, the candidate would

not be ordained, rather the discernment would enter another phase or the formation is terminated entirely.

It should be noted that the call and response to vocation are not always easy for every family in the region. There is a silent minority that would want their child to aspire for the priesthood but family issues made it really difficult for them. PR1 presents it as crisis in vocation. He says, “There are so many crisis moments for some people in their attempts to become priests. It could come from the family: you are the first born, why you are doing that, why are you going to be a priest.” PRF states the same issue in these words: “There were some who were influenced by family background to leave the seminary.” And the reasons were: “That he is the first son: I will carry all the family burden. I don’t see how I will be a priest and fulfill all the obligations as the first son. And this first son must get married. And he has to take over from his father. He finds all these very difficult.” Difficult indeed and the reasons are numerous.

In various cultures of the traditional southeastern region, it is difficult for the first son to become a priest. It is even more difficult, near impossible, for an only son to become a priest. The first son is the next to the father of the family. He will replace his father as the head of the family. He will be the custodian of the family goods, properties, and titles. He will continue the family tradition. This birth right is never ever contested in any form or pretext as long as the first son lives. To become a priest means giving up this right together with the family inheritance. The second son would have to assume the status of the first son. The case of an only son becoming a priest it would seem like he is dead. It could mean the end of his father’s family because there is no one to continue the lineage, the posterity. It is a heart breaking issue for the family. As PR1 puts it: “Only

parents who have faith will say to their first son: ok, go on; if it is the will of God let it be.” Only parents with extra ordinary faith would dare to accept the idea of Catholic priesthood for their only son.

This section presents the views of the participants on the various voices in the process of vocation discernment both in the seminaries and outside the seminaries. Its final analysis is that all those who can help, in any capacity, in vocation discernment are very much appreciated. The next section presents the changes the respondents feel should be made to ease the burdens on the formators, make things easier for the seminarians, and move the seminary formation forward with the priests of the millennium in mind.

e) Wind of Change

This section presents the changes some of the participants raised as issues for the good of the seminary and the seminarians in the light of the signs of the times. Some of the changes are in progress in some seminaries and there changes the seminaries are reluctant to make. The expected changes include formation and formator issues, Africanizing the seminaries, modern methods of forming priests, and some other social issues. The participants’ demand for change are presented under the following subheadings: i) Needed personnel for vocation discernment ii) Formation of priests in African milieu iii) Modern seminarian and Formation iv) Self-formation method v) JAMB as tool for Discernment and vi) Social interaction with women.

i) Needed Personnel for Vocation Discernment

Some of the respondents deem it necessary to have more personnel to facilitate adequate vocation discernment. The personnel specifically mentioned are formators, spiritual directors, and psychologists. Taking the case of the formators first; it would be

recalled that in Nigeria the formators are the lecturers, teachers, trainers, professors, or educators of the candidates for the ministry of the priesthood. They are usually priests and usually live with the candidates in the seminaries. They oversee the daily management, administration, and general wellbeing of the seminaries and seminarians. They also serve as supervisors of various aspects of the seminary life and growth activities. This is in addition to their difficult job of forming or helping to form young adults for the priesthood.

Some seminaries have other formators who are not resident in the seminaries. They only visit on their lecture days, teach, and leave the seminary. Thus, they are not part of the life after-class continuous formation of the seminarians. As a result, the seminarians usually refer to them as the visiting or external professors or lecturers and not so much as formators. But they are formators too, at least to the extent of forming the seminarians intellectually and morally in the class rooms.

The point at issue here is that some of the respondents express concerns over the inadequate number of formators for the seminaries. They express the need, not just for more formators, but for more qualified formators that would be commensurate with the ever increasing number of candidates undergoing priestly formation. According to PR2 we need “to have more clinical psychologists in houses of formation and spiritual directors to help stabilize these young men. We will also need to ask that we have more formators.” Then he made a distinction between formators and the other educators in these words: “The teachers here are not merely lecturers, they are also formators. There is a world of difference there, it is not enough to teach and go. We stay with these young men as they are growing up.” For this reason, he goes on to say: “The more available

well trained formators who have the good of the Church at heart, who have Christian values at heart, who are very, very ready to give their time and themselves for the formation of these future leaders of the Church of Christ, we have, the better.” On his part, PR1 expresses some disappointment that the requirement for seminary formators are not being fully realized. According to him: “It was written in the *Presbyterorum Ordinis* that priests who are being sent into the seminary to teach must be the best because through their life style, through their exemplary life they will help others to live the life. But unfortunately, some of what you see in the seminary are not wonderful.” For CDE the forming the future priests and discerning their vocation is not a job for any type of person including the newly ordained priests. Rather it is for:

Someone who must have had some experience, someone who must have been schooled into the knowledge of vocation discernment and who has studied about vocation discernment; somebody whose temperament or idiosyncrasies are not troubling, somebody whose behaviors tally with whatever he must have studied or the exposure the person must have had concerning vocation discernment and not any-how-person.

Further he added: “I cannot call someone who is newly ordained, who has not gained the experience to go about deciding people’s vocation but somebody who must have been exposed to it, who must have studied about it.” Formation and discernment of vocations are not easy tasks as some respondents have stated. To be a formator is not a “teach and go” matter but a personal commitment that only the seasoned really committed formators would do well. It is believed that when the number and caliber of formators described

above is made available to the seminaries, the difficulty associated with formation and discernment of vocation would at least be reduced.

Another set of important personnel in the formation process whose presence are needed by the participants were the spiritual directors. Spiritual directors are part of the formation team. They live in the seminaries with the seminarians like the other formators. They are available for spiritual directions for the candidates all the time. They can as well be called spiritual formators because of the special formation they provide for the seminarians. They are formators on the internal forum because of the confidentiality of the matters and form they work on. PRVD states their contribution to the formation and discernment of seminarians' vocations in these words: "We make sure that every seminarian has a spiritual director, the confessor even though these are the people of the internal forum but they can also direct and inform these candidates on the internal forum." The internal forum is centered on the spiritual and moral aspect of formation and discernment, the core of what makes a good priest. CDE narrates how good and comfortable it is to meet with the spiritual director under normal circumstances:

When we went to YFT seminary newly, there was that rapport between seminarians and the formators and between seminarians and domestic workers. Everybody saw everybody as brother or as sister. At that time spiritual direction was healthy and interesting, seminarians visited their spiritual directors freely disclosing themselves one hundred percent without hiding anything. Formators with good will, with love, fraternal care counseled seminarians, directing them, channeling them to the right direction. But when the first rector who started the self-formation method left the seminary, the second rector came in and everybody

shrunk because he did not follow the self-formation method. They started forcing us to go to spiritual directions but nobody had the interest any more. But when seminarians saw it was a kind of threat they decided to disguise themselves. They will go to the spiritual director and begin to say those minor things that don't make any meaning; it was a problem.

CDE, like other seminarians knows the importance of spiritual direction. A seminarian goes to spiritual direction to freely express, lay bare his spiritual life, to unburden his spiritual problems from the recesses of his soul to the spiritual director. Thereafter he receives the best spiritual advice or direction no one else but a spiritual director can give. This is a very vital aspect of the priestly formation. The consultation is not something to be hurried because a lot of seminarians are in queue to see the same spiritual director. For reasons best known to the authorities, the number of spiritual directors are always very few: one or two and rarely three priests for an entire seminary. Hence PR2's demands for more spiritual directors.

The spiritual directors are well known figures in the seminaries because they attend to all the seminarians. Sometimes they struggle to keep up with an overwhelming number of seminarians. In some seminaries, depending on the personality, the spiritual directors keep aloof of the rest of the formators and only interact with them when necessary. On the other hand, some of them, in some seminaries, in keeping with their priestly brotherhood, are in very close relationship with the rest of the formators. Sometimes, this evokes the attitude of mistrust on such spiritual directors on the part of the seminarians. And that may be a reason for the "shrunk" from spiritual direction as

CDE states. CDS implies mistrust at spiritual direction in his proposal for the employment of psychologists as an alternative.

The psychologists are the other important personnel the respondents demanded to have in the seminaries. The psychologists work on the external forum, but often they attempt to obtain some internal forum information from the candidates as required by their job or as their *modus operandi*. They are bound by some confidentiality, but not as much or in the same manner as the spiritual directors. Most of them are not priests and consequently, do not reside within the seminary compound unless in exceptional cases where there are special provision or accommodation.

Speaking about the need of the psychologists in the seminaries, CDS puts up this thought:

They should consider the employment of psychologist in houses of formation. I think it is very important. From my experience and my interactions, a seminarian will feel more comfortable talking to a psychologist than meeting a spiritual director who is a priest and a friend to the formators. So I think he will feel more comfortable talking to a psychologist, one who understands the patterns of human behavior.

CDS is scared that the spiritual director, who is in friendly relationship with the formators, may leak some confidential, internal forum matters to his formator friends. He also seems to confuse the role of a spiritual director and a psychologist in the process of formation and discernment of vocation. Both could provide counselling as CDS imagines but not from the same perspective. Each of them is unique in his or her area of service; they do not usually speak the same language. The spiritual director speaks a spiritual

language, while the psychologist speaks more of a social language. One cannot replace the other in the seminary setting. However, CDS's thought seems to suggest that some seminarians prefer spiritual directors who are not in very close relationship with the rest of the formators.

Due to the unavailability of the psychologist in his seminary, PRVD takes up the psychological job or part of it by himself. This is in his attempt to discern the vocation of the candidates in his seminary. This is how he explains himself: "I did not undergo any formal training in spirituality or in formation. I have Master's degree in counseling psychology. So I use a little bit of that but I rely more on the Holy Spirit, we try to pray: asking the Holy Spirit to help us know which one was called, ...and then we try to use some of the social psychological tools to determine the type of persons we are dealing with." The attempt to determine the type of person each seminarian is, according to PTF, is very important. It should not be one-time event in the major seminaries. For him, it should be done no less than three times before each candidate is ordained a priest. This is to ensure that they are psychologically sound all the way to ordained ministry. Accordingly he states: "Before ever they are promoted to diaconate, I feel they should go for another psychological test. This is apart from the ones they may have undergone earlier. Moreover, I believe the psychological test should be done before they are admitted to the senior seminary. And another one in the course of time; and then before they are promoted to deaconate ordination." He goes on stating: "It is good that they are examined again and again to find out whether they are still the same, whether there is a change or not in what they had before they entered the major seminary. I suggest that this

should be general in all the seminaries,” he concluded. This is necessary, according to CDE because:

There are some seminarians who did not have problem throughout their seminary formation yet when they become priests, the first problem they encounter locks them into serious mental stress and anxiety. So, the seminary authorities have to do something on our side so that from the seminary we will be psychologically balanced. When we are psychologically balanced, we will be spiritually balanced and every other aspect of us will be fine.

Newly ordained priests (and some older ones too) have not only had mental stress and anxiety, but real mental disturbances that may have been detected in the seminary if thorough mental and emotional evaluations were performed.

Discussing the importance of psychology, CDE explains: “Psychology controls every aspect of man; once he is psychologically malformed, every aspect is malformed because once the psyche is affected the entire person is affected – the psyche is the power house of a person.” He gave an instance of one of the problems that many seminarians had: “The problem of fidgeting before women or before a crowd: not standing on your feet when challenged by circumstances is as a result of malformation in the psyche.” Further, he added: “When we were in YFT seminary, we had a psychology professor. He was doing well in that he taught us a lot that will help us to balance our psyche.” Presumably, a priest with enlightened and balanced psyche would perform his duty undisturbed in that regard.

CDE also believes that the type of social formation they receive in the seminary is deficient. He refer to it as social malformation that affects the psyche as well. That was

the root of the psychological malformation he alluded to above. Contributing to the idea that psychology plays significant role to stabilize a candidate, PR1 spoke in relation to the expelled seminarians as follows: "...the church can help the candidates through the counselors but we don't normally have many of them here. ...the expelled seminarian can personally meet with counsellors to help him adjust." This was another allusion to the insufficiency of such experts in the seminaries that needed to be addressed.

The candidates were concerned that they were not getting the best out of their formation consequently in the discernment process due to the shortage of the above key personnel, which was not the fault of the seminary formators. The formators are equally concerned about the unavailability or insufficient number of well-trained formators and experts in the ministry. But they are helpless because it is not within their power to employ all the formators they need. The priests that meet the qualities of the needed formators and spiritual directors are not out there in the labor market looking for employment. Rather they are in the dioceses under their bishops who decide where to send them. On the other hand, the hiring of non-clergy men as experts in psychological issues seems to be even more difficult, complex, and delicate issue. The protocols ensure, not only the expertise and suitability of the persons, but also that they are the right persons. Economic factors may also play some role in the process. However, the candidates may not be aware or interested in the intricacies of it. Instead they are convinced it is possible for the church to employ the experts as required.

The situation indicates that the seminaries have managed with inadequate number of the required personnel and experts for the priestly formation for a long time and the results have not been the best. It is therefore high time the authorities meet up with the

requirements for the realization of adequate vocation discernment and formation. The next subheading under the wind of change dwells on the need to train the African priests for Africa, that is, in the African milieu.

ii) Formation of African Priests in the African Milieu

Some respondents are not very impressed that the church in Africa is still not completely Africanized together with her institutions like the seminary, especially+ in Nigeria. For them, as far as the “Africanization” of the church is concerned, the seminaries in the region are either resting on their oars or drifting back into the muddy water of Western colonial ways of doing things. CDE frowns at the attitude in these words: “life is lived forward and not backwards. We are rational beings because we tend to improve on the mistakes of our forefathers, but repeating the mistakes of the past continuously is both naivety and stupidity.” In his view, it seems the Nigeria church is still working with the “Council of Trent” in some respect. For CDS, in spite of the much talks and writings on “inculturation” in the Nigeria and African church: “It is unfortunate that even till today; priests in Nigeria are trained as if they are to work in the Western world.” For him: “the formation program should be made more African.” For instance, “The spirituality is strictly Irish spirituality. We could change that; we have African spirituality that is really congenial with our nature but sometimes we tend to abandon it as if it is inferior or as if it does not even exist, at times even deny it. But that spirituality helps seminarians to live their natural and spiritual life as well.” Thus, he concludes: “we can be truly Africans and truly seminarians. So I think inculturation should be emphasized, not just in the changing of vestment or the vessels we use for the celebration

of the Mass, but in the mentality of the seminarian and the whole formation program. It should reflect a true African identity.”

PTF expresses a similar view on the need to have seminaries that are African. According to him: “we are not yet completely African in the formation process.” For instance: “. . .the continuous wearing of the soutane. You know here we wear the soutane for lectures and everything.” And for a little change he proffers a solution:

I believe that we should equally develop another kind of dress that is African we can put on for lectures occasionally within the week. I don't know what happens in other seminaries. In a week, we can say, don't wear the soutane this time, put on something else. Then it will make the students to feel freer and to be more relaxed instead of being in the soutane always. . . .because of own weather here, how hot it is.

For PR2, some of the criticism of not being as African as possible in the seminary and some of the suggestions are being heeded to and some progress has been made.

According to him:

On the area of studies, the critique is if we pay attention to what is coming from Rome, they say we are more European. We've tried to indigenize, inculturate some of our activities. We pay attention to our environment, our traditions to know how we can appropriate some of the traditional values that we find very relevant to our maturity as Christians. So, we are not losing the fact of our environment. In philosophy program, we have much on African philosophy and in the department of theology; we have African-Christian theology just to take care

of our own basic values. We are interested in seeing who Christ is from our own point of view. Not who the Europeans say he is but who he is for us.

On his part, CDU is more cautious about the Africanization and inculturation issues in the local church. According to him: “It is good to make the church African: singing and reading the gospel in vernacular in the church is making the church African. But there are things we cannot inculturate so as not to degrade the value of the whole thing.” He equally cites some instances of the type of inculturation his seminary enjoys: “In my seminary, sometimes during the offertory, those in the cultural dance group beat their drums and play their flutes and those carrying the offertory gifts will be dancing to the altar. So, it is a way of inculturation. Also, there, we use wooden altar, wooden lectern, and wooden tabernacle. This is part of bringing everything down to our culture.”

The above are some of the areas for change, for improvement and some improved parts in the attempt to make African seminaries really African. But the heart of the inculturation in the seminary, according to CDS, does not completely lay on the changing of the materials in the church but more in changing “the mentality of the seminarian and the whole formation program.” The next subheading presents the views of the respondents on the formation of the modern seminarian.

iii) Modern Seminarian and Formation

Vatican II Council speaks of the formation of the future priests in the light of the signs of the times or according to the circumstances of the times and place. The goal is to be meaningful to the people of the place and time (The Catholic Church 1996, 365f). In keeping with that, *The Church and Internet* (Foley and Pastore 2002), a document of the “Pontifical Council for Social Communications,” teaches that the candidates for the

priesthood should be trained to have good knowledge of the modern media of social communication, including the Internet (2002, n. 7). This will enable the new priests “to communicate effectively” particularly with the young ones (n. 5). Similarly, some respondents hold the view that future priests should be formed in the modern way with modern means and technology while some believe that there should be some restrictions on the modern material the seminarians should be allowed to use during formation.

According to PRVD, “Everything we do here, we talk about the circumstances of our time, the signs of our time and always talk about forming seminarians according to the circumstances of their time. I usually tell them about the age gap between me and them.” PRVD did not mention the age, but he acknowledged that “the age gap is so wide that every day I remind myself that I cannot help form these seminarians the same way I was formed; that will be going back as it were. You have to be formed according to the circumstances of the time and the age you live in. Things have changed and will continue to change.” PR1 expressed similar view as he shared the following experience:

People were saying this generation of seminarians are more knowledgeable than us. So, we are leading people who are more knowledgeable than us. They just make fool of us. We don't have computer, we don't know how to use computer. But they can just browse through the internet and do many things which we don't know how to. We will be talking to them and they will be looking at us, laughing at what we are saying and our ignorance will be clear to them. The more they play along with us, the more they make fool of us. So the signs of the times is that we have to be updated, so as to be on the same level with them.

Further, PR1 recalls having said in one of his remarks to his seminarians: “you are being trained to be disciplined and gentle people and if you are able to assent to that, you can fit in anywhere in the world.” But for CDS: “If we are being trained for the modern world, I don’t see why in some seminaries some gadgets like personal computers are still not allowed. And I think in almost all the seminaries cell phones are not allowed in the modern world like this. I would strongly suggest that seminarians be allowed to use these things and learn to use them responsibly. They should be part of the formation program.” But PR1 does not approve of the use of the cell phones in the seminary. It will ruin the rule of maximum silence. According to him, “a candidate has his cell phone and said he is keeping *magna silencia* what does that mean when the phone company has given them all night for browsing and phone call for free.” However, he clarified that he did not make the rule that banned the use of the cell phones in the seminaries. It was the bishops that made the rule. That means he is only implementing the rule. In his words:

The bishops said seminarians should not use cell phones in the seminary. They can have it but they should not use it in the seminary because of the distraction... and also the noise it can create because some candidates don’t know how to use it. If allowed, they can use it in the church and use it anywhere. Simple instructions like that are taken into account. So, if any of them is caught using the cell phone, home he goes – he is expelled from the seminary. It may not be a serious matter but a test of obedience is called for. Even as it is true that they are modern persons but the bishops said they should not use it in the seminary and so if a candidate is caught using it, he is sent to his bishop and the bishop says: leave; and his vocation is over.

CDE affirmed the rule as stated by PR1 thus: “Presently, if you are caught using the cell phone in the seminary, you are expelled.” According to him, with that rule: “Seminarians are restricted from exposure and modern development, they are restricted from learning or understanding the ethics of cell phone prior to becoming priests.” CDS feels that knowledge of: “Responsible use of these accessories is very important because we will use them as priests.” For him, the view of the authorities that “they are trying to cut away certain kind of distraction may be good intention but it does not really help us.” He feels: “It is unfortunate that there are seminarians, even deacons who do not know how to use the phone properly. And we are being trained for international standards.” He then questioned: “What if immediately after ordination such a new priest is sent overseas for studies. You will then have a priest who, after all these years of training, does not know how to use these basic things. They are important; responsible use of them should be emphasized.” And then he gave instances of responsible use: “it should not be taken to class and should not be taken to the chapel whatsoever,” he concluded.

Based on his view that the restriction leads to lack of good, ethical knowledge and appropriate use of the cell phone, CDE stated that there have been some reports of newly ordained priests who embarrassed themselves and others because they attempted to answer the phone during Mass. For him that was “an aberration; an abuse and it was because the priests were restricted *ab initio* from knowing the ethics of using the phone.” He also added: “Presently we do not watch televisions in the seminaries. They said it is a distraction.” He argued that: “seminarians should be exposed to the use those things so that when they are ordained, they would not see them as their second nature, or as an opportunity to make up for calls they did not make or the TV shows they did not watch in

the seminary.” On his part, CDU supports the idea of banning the cell phone in the seminaries for the reasons the formators put forward. He stated as follows:

Over there at YFT seminary, we use our computers but we don't use our cell phones. They said that the rule there is that no one should use the cell phone. The reason for them is that the cell phone is a distraction, that it does not allow us to concentrate on the activities in the seminary because for them you will have divided attention: listening to the seminary and at the same time talking to the world. It is like being in the seminary and outside the seminary at the same time. But there is reason in what they are saying because people will be calling you. You may be there in the chapel praying but your mind is on the cell phone, and after the prayer you rush to your room to see if you have any missed call and if you have no missed call, you may try to make a call yourself. The fact is that to use the cell phone is good but it cannot be denied that it causes distraction as the formators are saying.

While he supports the ban on cell phones, CDU feels that the banning of computers is not in the best interest of the seminarians. In his words: “There at YFT seminary, we use our computer but I heard that at MTS the seminarians are not allowed to use the computer. It is wrong; they should be allowed to use it.” For him, the rule should be reversed to allow seminarians use the computer because: “This is computer age; many companies like the new bank over there has add computer literacy as one of their conditions for employment. Seminaries should equally allow and encourage their seminarians to use their computer in order to belong to this age.” But for PR1, both the computer and cell phone can perform the same function and should be banned altogether because “when you ban a candidate

from using the cell phone but he is using computer; what he loses with the cell phone, he gains with the computer” and so, of what use is it to ban one and not the other.

Unfortunately, in spite of the ban and the consequences, some seminarians still take the risk of using their cell phones in the seminaries, especially during the free call hours of the night. According to PR1, this was made clear to him when a girl asked him why they banned the use of cell phone in the seminary in this modern time and he responded:

“because it does not help discipline in the seminary.” The innocent girl who was ignorant of the gravity of the offense told him “she has a friend in the seminary and that they only talk by four o’clock in the morning,” PR1 recalled. At that he delivered the clear message:

I said to her, do you know that you are creating a problem for the boy, you are trying to expel him from the seminary. If you want him to become a priest, you should desist from that. First of all, it is not allowed and the time he was speaking with you was the time he was not allowed to talk in the seminary. You were speaking with a seminarian who was disobeying the law that banned the cell phone and also communicating with the outside world. If he is caught, he will be expelled that day.

In this light, it seems almost impossible to catch a seminarian making a call in his room by four o’clock in the morning and so for PR1: “The explosion of the communication system, communication technology almost makes nonsense of formation. We may think we are controlling these candidates but they are more powerful, they are more knowledgeable than us.” Furthermore he stated: “we will still insist on control, on discipline, on silence, and also reduction of noise. But we will need modern means to

face this modern time and candidates,” he concluded. While the above are important, there may be other modern materials the seminary may need for the formation of the future priests. The next subheading presents self-formation or auto-formation method of formation.

iv) Self-formation/Auto-formation System

Self-formation, generally known among the concerned seminarians as auto-formation, is a new system of formation of candidates for the ordained ministry. It was adopted at one of the new major seminaries in the southeastern region. It was intended to spread from there to other seminaries in the region but it did not last. As a result, only few of the participants expressed some views on the system as an alternative to the traditional method of formation because they are not very familiar with it. One of the few that experienced the self-formation system is CDE. According to him, “When we were admitted at YFT seminary, we were told that it was built with our present age in mind.” According CDE: Before the seminary was opened for studies, “All the initial formators had been sent to America to learn how to run self-formation seminary. When they came back, they were acting with one mind, one understanding, and with one approach. When something happens, first of all, they try to understand it from positive point of view, with the mind of helping the seminarian and not for expelling him.” Continuing, CDE said:

That was why nobody was expelled during the time. Those who left the seminary, left happily on their own. Even, there was one seminarian that had problem during his apostolic work, the formators intervened. They went to his bishop and told him not to expel him because of the report that came from the place he did his

apostolic work. They intervened and stuck to it and eventually the seminarian was returned to the seminary.

CDU, another participant who experienced the self-formation system made similar statement: “At YFT seminary where I passed through; all the years I was there no seminarian was expelled because we were running self-formation system where all the seminarians live their life freely. Those seminarians that left are those who decided from what they have learned, observed and reflected on about the seminary activities, life and program and then left on their own, nobody forced them.” In this light, CDE described the seminary as a place of freedom and the place where the reality of the priesthood is meant to sink into the candidates. In his words:

It is not a place where one is policed about. Nobody decides for you, you decide your own vocation for yourself. The formators will only be there guiding you, directing you, telling you what to do and what not to do. Then, when you make any mistake, they will call you and tell you the consequences or the implications of what you have done; then from there, you take your correction. This is subjecting you to the reality of what you are going to become, subjecting you to the full reality so that you will not be half-baked in any way so that you will not say this person did not inform me properly.

All these and more, from CDU’s perspective, are sufficient reasons to call for some changes to the traditional method of priestly formation in the region. According to him:

There should be many changes. We were running self-formation program and it was very, very good. In the first instance, the seminarians here have the freedom and chance to live as they should. There is nothing like ringing the bell regulating

the students as it was when I was at MTS seminary. Here each seminarian is given the daily program for the semester. For the daily program, you use your watch and regulate yourself. When it is time for prayer, you will be there on time; in the same way, time for study and every other activity. The essence of it was to impart into the seminarians the idea that when they become priests, they will be living on their own; they should form the habit of keeping to time and schedule for their private prayer in their chapel and celebrating Mass for the people. This system has been helping me and other seminarians who passed through that place. I benefitted a lot from the system. So, I am of the opinion that the seminaries in this part or all over the world should follow this system of self-formation.

Self-formation as presented so far involves freedom to do the right thing at the right time under the guidance of the formators.

The participant formators, from the traditional method of formation, are also of the view that the candidates should be guided to do the right thing. According to PR1, a primary role of the formators is to help the candidates “to configure themselves to Christ, so that they can be another Christ.” Similarly, PRVD stated: “A formator is supposed to be able to help a candidate for the priesthood discern his vocation.” But CDU expressed a different experience with the traditional method of formation as follows:

The type of formation they gave us was to intimidate us. They lecturers and formators used intimidating words when they were addressing the seminarians. There was so much emphasis on punishment instead of love. I am talking from experience. When I was at MTS seminary they normally intimidated us but there at YFT even if we make mistake, they conscientize us and tell us this thing is very

bad, we have passed the age of making this type of mistake; just try to live as you should and do what you should do, there was no intimidation.

CDE also expressed similar experience with the traditional formation. According to him, it is difficult to understand when: “a formator sees a seminarian as an enemy, as a rival, as a competitor. That is the worst thing that caused seminarians to be expelled unjustly and being thrown into confusion and destabilization.” Further, he stated:

When we went to YFT seminary newly, there was that rapport between seminarians and the formators and between seminarians and domestic workers. Everybody saw everybody as brother or as sister. At that time spiritual direction was healthy and interesting, seminarians visited their spiritual directors freely disclosing themselves one hundred percent without hiding anything. Formators with good will, with love, fraternal care counseled seminarians, directing them, channeling them to the right direction. But when the first rector who started the self-formation method left the seminary, the second rector came in and everybody shrunk because he did not follow the self-formation method. They started forcing us to go to spiritual directions but nobody had the interest any more. But when seminarians saw it was a kind of threat they decided to disguise themselves. They will go to the spiritual director and begin to say those minor things that don't make any meaning; it was a problem.

Furthermore CDE pointed out that one of protagonists who kicked against the self-formation system was happy when they ended the system. According to him:

He said it openly that he could not condone the way things were going: the formator coming very low to the level of seminarians as if everybody is equal. He

wanted it to be formator here, seminarians over there and before you could approach a formator you should virtually go on your knees from a distance. He said that seminarians were taking a lot of things for granted. How can you see your formator coming instead of running away, you pass by him and greeted him just ordinarily. So, that kind of structure still exists in some of the seminaries: the colonial method of master-slave relationship.

And as he observes: “In the environment of master-slave relationship, the idea of pretense, pleasing the master and hiding the real self is the order of the day.” Similarly CDU stated that in the presence of unfriendliness or “when you use such harsh words on seminarians, some may close up, just hide everything and be following the rules sheepishly. But when they enter the ministry, they bring out their true color.” For authentic vocation discernment, CDE suggested that the master-slave “mentality is supposed to be eradicated from the seminary structure and formation. While the idea of self-formation should be inculcated into the formators and seminarians. It is supposed to be brought into the seminary structure so that seminarians are allowed to develop themselves and be allowed to discern and decide for themselves on their vocation.” The candidates want a seminary where “seminarians would see and feel the formators as their fathers, as their friends, as those who are out to help them and not as those who are on the lookout for their faults and fall,” (CDE). CSS also expressed similar thought: “Taking into consideration the changes in our environment and also in the world, I feel one should be very free to discern his vocation,” because personal discernment is a value that cannot be overlooked.

CSS did not experience the self-formation system but he was impressed by what he observes among the religious congregations which resembles the self-formation system. In his words:

The way seminarians are being formed today is different from what happens in the religious communities of the congregations. They live together as brothers in communal life while in the seminary setting the seminarians are being forced to carrying out the activities in the seminary. I think as those who are called to the priesthood, they should be allowed their freedom and the formators should then discern who uses his freedom responsibly and from there they can judge who is called and who is not called to the priesthood.

For some of the formators, it depends on the type of freedom the seminarians are looking for. According PR1:

One of the things we were discussing was discipline. Some candidates want to do things their own way, they want absolute freedom. They want to go outside the seminary compound every day, every weekend. Some want go out on behalf of their “Association” or “Organization” or because Father sent him on some errand, etc. We try our best to control them. So, they have freedom but not absolute freedom. That is what they want.

For CDS, it is not the issue of absolute freedom because for him: “Formation is a process where people who are not perfect, who are not good are made good for the priesthood.” And so requires “directing, teaching, modeling, forming, telling the person, the reality, what ought to be the reality the person is going to face in priestly ministry” he added. The formators hold the same view; the difference may be the manner or method of approach.

Vatican II has the provision for each episcopal conference to design or customize the method of priestly formation that that is good for their culture and time (The Catholic Church 1996, 365f). As such, whatever method of formation a people chooses and are comfortable with, that is the method that they should apply. Though it is good to try something new sometimes for growth and renewal if required. The next subheading views JAMB exam as a discernment tool.

v) JAMB as Tool for Screening

Another change some of the participants point at concerns the entrance examination to local universities conducted by the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB). The seminary rules and regulations forbid seminarians from taking JAMB or any external exam that is not conducted or authorized by the seminary. PRVD introduces the story as follows: “When they finish their West African Examinations Council (WAEC) exams, and at any point during their formation, if a seminarian is caught taking the external JAMB examination for admission into the university, he is asked to discontinue from the seminary.” For CDU, “The reason for not allowing them to take the JAMB is so that they will all go for the priesthood.” And he added: “Blocking the seminarians from taking the JAMB is not all that good because there may be something within them that makes them want to go to the university. So if they allow them, those who want to go to the university will leave.” Similarly, PRVD argued that “seminarians should be allowed to take that JAMB examination. If a seminarian passes it and decides to leave, then it is an indication that he is not interested in the priesthood because somebody could be lying low here due to he could not get admission into the university and a few things have confirmed what I am saying.” According to him, “It has

been discovered that the seminarians once they get admission overseas, they leave the seminary. I have also discovered on two different occasions when seminarians took the JAMB and we did not know about it. As soon as their JAMB results came out and they did so well, they left the seminary.” That may mean that they are not called to the priesthood or they do not want to continue in the seminary.

Still on the topic and in favor of the JAMB idea CDU stated: “seminarians should be allowed to take JAMB and then decide whether to continue to the priestly or secular life. In the formation for the priesthood, there should be a certain stage when one should be free to say: I still want to continue to the priesthood or I am no more interested.” For him the JAMB is a nice opportunity for that and the seminary should be open to it. On this ground, PRVD has been “arguing with the bishops that seminarians should be allowed to take the JAMB. If they take JAMB exam and pass it and want to continue with us, then you know that they are more serious and those who are not serious will leave. In fact it is a way of helping us decide or determine who is serious.” For PR1, the idea is “to reduce the number of candidates and to know those who are really for the priesthood. This is because those who are not for the priesthood would take the JAMB and leave.” On his part, CDU believes that the experience of a seminarian in the seminary may contribute to his decision to opt out of the priestly formation. According to him, “the type of training the seminarian received before this JAMB stage plays important role in the decision. If you are training them with intimidation and all that, the initial zeal they had may have gone and they want to go to the university because they have not seen the reason they should go for this kind of life. But if they trained them with love, the seminarians may not think of JAMB even when they are given the opportunity.”

PRVD narrated the situation in his seminary thus: “This year, two of our seminarians have left because they got admission overseas. And you don’t know when they do these things because the internet is out there and they go on walk and holidays. There, they will be working on these things secretly and when it matures, that is when you will know; and they will come and tell you that they are leaving the seminary.” PR1 feels that the idea and demands to allow the seminarians take the JAMB exams are thoughts that need consideration of the authorities. In his words: “These are suggested measures but I don’t think they have started implementing them.” And referring to the church authorities, he stated: “why not allow them to take JAMB so that those who came back to the seminary, we know they are serious.” The authorities may have to consider lifting the ban and let the JAMB serve as one of the means of screening who stays or leaves the seminary, as PRVD suggests.

Another academic issue some of the participants raised for some change concerns the duration of the priestly formation and the level of academic qualification that goes with it. In southeast, it usually takes at least eight years to complete the formation to the ordained ministry. That is, four years of philosophy and four years of theology programs. Each offers a bachelor’s degree certificate. Some participants think that spending eight years in the seminary for a double bachelor’s degree is not the best academic achievement that can come out of the period. According to CDE: “when we were at YFT seminary, they suggested that before you graduate as a theologian you must have obtained your master’s at once so that you are graduating as master degree holders but many formators kicked against it... Such an idea is very, very good and would help the seminarians.” It will also help the church as it may reduce the number of priests desiring

to go for further studies shortly after their ordination. This issue is raised by one participant from YFT. Other participants made no comment about it hence not many views are expressed about it. It is revisited in the discussion chapter.

This subheading shows that it is not only prayer, reports from head-functionaries, apostolic works, parents, formators, etc. are tools for vocation discernment. Success in JAMB exam can also be part of it. It also covers the view to reformulate the academic program of the formation period to benefit the priests and Nigeria church better than it is currently. This is in terms of the academic qualification that goes with the period of priestly formation in the region. The next subheading presents the participants' views on the social interaction that should exist between the seminarian and the women folks as he prepares to work with them and for them in the priesthood.

vi) Social Interaction with Women

The seminaries in the region have unwritten rules that restricts or prohibits the seminarians from ordinary social interaction or association with the female folks. This idea has even entered the mindset of the locals that many of them attach a woman to most priestly aspiration that came to an end. In the words of CSS: "Take for instance, a seminarian leaves the seminary on his own; and people who know him as ex-seminarian say it was a girl that led to his departure or expulsion from the seminary. In a way they may be correct because of the formation we are given, but if this mentality could be changed it will do us a lot of good." According to some of the participants, the restriction and the mindset that have been created are not good for their human formation as future priests. Some termed it social malformation. For CDM: "Seminarian should be allowed to relate with women openly, freely without regulation." He argued: "You know, we have

sisters and we have brothers. And when you become a priest you work with men and women, mostly with women. So, seminarians should be allowed this open relationship with women to enable them relate well after ordination when there will be no such regulation.” From his YFT seminary background where self-formation was practiced, CDE states: “When we went to YFT seminary newly, there was that rapport between seminarians and the formators and between seminarians and domestic staff. Everybody saw everybody as brother or as sister and things were fine. But later when the rector was changed, everything changed.” Additionally, he states that:

Seminarians should be exposed to social interaction with women because the problem we are having today is that seminarians are malformed socially. In this regard, when you are in the seminary and they see you standing or talking with a woman, they immediately conclude negatively. They always emphasize man-woman, boy-girl relationship in a negative way without giving healthy suggestion, healthy enlightenment, healthy upbringing to help the seminarian balance his life because when he becomes a priest he will find himself in the midst of the Catholic Women Organization and the Mary League Girls’ Association.

CSS on his part, has personally experienced the above thought and refers to it as

“depraved” way of looking at male-female relationships. According to him:

I nearly got into trouble some time ago. I was standing with my female friend after Mass and a priest called me and questioned: who is that girl you were standing with? I told him: my girlfriend. And he is like: and you are bold enough to tell me she is your girlfriend. That was my very first year in the seminary and I said to him: Father I don’t understand what you are saying. He said how can I

have the audacity to tell him that that girl is my girlfriend. I didn't understand this. I told him but Father, she is a girl and we are friends, so she is my girlfriend. That was when I started seeing this depraved, one-sided mentality the formators and even people outside have about relationships.

Due to this manner of formation, seminarians find it easier and more comfortable to attend to or address men than women. CSS expressed it thus: "sometimes you are out there or on apostolic work and a lady comes to you with some problem and you don't know how to address the lady, you feel shy, you feel as if you are not competent to handle the problem but if a man comes to you that is no problem. This is because we are not used to talking or having discussion with them." For CDM, prohibitions often times breed curiosity, more inquisitiveness that may end up ruining what is being protected by the prohibition. According to him:

It is when you are banned from the open relationships with them that you think there is something there but when you have free and open relationship with them that you know them very well: ordinary humans like your relatives at home. You also know how they reason, how they think and what promotes their thoughts and how to respond or address them. But if you are shielded from them, you view them from a different perspective and often under sexuality. So, in order to promote the godly relationship that should exist between priests and parishioners, especially women, seminarians should be allowed and even encouraged to associate well with women while in training.

Many religious congregations have no problem with male-female cordial interactions because from the beginning they are trained to have open relation with the women folks:

to see them as members of their family, as mothers and sisters, or even as associates. In this light, CDE narrated another pertinent experience:

When we visited the DMR religious congregation house, they have their DMR family comprising lay men and women. These lay people come to their community and they eat with them in their refectory. Sometimes, they hold party, gala night: all of them dance together; all of them drink together responsibly. So that once you interact with these people in a healthy way, after a while, you will not have problem living with them even if it is in a room you can still be yourself but when you are being harassed even to the point of just looking at them seems like a mortal sin, there is problem, it is a terrible problem. So, socially, the formators should do something about it.

Addressing the formators also, CDM stresses that a bad relationship between any persons, men or women, can produce various bad results and not only when it is between seminarian and women. For this, the seminarian should always bear in mind what he is up to and avoid every relationship that does not fit his call. In his words:

Every seminarian who is worthy of the name should know the limit of his relationship with anybody, male or female. They should be taught or made to feel that there can be very cordial relationship or friendship between a man and a woman that has nothing to do with any romantic or sexual relationship. They should be made to see the female folks as mothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ and not as 'dangerous territory' or 'sin' to be avoided. Because the only danger the seminarian has in his formation is himself. His thoughts, deeds or omissions

will retain or expel him from the seminary and not his fellow human being like women.

He, CDM, then pointed out some likely problems that may result when a seminarian becomes a priest without learning or experiencing the godly cordial way of relating and associating with the female folks who are among those he is called to serve and work with. According to him: “If seminarians in this country do not know how to relate with women when they are seminarians, it is going to be difficult when they become priests; they may tend to discriminate against women in terms of job offer, become suspicious of women generally, become autocratic over them, would not want women at their rectory.” “But” he goes on to say, “These women are sincere, honest people who come to serve their God and not the priest; what they do are done for God because of the favor they want or have received from God like Mary Magdalene.” In the same light, CDE says: “When a priest is ordained there is no way he can be given a parish that is made up of only men. I believe, if at all, such parish will not grow because women have always played significant roles in the growth and development of the Church.” To neglect or discriminate against them is to neglect or discriminate against a significant part of the body of Christ where everyone is important.

On his part, CSS opines that freedom of social interaction would not only help the candidates but would also enable the formators to discern the genuineness of their vocations. As he put it: “We should be allowed to act in freedom so that our full personality would be seen and help the authorities to discern the vocations. We should be formed all round and not only one side – the men way or the men side.” Adding another voice, CDS, believes that living the social life of the people and with the people should

not constitute any problem as long as the seminarian is very much and ever aware of his mission and what is expected of him at every step. He cautions as follows:

The seminarian can be reasonably involved in every social activity that is not against the commandments of God and the teachings of the Church. The seminarian should not under the pretext of wanting to be like every other person go into smoking for instance or alcoholism, drug addiction, sexual promiscuity, and all sorts of bad things. The seminarian should be reasonably involved in the social life of the community whose life he shares and also be conscious of the fact that he is not like every other person. He is meant to be a model and so he should give good example even while being involved in those things.

CDM expresses some of these in his experience as follows:

A priest who studied in Italy visited our spiritual year house and lamented the Spartan or regimented way the seminarians were being formed. He suggested that the seminarians be released, be allowed a little space to exercise themselves a bit. The bishop said we are not yet matured for that; if they are given that chance they will abuse it.

For CDM, “This is mere speculation and unwarranted fear of abuse; you cannot have confidence in it until you give it a trial. To have any breakthrough; somebody has to begin it.” Furthermore, CDM narrates another similar experience:

I was surprised when I went to ABC for the ordination of a religious. That was my first time of seeing seminarians eating on the same table with priests. My friend there told me it is normal for them over there – priests and seminarians eat together on the same table. None of the seminarians abused any priest because

they were eating together. Instead of abuse, the seminarians respected the priests the more. The rector was there chatting with seminarians. That was my biggest surprise.

The religious priests live in rapport because they trust and appreciate each other as brothers. With that their fraternal relationship continues to grow.

The participants in this subheading, mainly the candidates, are (calling a change of attitude on the part of the formators with regard to how they perceive their relationship with women). They are calling for more formation on the area of affective maturity that will help the future priests to do their ministry efficiently and effectively to both men and women. The next heading reports on the issues of expulsion of seminarian from the seminary.

f) Termination of Formation

Formation for the priesthood is terminated when the seminarian withdraws or is expelled from the seminary. Personal withdrawal from the seminary is believed to be voluntary, but there are certain things that may be involved in the withdrawal to make less voluntary. For instance, when the seminary authorities advise a candidate to withdraw and when the candidate visualizes that he will be expelled and decides to withdraw earlier. On the other hand, expulsion gives an outright injunction to a candidate to leave the seminary, sometimes with specific date and time depending on how the expulsion emanates. The candidate who made a normal withdrawal of himself from the seminary is believed to have some alternative plans about his future career. On the other hand, because it often comes abruptly, the expelled candidate is embarrassed, confused, destabilized, and irate. Issues of termination of formation in this section are presented

under the following subheadings: i) the expelled seminarian and ii) ex-seminarian and adjustment issues.

i) The Expelled Seminarian

In one of his responses to the question of vocation discernment, PTF says:

“Naturally, every seminarian, every candidate in the seminary must not be a priest and so we help to discern who has vocation.” By this, he implies that some seminarians will withdraw from the seminary, some will be advised to withdraw, and some will be expelled while some will make it to the priesthood. There are many reasons for which a seminarian may be asked to leave the seminary. One of the reasons is disobedience. Issue of disobedience are taken seriously in the seminary hence these popular catchphrases among the seminarians: “obedience is the first law in heaven,” “obey before complain” and “obedience is better than sacrifice.” To avoid the problems of disobedience, PTF advises the seminarians: “If you want to become a priest, as long as you are in the formation house, continue to follow the program of here. Do everything accordingly, comply with instructions and you will not be harassed, you will not be forced to leave the seminary.” To the seminarians who have no intention of becoming priests, he also advises: “If you come into the formation house and you want to be formed, even if you are not going to be a priest, dispose yourself for formation, gain what it means to be in this place and then take it as you leave.” This is because it will be a wasted time and resource for a seminarian to leave the seminary without anything to show for it due to abrupt expulsion at certain stage of the formation.

While some candidates are of the view that some of the expulsions are unjustified, PR2 holds that: “No seminarian is unjustly expelled. Something must have happened

before a seminarian is withdrawn.” One of the easiest ways to get expelled from the seminary, according to PR1, is by examination malpractice. In his words: “I have told them that the easiest way to leave the seminary is to copy. The fastest way to go home on expulsion is to copy in exams. It will be better for you to fail my subject and remain in the seminary than to copy and then be expelled.” Examination malpractice is one of the cases that attracts immediate and non-debatable expulsion from the seminary. If it is discovered that a seminarian is always below average academically, and every attempt to improve has failed, “then he could equally be encouraged to seek his career elsewhere,” says PTF. There are many other reasons for which a seminarian can be expelled from his seminary. According to PR2: “Morally, if a seminarian’s character contradicts priestly character then it is not going to be conveniently possible for the candidate to be allowed to continue to go on to the priesthood.” For PRF, the seminary has rules and regulations or “codes of conduct: if you go contrary to them consistently you are dismissed.” CDS believes in second or more chances and any seminarian who shows inability to utilize those chances has himself to blame. According to him: “Having someone who is simply incorrigible, after many attempts to correct him, he still remains incorrigible; that could be a clear sign that the his vocation lies elsewhere.” All these point to the need for compliance to all the rules and requirements of the formation program.

On his part, CDE is sad and critical of the manner the seminary has handled some of the expulsion cases. For him, the punishment of expulsion imposed on some of the seminarians are not proportionate to the offences they committed and some are quite unjust and unmerited. In his words: “Seminarians make mistake, because no person is above mistake. But instead of interpreting it in the line of helping him to know better,

they are interpreting it to mar him, to destroy him completely.” Further, he narrates how a formator with reasons best known to him insisted that a particular seminarian must be expelled. This is without reference to due process and in spite of common sense and fairness. In that light, CDU feels convinced that: “There were some people that have been expelled who really had the vocation to the priesthood.” These put to question the type of vocation discernment process that is used at the seminary. CDE opines that expulsions should follow a process that will make it clear to the candidate who is to be expelled that it is the right thing to do so that he can get himself together and plan his future well.

According to him:

The authorities should understand that seminarians should not be expelled for no just cause. Seminary is not an expulsion ground. A normally expelled seminarian should be able to say: I merited the expulsion and not to bemoan the injustice done to him when he looks back. The only thing he should be fighting to conquer should be the future and not trying to understand the past while the future is running faster away from him.

Thorough or adequate vocation discernment is transparent and takes a gradual process so that the candidate who will face expulsion will see it coming and probably prepare for it so as not to experience that devastation abrupt expulsion inflicts on its victims.

It is not only important that expulsions should be less devastating, a word or two of advice or encouragement may be of help to the seminarian. To those who wish to withdraw from the seminary PTF volunteers the following advice: “If you want to leave the seminary on your own, prepare your ground, prepare yourself and prepare your mind, psychologically, spiritually and academically so that you would not have any kind of

friction with anybody or anything.” On this ground, PRF believes that: “Those who leave on their own have nothing against the church; they have their reason, their plans. When they are leaving, we will not be bitter, we give them blessing.” PR1 shares a similar view: “I have always believed that many of those who leave the seminary on their own are better prepared to adjust. But those who find things difficult are those who were expelled. Before they come to terms with the reality of their situation it may take years.” PTF narrated the case of a final year candidate who was expelled: “There was a candidate who was about to be ordained a priest but was expelled for reason of sexual orientation. He was completely devastated. He kept on trying here and there to see if there will be any change but nothing happened and he gave up.” Some give up to depression, to the weight of the frustration and devastation and relapse into some mental or psychological problem that may lead to death. As PR1 states above, expulsion is devastating. It could be years before the expelled candidate comes to terms with his situation or it could ruin a seminarian completely, according to CDE. That is why abrupt expulsions should be minimized or completely eradicated through the process of adequate vocation discernment. The next subheading deals with the rehabilitation of the expelled seminarian.

ii) Ex-seminarian and Adjustment Issues

Majority of the participants believe that the expelled seminarians should not be allowed to suffer alone whatever came his way as a result of the expulsion. Rather he should be assisted to adjust outside the seminary world but the type of assistance and for how long, there is no consensus. According to PRVD: “The understanding is, as much as you can, let no seminarian leave the seminary with bitterness. Don’t make enemies with

anybody, let the pattern be one that two of you can handle so that if in the future two of you meet, you can smile, you can shake hands, you can embrace, you can talk.”

Continuing he says it is obvious that it is not easy to tell a seminarian to discontinue and that is the more reason it should be done amicably for the sake of the future. In his words:

Really, every rector will be in sympathy with any seminarian who was asked to discontinue or any seminarian who leaves and we try to make the pattern friendly because you don't know what this student here will be in the future. If the pattern is friendly, you will always remember each other. I usually tell them, if there is any way we can help you, please come back and let us know; that type of thing, because the future is very uncertain.

For PR2 the assistance to the ex-seminarian should come in the form of a pattern of rehabilitation prepared ahead of time for all the candidates in the seminary. This includes the organization of “our academic program in such a way that any seminarian who leaves can still fit well in the society.” But as soon as an expulsion occurs, “we will explain to the student concerned why we advised him to find his call in other areas of life style so that the person's life is not destroyed. That is why we have the presence of spiritual directors, clinical psychologist in the seminary to help to talk to the young men before they are finally asked to leave.” Similarly PTF believes that with the affiliation of the seminaries to “Nigerian universities, an expelled seminarian can continue his studies in the university and get the appropriate certificates whether from the seminary or from the university of affiliation. With that he can adjust, be able to find something to do.” CDE suggests that the “seminaries should expand their areas of study to include some good secular courses and not only philosophy and theology. So that an expelled seminarian can

use the certificate to find job and fit well in the society.” PR1 narrates the story of a certain candidate who was expelled and remained dormant for ten years until his classmates, who became priests, came and woke him up. For him, “we can be helpful; we have to make the person realize that this is not the end of the world: it is just a mistake he made.” For CDU it is: “Yes, the church can help the expelled seminarian in different ways. If the bishop does not want the seminarian in his diocese, he can release him to join any other diocese or religious congregation of his choice. The bishop or the church can also help him to enter a university.” On his part, CDM feels that “the church can disabuse the mind of the locals that the expelled seminarian is not a criminal and should not be treated as such. The church can also introduce them to the diocesan ‘Vocation Interest Promotion’ group or association to help them with jobs or the adjustment they need.” Left on his own, the expelled candidate will rot away in his room as he agonizes over his fate. As such, any kind of help he can get from anywhere will be of immense benefit to him.

Another important help the expelled seminarian needs is the timely release of the documents he needs to move on from the seminary. As reflected in the statements of the formators, some expelled seminarians have expressed the problem and difficulty the experience to obtain their transcripts. But according to PR2: “When the bishop advises you to discontinue, he immediately gives you a letter to the rector who will begin to prepare your documents. The certificates and other transcripts are personal documents of the seminarian as such the bishop or any other authority should not hold them back, deny or refuse it to the seminarian.” He goes on to say, “The bishop has to make the demand because the seminary authority has no right to begin to give out documents without

authorization from the bishop.” The said delay of the transcript may arise here if the bishop is out of town on conference or angry with the seminarian for his behavior that led to the expulsion. To help his seminarians, PR1 pledges to help them secure the transcript: “I said to them: even though you are leaving here, if you have any problem about transcript I will assist you. And when they come, they are given prompt attention. That is the way we can help them.” These show that some of the seminary authorities are aware of the fact that the expelled seminarian needs some assistance. It is left for them to make good on their thoughts for the wellbeing of the expelled seminarians.

This section presents the termination of formation to the priesthood under two subheadings. Here the views of the participants on what it means to expel a seminarian from the seminary are expressed. They include the effects of expulsion on the candidate and the assistance he needs to move on with his life in a different vocation.

g) Conclusion

From the foregoing, the respondents are aware that vocation to the Catholic priesthood is God’s call in the Church to serve God through God’s people, the Church. They also know that not everyone in the seminary is really called for the priesthood. Hence the need for adequate vocation discernment to ascertain the candidates with authentic vocation in line with the Church. The Church emphasizes the importance of possessing the right intentions by all the candidates for the priesthood. The respondents strongly believe and express the need for vocation discernment but they do not all agree on the same approach. For some, especially the formators, it is better to be strict, apply all disciplinary measures, and micromanage many things from activities in the seminaries to activities outside the seminaries. The candidates refer to some of these as “policing” the

seminarians. On the other hand they, the candidates, want more freedom in formation or formation in freedom. Some of them made particular reference to the self-formation system as a better method of formation for the priests in the modern era. They believe that when they live and act in freedom the formators will have sufficient materials to judge them objectively in the discernment process. They realize that adequate vocation discernment seeks the right intentions and to eliminate issues of abrupt termination of vocations. It leads to inspired or informed withdrawal from formation which may be very much like a smooth transition from one career to another.

The respondents also generally believe that there should be some changes in the seminaries. They believe the seminaries can be better places to live, study and work for both the formators and the seminarians, but they are not in consensus on the approach to realize the goals. The next chapter discusses some of this study with reference to some authors to ascertain their relevance and place among existing literature.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

a) Discussion: Introduction

This study set out to investigate the problems confronting vocation discernment in the seminaries of the southeastern region of Nigeria. The intent is to provide the seminaries with more tools for the process of vocation discernment. The tools will enhance the efforts of the formation teams to ensure that all suitable candidates are ordained and the unsuitable ones are redirected to other vocations. This thought was born of the belief that vocation discernment to the priesthood at certain seminaries of the region needs improvement. The belief was in turn born out of comments of priests and candidates for the priesthood in that regard as well as from personal experience of the researcher as one who has been through the process. The study does not rely on those past comments or on the experience of the researcher. It relies on the views and experience of some priests and candidates for the priesthood who currently in the seminaries. The study involves the interview of ten research partners: five active priests and five candidates for the priesthood. The research questions are formulated into interview questions that inquired into their concept of vocation as well as their thoughts on the vibrant priestly vocation in the region. It also inquired into their process of vocation discernment. This shed some light on the problems militating against adequate vocation discernment. It also sought their thoughts on the changes they wish to make to enhance formation and vocation discernment in the region. Their thoughts on issues surrounding expulsion of some candidates were also explored.

Here is a summary of the findings, which are also the source of the discussion in this chapter. It was found that: a) the research partners have general and particular concept of vocation that correspond to the views of some other authors. An instance of particular vocation is vocation to the priesthood. b) The vocation boom needs better management so that it does not constitute a problem to adequate vocation discernment as it seems. c) The number of formators at some seminaries is not commensurate with the large number of candidates. Likewise, some of the seminaries have none or insufficient number of experts, like psychologists to assist the seminarians. This is a problem to formation and vocation discernment at the concerned seminaries. d) Some of the seminaries in the region have elaborate process of vocation discernment that involves every person who wanted his or her voice to be heard. e) There are some changes in the method of formation that can enhance the process of formation and vocation discernment. They include but are not limited to: review of the self-formation method, social formation that enhances cordial interaction, openness to the issue of JAMB, and more thoughts on inculturation. f) The expelled seminarian needs some help to move on with his life. These are the framework on which the discussion in this chapter are built.

i) General Concept of Vocation

It is found that most of the participants have both general and particular concepts of vocation. Some of them traced vocation to its Latin root: “voco” which means “call” and came up with the view that vocation in the general sense means a universal call to various endeavors and professions or style of life (PR1; CDE). This view seems to have been borrowed from Neafsey (2006) who already holds the view that vocation means more than priestly and religious life or any particular profession. Rather it means every

aspect and dimension of life including married life, and the things people do with their talent, time, or resources. Even from their Christian perspective, Grisez and Shaw (2003, 34), are of the view that it is not only that everyone in the Church has a vocation, but that life itself is lived in a complex reality of vocations. For them vocation may be lived as faith, as state of life or just as something personal. The finding here is that the word “vocation” means much more than vocation to the priesthood or any one particular vocation. And the views of the respondents are in consonance with those of some other authors. The relevance of this to vocation discernment is that vocation, especially, most Christian vocations need some form of discernment for authenticity so that one will be where God calls him or her.

ii) Particular Concept of Vocation: Priesthood

Particular vocation is an individual vocation or a vocation any person may have. For instance, vocation to the priesthood is a particular vocation, a call from God to a particular state of life. It is a particular call from God for an individual to personally serve God and God’s people in sacrificial manner in the Church (Fichter 1961, 4). Similarly, the respondents expressed the personal nature of particular vocations and equally identified the priesthood as a particular vocation whereby God motivates people to embrace the self-giving ministry. While the respondents held the same view that the priesthood is not the only vocation but only one of them, they equally hold that it is an exceptional vocation (PRVD). This is based on their view that the priesthood, as a religious vocation, is very rich in theology at a level that is not found in other vocations. It is also special because of its spiritual nature and the function of the priest as a mediator between God and God’s people after the manner of Christ. Other vocations have some

elements of service but the Catholic priesthood for instance, calls for total self-giving to the service of God and the people “in sacrificial manner” according to Fichter (4). Fichter speaks also of two aspects of vocation to the priesthood: subjective and objective aspects. These two aspects are similar to Hostie’s (1963, 74) internal and external vocation motivations. The aspects are addressed next.

iii) Subjective Aspect of Vocation to the Priesthood

The subjective aspect of vocation according to Fichter is the “genuine, personal, and inner urge” toward serving God and God’s people while the objective aspect is the “recognizable suitability” (4). For Fitcher, the subjective aspect is the inner urge associated with vocation to the priesthood. On their part, the respondents also spoke of the inner urge or motivation and the irresistible nature of genuine call to the priesthood. Some of them argued that the idea of irresistible instead of voluntary nature of vocation connotes force or compulsion on the side of God. This somehow questions the issue of vocation discernment on the human side. This is because, if a person is compelled by God to become a priest, the person may not have the room to discern the vocation and may not be held responsible for any mistake. For it is when a person acts in freedom that he or she is completely held responsible for the action (PR2; CDS). However the motivation or the irresistibility associated with the call to the priesthood does not so much mean divine compulsion or coercion to the priesthood as may appear in the ordinary sense. According to CDE, it is rather a gentle spiritual or loving and lovely divine influence, a stimulating instinct luring a person towards where the Lord wishes the person to blossom for the glory of God and for the joy of God’s people. It is in the sense that God calls and provides the person called with all the graces, the enablement to respond

affirmatively. In this manner, God's grace or generosity motivates the person to respond. It does not block or blur the personal instinct or freedom to examine or discern the authenticity of the call.

In this subsection the respondents' concept of vocation was found to be in consonance with the existing knowledge of vocation. Question of the concept of vocation as voluntary call for voluntary response and as irresistible call that must be answered was explored and answered. The next subsection discusses health as an objective aspect of vocation.

iv) Objective Aspect of Vocation to the Priesthood

On the objective aspect of vocation, Fitcher speaks of the recognizable qualities that make a candidate suitable for the priesthood such as health, intellect, and so on (4). These objective aspects are within the four areas of priestly formation and vocation discernment that John Paul II (1992) very well-articulated in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*. According to him, the candidates for the priesthood cultivates and manifests those commendable human qualities that are necessary for effective ministry. Such qualities, according to John Paul II (1992) "are needed for them to be balanced people, strong and free, capable of bearing the weight of pastoral responsibilities" (n.43). To be balanced, strong, and capable of bearing the weight of the ministry imply, among other things, good health. Seminary formation has always highlighted the necessity of good health: physically and mentally. Indeed, the priestly ministry is not for people with delicate or fragile health. The seminaries have infirmaries where the infirmarians treat the seminarians of minor ailment and keep records. They may also accompany seminarians to the hospitals in the case of major illness for support. At the hospital, the infirmarians

facilitate things for the seminarian to see the doctor in timely manner. During the annual, the chief infirmarian submits reports on each seminarian that received the attention at the infirmary (PR1). From the reports, the authorities will have an idea of the health condition of the seminarians concerned. If a candidate is reported to have weak health, he is allowed some time to heal himself. At the end, if his good health is assured he continues with his formation but if not, he is advised to leave the seminary. The Church has had some sick priests. A sick priest performs little or no ministerial function depending on the nature of the illness. As a result, any known case of illness is not taken lightly in the seminary. Actually, sickness is one of the disqualifying factors in the process of vocation discernment. This includes mental health or psychological disturbances, or some religious paramystical phenomena (Hostie 1963, 24) and any type of debilitating sickness or as the Church authorities may deem unfavorable to the ministry. And since the authorities may not be experts in detecting certain kinds sickness, Hostie recommends that specialists' assistance should be sought whenever persistent doubts exist about a candidate's state of physical and mental health. It is such competent or qualified doctor or theologian that should decide the best course of action according to Hostie.

Generally, the Nigerian seminaries will not knowingly keep a sickly seminarian or one with some disturbing illness in the seminary. In this light, some respondents (PTF) suggest that candidates for the priesthood should undergo specialists' evaluation at least three times before their ordination to ensure that they are suitably healthy for the ministry. While this is a valuable thought, it was found that some of the seminaries do not have the experts and professionals to evaluate such candidates before it is too late. This is

a matter that needs thoughtful consideration of the both the seminary and church authorities in the region. The next subsection is on another objective aspect of vocation: intelligence.

Another objective aspect of vocation, according to Fitcher (1961, 4) is the intellect which John Paul II (1992) treats under intellectual suitability in the *Pastores Dabo Vobis*. For John Paul II, it is a fundamental necessity to have for the priesthood, candidates who are intellectually well formed. According to him, the justification for intellectual formation of the future priests is the very nature of ordained ministry which is faced with various challenges, especially that of the new evangelization in the new millennium (n. 51). In John Paul II's view sees, the current situation of things in the world requires corresponding knowledge and intelligence. The "widespread mistrust regarding the real capacity of reason to reach objective and universal truth, and the fresh problems and questions brought up by scientific and technological discoveries ...strongly demands a high level of intellectual formation" (n. 51). This he continued, would enable the priest to face the challenges of the times adequately and thus proclaim "the changeless Gospel of Christ and to make it credible to the legitimate demands of human reason" (n. 51). John Paul II mentions a good knowledge of philosophy, and theology as steps in the right direction for preparing future priests.

The participants on their part emphasized the importance of meeting the intellectual and academic standard required of a candidate for the priesthood. For them failure to meet such standard should be a disqualifying factor. For them, that should be used a discernment tool because it will not favor the church to have priests who are not intelligent, it will be a liability to the church (PR1). Some of the liabilities could be

disturbing. To avoid the ones that result from poor intellectual strength on the side of the priest, the seminarians who will not meet up with the academic and intellectual requirements are advised to withdraw from the seminary (PRF; PTF). Here, intellectual and academic capabilities are measured by examinations. As a result, the candidate who does not score the required percentage at his exams is considered unsuitable. There is a thought that the emphasis on excellent academic results may lead to some examination malpractice. But the seminary rules and regulations have already taken care of that: any seminarian who is caught cheating or found to have been involved in exam malpractice will be expelled from the seminary. For some of the participants, such extreme punishment is adequate. According to them, if such cheating is treated with lesser punishment, the candidate who cheated his way to the priesthood may not stop there. He may also try to cheat in the management of church goods. This may lead to such ills as non-transparency, non-accountability, embezzlement of church fund, misuse of church goods, etc. if finds himself in the ministry of the Church (CDS). For this and other reasons, such ills should be uprooted as soon as they are discovered for the good of the Church.

b) Reasons for Vibrant Vocation

During a seminar at Yaounde, Cameroun in 1988, the Rectors and Spiritual Directors of major seminaries of West and Central Africa assert that the abundance of vocations currently experienced in Africa is a divine act that needs to be joyfully and gratefully received and appreciated (Synod of Bishops 1993, 28). Similarly, the participants express the joy of abundance of vocation to the priesthood in the region of

study. When asked what is responsible for the vibrant vocation, the respondents state that God is responsible for it.

i) God and Religiosity

In Nigeria, the idea of God, religion, and religiosity are inseparable. A person does not claim one without the other. The participants explain that it is because of the religiosity of the people. According to them, vocation to the priesthood is from God and thereby a religious matter. As such, there has to be religious disposition for it to thrive and the people of southeast and Nigeria have the disposition. For them, there is a clear connection between the religiosity of the people in particular and that of Africa as a whole, to the abundance of vocations in the areas. For them, it is also a matter of divine providence to be grateful because God uses people as instruments for the manifestation of God's gifts and plans. They state that the religiosity of the people in the region or Africa is not because of Christianity. They have culturally lived and practiced their religion from time immemorial, long before the advent of the Christian religion to the area. It is their religious inclination and practice that enabled them to embrace Christianity more easily because of some similarities (CDU). For instance, the concept of the priesthood is well known and accepted in African Traditional Religion (ATR). Buhlmann (1978) has already expressed the idea of the religiosity of the African in writing. According to him, the success of the African church and the priesthood is not without the fact of "the African's deeply religious pre-disposition. His sense of God, on whom he knows he is completely dependent, is the light by which he sees, the air he breathes, the skin in which he lives – not merely the clothes that covers him partly." Further he added: "The African does not simply believe in God and the spirits of his ancestors but lives, in the full sense

of the term, under the eyes of the creator, the hidden cause of all other causes” (152).

This is in consonance with CDE’s paraphrase of Mbiti’s view that the African goes everywhere and does everything with God and religion. While religious predisposition is fundamental to the vocation boom in the region, there are some other factors that have kept it flourishing in the Christian, modern era in spite of the decline of vocations experienced in some other regions of the world.

ii) Young Church

For some of the participants, it is because Nigeria is still a young church with youthful exuberance of faith. According to PRVD, the Nigeria church is still enjoying the novelty of her Christianity that is why there is abundance of vocation in the country. In this light, some respondents hold the view that as a young church, the Christian faith here has not been challenged by those things that may adversely affect the vibrant priestly vocation. According to them, such things include: modernism, secularism, philosophical, and even some theological thoughts. They also include some scientific inventive advancement and technological developments, industrial revolution, that may attract, divert and occupy the attention of the youth/s and thereby lead to the decline of vocation. In other words, the attention of the youth/s of the region are still on their religion hence vocations are still on the increase. The thought of youthful church expressed here has some elements of Buhlmann (1978) who describes the church in Africa as the church of the youth, the church of dynamic people, the church of the poor, and ‘the church of the future, and the future of the Church (23). For some participants, Nigeria is still a young church, poor, and underdeveloped but she has religiously dynamic people. For this, the participants believe that even if Nigeria develops and advances industrially, scientifically,

and technologically like other developed countries of the world and Christianity here gets old. The faith of the people and their religious aspirations will remain dynamic because they are innately religious. And parents will continue to bring up their children in the same culture of religiosity that begets vocations. As such, the age of the church here and advanced development of the country may not place any noticeable impact on the abundance of vocations in the region and country. The respondents also mention other factors that have helped to sustain the increase of vocation in the country to include good economic and social status as well as parental stimulation of vocations.

iii) Economic and Social Wellbeing

With regard to the issues of economic and social wellbeing, the respondents generally agree such issues in one way or another may affect vocation in Nigeria. But opinions are divided as to whether the effects are positive or negative to the growth of vocation. The popular voices are on the positive side: that for economic reasons many people enter the priesthood. But the new and not very popular voices, on the other side, hold that some people refuse to enter, decide to leave the seminary formation, or even the priesthood itself in search of better economic wellbeing. Each side has reasonable and evidence provable points while some of the participants support both sides. There is evidence of both sides being right and not so much the question of “either” and “or.” The popular voices based their view on the fact that because of their religiosity, Nigerians generally care about priests, love, respect, and appreciate their services. As a result the priesthood has an honorable position in the society. The affection the people have for the priests is not mere words, but clearly demonstrated by their supports and generosity for and to the priests. For instance, the economy of Nigeria is in poor shape, there is

unemployment plague, yet at his ordination, especially among the Igbo people of the region, the candidate receives generous gifts. These are seen as gestures of support, encouragement and especially to equip him with some of the material things he needs for the service of the Lord to which he has offered himself, and also to encourage others to join the difficult ministry. These gestures are believed to be motivating factors for many people to join the priestly ministry because their intentions are clear: for some support and to encourage others to aspire for the priesthood. And many indications show that the intentions are being realized. Many people are being attracted to the ordained ministry. It is therefore left for the formators to “sit down” and discern which of the fish in the dragnet are to be put into the bucket and which ones should be thrown back into the sea (Mt 13:47-48). That is not all, during their ministry as priests, the priests continue to enjoy the appreciation and generosity of the people in terms of many material benefits. Consequently, it is believed that some candidates aspire for the ordained ministry because of the economic and social benefits.

On the other hand, the less popular voices are of the view that there are people who will not volunteer for the priesthood irrespective of the economic and social comfort associated with it. They cited instances of some candidates who are in the seminary only for academic reasons. They go through the same formation: learn the same thing about the priesthood with their fellow candidates but at the end, when they achieve their academic goal, they happily leave the seminary. Similarly, there are candidates who are willing to leave the seminary if somebody should give them a certain amount money they will use to become something else in the society other than priests. For these candidates, in spite of all the much talked-about economic buoyancy and high social status associate

with the ministry, the priesthood is not their first choice of career but only an alternative if their first choice fails. This seems to lend some credence to the insistence of some of the respondents, like CDU, that it is not for economic comfort or social status that seminarians undergo the crucibles to become priests but because they have genuine vocation, the Lord called them to the ministry of the priesthood. Some other different thoughts hold that vocation can come from and through various ways. It could come through religious, spiritual or material means. Whichever way God chooses to call a person or through whatever means a person feels called to the priesthood is not of much importance, what matters most is the genuineness of the vocation, the right intention (PRVD; CDE).

The Church emphasizes the “Right Intention” for choosing the priesthood; that is the candidate’s reason for the desire to become a priest. According to Frison (1962, 30f), right intention “is an efficacious will to enter the religious clerical state, not in order to obtain vain advantages or its more earthly benefits, but because of its nobility and the spiritual improvement of self and others which is more readily achieved in such a state.” There may be people who enter the priestly formation without the right intention, like what some respondents referred to as initial understanding of the priesthood. But it is believed that initial or wrong intention is purified or changed, converted during the process of formation. It may also happen that the candidates with wrong intention will run out of patience. They may get frustrated during the long years of seminary formation, and decide to leave the seminary on their own. It may also happen that by divine intervention such candidate is discerned as not having the genuine vocation. At that, they

will be advised to withdraw hence the need for adequate vocation discernment in the seminaries.

iv) Parental Contribution

Another contributor to the abundance of vocation in the region is the family or the parents. In his post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*, John Paul II (1995) states: “‘The future of the world and of the Church passes through the family.’ Not only is the Christian family the first cell of the living ecclesial community, it is also the fundamental cell of society. In Africa in particular, the family is the foundation on which the social edifice is built” (n.80). He goes on to say: “‘It is in the heart of the family that parents are by word and example...the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children. It is here that the father of the family, the mother, children, and all members of the family exercise the priesthood of the baptized in a privileged way’” (n.92). Further he states: “‘Thus the home is the first school of Christian life and ‘a school for human enrichment’” (n. 92).

Reker (2008), shares similar view when he describes the family as a place of growth and maturity as well as the first seminary a seminarian attends where parents are the teachers and rectors. According to Reker, the US bishops recognized these parental roles and accepted them “as important partners in building a positive climate for vocations” (Reker 2008). For the respondents, parents serve as source of support and encouragement for their children in the seminary and serve as formators and guardians for them at home. Their parental role in the discernment of the vocation of their children is never overlooked both in the minor and major seminaries.

Nigeria operates the minor seminary system, a secondary school level of vocation formation for children, which is the major and well-intended basic source of vocation to the priesthood in the country. The system is well known to every priest and to all the candidates for the priesthood in the region because most of them passed through it as kids in their early years. According to John Paul II (1992), “As long experience shows, a priestly vocation tends to show itself in the preadolescent years or in the earliest years of youth. The Church looks after these seeds of vocations sown in the hearts of children by means of the institution of minor seminaries, providing a careful though preliminary discernment and accompaniment” (n. 63). The intention is to have a kind of “catch them young” program designed to start from an early age to train kids to develop religious set of mind inclined to seek priestly ministry or to be able to hear and respond properly if the Lord calls them to the ministry. As John Paul II states: the aim is “to protect and develop the seeds of a priestly vocation so that the students may more easily recognize it and be in a better position to respond to it” (n. 63). In the southeastern region and Nigeria, this minor seminary program is a major factor that boosts vocation to the ministry. It is there that the hope for a large number of seminarians in the major seminaries and at ordinations lies. As it stands, the program is working so well that the annual number of students in the minor seminaries grows in geometric proportion.

Parents or families are of great significance for the success, the realization of the objectives of the minor seminaries. Due to their interest and desire many of them have to send one or more of their kids to the minor seminary. This however, is not always for the purpose of becoming priests for some other reasons. Some parents send their kid to the minor seminary not because the kid has expressed the intention to become a priest or

because of the kid's faith, but because that is where the parents want him to be. The entire intention is not that he may become a priest but it will be a joy if he becomes. There are also some parents who send their children to the minor seminary for academic reasons: to obtain the qualitative education and that human formation that often distinguishes a seminarian from his peers. The above two categories of kids per parents are different from those who are in the seminary because they have from a very early age expressed to their parents the desire to become priests. This may be due to family religious practices, parental active participation in the church, family favorable view and appreciation of priests and so forth (PR1). There may be other families who send their kids to the minor seminaries for reason other than the above. At the end, the result is a large number of seminarians in the minor seminaries. As it stands, each diocese in the region has at least one minor seminary, sometimes with a satellite campus. Whereas some of the larger and more populous dioceses have more than one minor seminary with growing satellite campuses at different locations in the dioceses concerned.

All the kids who are in the minor seminaries for different reasons undergo the same seminary formation. It was learned that many of those others who are in the seminary on their parents' intentions or faith often pick up the interest or receive the call to become priests during the formation period. That means a large number also for the major seminaries which are normally populated with seminarians from the minor seminaries. At the end of their six years of formation in the minor seminary, the seminarians graduate and start the process that leads to the major seminary. According to John Paul II (1992): "The educational goal of such...formation...will lead the young person to embark on the path of the major seminary with an adequate and solid

foundation” (63). Each year the dioceses produce sufficient and sometimes more than sufficient number of candidates from their minor seminaries. This has led to the building of more regional major seminaries with satellite campuses. Most dioceses in the region do not look up to the secondary schools, higher educational institutes, or the universities for their priestly candidates because almost one hundred percent of them come from the minor seminaries. For some dioceses, the admission of candidates who did not go through a minor seminaries may be a thing of the past in the future. In the words of John Paul “The educational goal of such seminaries tends to favor in a timely and gradual way the human, cultural and spiritual formation which will lead the young person to embark on the path of the major seminary with an adequate and solid foundation” (n.63). For such dioceses, it seems easier or better to build on already laid adequate and solid foundation. In all, sending their children to the minor seminaries is one of the ways parents or families are major contributors to the abundance of vocation to the priesthood in Nigeria.

v) Vatican II Africa

There is yet another contributor to the explosion and increase of faith and vocation to the Catholic priesthood in Nigeria and Africa that was not directly referenced by the participants. It is the Second Vatican Council of 1962. Buhlmann (1978) states that the Council has often been cited as one of the major reasons responsible for the decline of vocations to the Catholic priesthood in Europe and North America. One of the reasons according to Power (1999), is that the language of the Council reduced the sacral concept of the office of the priesthood. That is, it removed “some of the aura of the holy from the office and person of the priest” (32). Buhlmann refers to the problem as “the

declericalizing of the Church” (9). This displeased many priests who left the ministry and also discouraged the aspirants for the ministry and this resulted in the decline of vocation to the ordained ministry which is only beginning to abate in many countries.

On the other hand, the Second Vatican Council has continued to be cited as a God-given and Spirit-inspired event responsible for the explosion of vocation to the Catholic priesthood in Nigeria and Africa in general. It was a liberative event that revitalized, and kindled fresh Christian zeal and spirit in the people. It was a fresh coming of the Holy Spirit that renewed the face of the Church in Africa. It was “the beginning of a movement expected to lead to a Church which would be freer, more alive, more authentic and at the same time more effective” (Buhlmann, 1978). This came about by the Council’s decree that authorizes the indigenization of the Church. This makes the message of salvation more relevant to the diverse cultures of the people of God in every part of the world. This inspired unprecedented enthusiasm among the Catholics in Africa and Nigeria with particular reference to the southeastern region. Among the results of the renewed enthusiastic embracement of the Church since the end of the Second Vatican Council is what can be expressed as the geometric increase of vocations to the Catholic priesthood in the region of focus. The region has grown from one major seminary in 1951 to eight major seminaries at present. The seminaries are well populated with indigenous seminarians. As a result, the vocation problem facing the southeastern region of Nigeria currently is the ability to adequately manage the number of seminarians in some of the seminaries. In his address to the Nigerian priests, seminarians and seminary authorities during his maiden pastoral visit to the country in 1982, John Paul II made an unambiguous call for adequate vocation discernment to the ordained ministry in the

region - the intent of this study. Both the formators and seminarians in the region and nation take the issues of vocation discernment very serious because they know it is what determines who becomes a priest as well as the quality of the priest.

It is noted here that the reason for the particular reference to the southeastern region is that the abundance of vocation to the priesthood is not equitably distributed in all the regions of Nigeria. This is due to cultural diversity and diverse dominant religions in the different regions. Christianity is the dominant religion in the southeastern region and a particular tribe is in the lead. The participants are very much aware of this and some of them made reference to it. PTF and PRF referenced the Igbo tribe of the southeast as the epicenter of vocation boom in Nigeria. Other regions, like the northern region which is dominated by Islam and the western region that is shared by Christians and Muslims, do not have the abundance of vocation to the priesthood as it is in the southeast.

This section discussed the reality of the abundance of vocation in the region of study and found that the people are innately religious, and have fervent adherence to their religion. They believe that their religiosity is fundamental to the reason for the vibrant priestly vocation which for them is a divine providence. Hence God is responsible for the vocation boom. But because grace builds on nature, God uses different means: human beings and inanimate objects, experience of life, events of history, and so forth to awaken, ignite, or spread the interest in vocation to the priesthood. In this vein, according to some of the respondents, the youthfulness of the church in the area is one of the reasons vocation to the ordained ministry has continued to flourish (PRVD). Similarly, the poor economic situation of the country is also seen a means God uses to turn the

attention of the religiously enthusiastic youth/s to the ministry of the priesthood (PRVD). On their part, parents who are only mentioned occasionally in the formation or discernment process have been shown to be among the vital and major contributors to the abundance of vocation in the region. For the respondents, all these are not coincident. They are God's plan to raise vocations.

Things that have advantages may also have some disadvantages. This is applicable to the abundance of vocation experienced in the region. The disadvantage here includes the problem of insufficient number of formators and other personnel to handle the number of candidates. This is believed to affect adequate vocation discernment to certain extent (PR2). This and some other related problems are the points of discussion in the next section.

c) Needed Personnel for Vocation Discernment

The abundance of vocation in Nigeria and Africa is a great blessing to the continent of Africa and the people are happy about it (Schotte 1993 *Instrumentum Laboris*, n. 28). But it was found that there are some underlying problems associated with vocation boom, especially at some of the seminaries of the region under study. The problem concerns the insufficient number of personnel needed to handle the number of candidates in the seminaries for adequate vocation discernment. The solution requires, among other things, sufficient number of qualified formators and other experts or professionals like psychologists to adequately discern the vocation of each of the candidates at every level of their formation. These needs were expressed in various ways by the participants, but it was PR2 who better articulated that there is the need "to have more clinical psychologists in houses of formation and spiritual directors to help

stabilize these young men. We will also need to ask that we have more formators.” This participant mentioned three kinds of persons that are very important for the formation ministry. Without them, formation and discernment of vocation will not be said to be thorough. The important roles these personnel play in the formation and discernment of vocations are the next issues discussed.

i) Psychologist

In its *Guidelines for the Use of Psychology in the Admission and Formation of Candidates for the Priesthood*, the Congregation for Catholic Education (2008) states: “Inasmuch as it is the fruit of a particular gift of God, the vocation to the priesthood and its discernment lie outside the strict competence of psychology” (n.5). At the same time, it did not rule out that there are some discernment cases where expert help should be sought from psychology to adequately evaluate the candidate’s psychic state so as to ascertain his human disposition and capability to understand and respond to divine call. As a result, it allows the services of experts in psychological sciences to evaluate candidates for the priesthood as long as such expert assessment can provide the formators with some helpful information and may even provide therapy to the candidate if psychic problem is diagnosed (n.5). The participants on their part, emphasized the importance psychological evaluation of all the candidates for the priesthood. Some suggested that the evaluation should be done, not just only once but, at least three times, at important stages of their formation, prior to ordination. This is necessary to ensure that each candidate for the priesthood is mentally healthy or psychologically balanced. They stated that there have been cases of candidates who, unknown to the authorities and their fellow candidates, have latent psychic problems that only surfaced after ordination in the

ministry to everyone's surprise. For them such cases could have been detected during formation if the necessary psychological evaluations were conducted. This view is not far from the teaching of the Congregation (n.4), which acknowledges the fact that psychological errors do occur in the process of vocation discernment. The fact is expressed in another document, *A Guide to Formation in Priestly Celibacy* (Congregation for Catholic Education 1974, n.38) as follows: "errors in discerning vocations are not rare, and in all too many cases psychological defects, sometimes of a pathological kind, reveal themselves only after ordination to the priesthood. Detecting defects earlier would help avoid many tragic experiences (n.38)." For Guy (2009), who does not support the use of psychology as vocation discernment tool for formation, it is not only that errors do occur in the process but that "very often these tests are misleading" (79). There may not be a perfect process of vocation discernment, but effort should be made to ensure that each discernment is as adequate as possible. No stone should be left unturned to achieve a higher if not the highest percentage of success of the vocation discernment. For Guy, where it is possible, more valuable alternatives can be sought in place or to supplement the available process instead of relegating the process of discernment to the psychologist (79). According to Guy, the relegation of duty happens when: "these tests take responsibility" off the shoulders of the formators because "it is easy to spontaneously transfer the decision making responsibility to a third person" (79). This is compatible with PR1's statement that some formators do not want to participate in the process of discernment because it is a matter of conscience, they do not want to share in the responsibility of sending away the candidates "judged" to be unsuitable for the priesthood.

On another note, some of the respondents feel that psychology should not be used only for evaluation, but also as part of the formation itself so as to learn “a lot that will help us to balance our psyche” (CDE). The Congregation for Catholic Education presumes that the well-formed formator and discerner of vocation should have some knowledge of psychology. This is in order that he or she may be able to use the knowledge to accurately comprehend from the first moment of a candidate’s admission, the candidate’s personality, potentialities, dispositions, and the types of any psychological wounds he may have and evaluate their nature and intensity (n.8). But for Guy (2009), “Psychological accompaniment should never be handled by the person in charge or by another religious from the community” (143). For him, “it is better that the psychologists be totally independent and not involve themselves in community matters. The Community should not become a laboratory for research purposes” (143). Guy is speaking from the platform of religious congregation but his views are equally meaningful to diocesan seminaries. It is also the view of the Congregation for Catholic Education (2008) that the psychologists who assist to evaluate the candidates “cannot be part of the formation team,” but should “have specific competence in the field of vocations, and unite the wisdom of the Spirit to their professional expertise” (n.6). This is “to avoid any harmful confusion” (n.6) or some unhappy experience (Guy, 143).

As it stands, it was found that even though “vocation to the priesthood and its discernment lie outside the strict competence of psychology” (Congregation for Catholic Education 2008, n.5) there is no alternative yet to the important role psychologist play in the formation and discernment of vocation of the candidates for the priesthood. It has and will continue to be used to validly evaluate the true personality of a candidate, to assess

and inform a candidate “regarding certain character features which could present some difficulties” in his formation or ministry as priest (79). The participants, both priests and candidates for the priesthood expressed the need to have timely services of the psychologist to assist in the formation and in the discernment of the vocation of each candidate for the ordained ministry.

ii) Spiritual Director

The Spiritual director is a part of the formation team. He lives in the seminary with the seminarians like the other formators so as to be available to the candidates at all the time. His role in the formation and discernment of vocation has been expressed in chapter two. The seminarians go to him for the sacrament of reconciliation. They also go to him at various times for spiritual directions. He can as well be called spiritual formators because of the spiritual formation he provides for the seminarians. He is a formator on the internal forum because of the confidentiality of the matter and form he works on. He contributes to the formation process by the spiritual directions he gives and by encouraging seminarians to be open and sincere to the formation team on personal matters that deserve the knowledge of the team (n. 14). The formators make sure that each seminarian sees a spiritual director or the confessor (PRVD). Unfortunately their numbers are not sufficient for the seminarians in some of the seminaries. Under normal circumstances, when spiritual direction is “healthy and interesting,” seminarians visit their spiritual directors and confidently disclose their spiritual problems to the spiritual director who in turn advises them accordingly, providing spiritual support (CDE). But when there is suspicion that their confidentiality is not assured, like when a spiritual director is in very friendly relationship with the rest or some of the formators on the

external forum; some of the seminarians tend to avoid or become skeptical about spiritual directions. Under such condition, some candidates seem to prefer an outsider, like the psychologist (CDS). A candidate may prefer a psychologist but he should not confuse his or her role with that of the spiritual director. Both could provide counselling but not from the same perspective. Each of them is unique in his or her area of service; they do not usually speak the same language. The spiritual director speaks spiritual and moral language while the psychologist speaks more of social science language. One cannot replace the other in the seminary setting. The spiritual director is very important. He is needed in the seminary for spiritual guidance, counselling, and for spiritual nourishment and growth of the seminarians.

Spiritual formation and discernment in the seminary require the candidates to participate fully in all the spiritual programs designed for their spiritual growth. This would enable them to tower spiritually high among the people of God they were called serve and nurture spiritually. It is also to arm them as Paul would say, with the amour of God to stand firm against the devil in the spiritual battle against principalities, the powers of darkness of this world, the evil spirits and every evil in the heavenly realms (Eph 6:10-18). Not to accept and live by the spiritual formation would mean spiritual poor or lack of spiritual growth for the candidate. The seminary authorities seriously frown at and punish any refusal or even suspected intent not to follow any of the required spiritual exercises.

iii) Formators

In Nigeria, the formators are the lecturers, teachers, trainers, professors, or educators of the candidates for the priesthood. They are usually priests and usually live with the students in the seminaries. They oversee the daily management or administration

and general wellbeing of the seminaries and seminarians. They also serve as supervisors of various aspects of the seminary life and growth activities in addition to their difficult task of teaching and forming or helping to form the seminarians. Some seminaries have other formators who are not resident in the seminaries. They only visit on their lecture days, teach, and leave the seminary. Thus, they are not part of the everyday continuous formation of the seminarians. As a result, the seminarians usually refer to them as the visiting or external professors or lecturers and not so much as formators. But they are formators too, at least to the extent of forming the seminarians intellectually and morally in the class rooms. Formators are among the personnel that PR2 requested to have in the seminaries to assist in the training and for vocation discernment of the candidates. He made the call because there is not enough formators for the formation of the large number of candidates in some of the seminaries. According to him, the seminary formators are on twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week live-in ministry in the seminaries. And there is a serious need to have more of such people for the ministry of forming the seminarians. Because, with the availability of sufficient number of well trained, well qualified formators who are devoted, very ready and willing to sacrifice their time and self to the formation of the future priests, then there will be better results both in the formation and in the discernment of the vocations. This request found credence in the request of the African Synod Fathers who urged every Episcopal Conference to ensure that only qualified priests capable of carrying out effectively the formation program desired by the synod should be sent to teach in the seminaries (*Synod of Bishops* 1994 n. 51). While there is demand for formators in the seminaries, the church has always emphasized qualified formators.

In the *Guidelines for the Use of Psychology in the Admission and Formation of Candidates for the Priesthood*, the Congregation for Catholic Education (2008), describes qualified priests for the formation of seminarians as those priests who “have a good knowledge of the human person: his rhythms of growth; his potentials and weaknesses; and his way of living his relationship with God” (n. 3). Such priests must have been “prepared, including by means of specific courses, to understand profoundly the human person as well as the demands of his formation to the ordained ministry” (n. 4). These resonates with CDE who believes that forming the future priests and discerning their vocations is not a job for any type of person including the newly ordained priests but for experienced priests who have been well schooled in the knowledge of vocation discernment. They also resonate with PR1 who felt dismayed by the caliber of formators he sees in the seminary which for him needs a lot of improvement or replacement by the caliber of formators stipulated by *Congregation*. And by that stipulation, newly ordained priests who do not have the qualifications are not suitable for the demands of the formation and vocation discernment of the future priests.

The problems facing the southeastern region with regard to formation and vocation discernment include but are not limited to: shortage of formators and the issue unqualified formators. There is abundance of vocation but the formators at some of the seminaries are few. And among the few formators, some of them are not qualified according to the dictates of the Congregation for Catholic Education. These are recipes for inadequate vocation discernment. Attesting to this, PR1 made three separate statement regarding “tyranny” of numbers at his seminary of experience. First he says: “The number of candidates in our seminary is so much that so many of them are anonymous.

You don't know every person and you should know people to know what they are. So, some of them grew in this anonymity and go through the seminary unnoticed which is not to our own advantage." Secondly he says: "The formators should be able to open their eyes because the large number of candidates is doing a lot of harm in our own case. Because of the number, we cannot get to know them one by one. It is when you get to know them one by one, that you will know that a candidate is forgetful." And thirdly he states: "So the formators in the seminary have very great work to do with the many number of candidates." Even though he did not indicate the number of teachers in connection to all the above, it could be inferred that for him, with sufficient number of qualified formators in place, every seminarian will be taken account of. None of them would be able to go through the seminary and to the priesthood anonymously any more as he stated. Hence the need for the authorities to respond to the request of PR2 for experts in psychological sciences, spiritual directors and more qualified formators. Thus, it was found in this section that the personnel needed for adequate formation and vocation discernment are not sufficient and some of them are not qualified for the job to produce the needed adequate vocation discernment. It was also found that as a result of the large number of candidates and insufficient number of formators at some of the seminaries, some of the candidates reach the priesthood unanimously. There is no means to know at the moment, the number of such anonymous candidates per year.

d) Vocation Discernment

Vocation discernment is necessitated by the fact that it is not only the voice of God that a candidate hears calling him. Rather there are so many voices, such as the voices of the family, relatives, friends, peers, the community and society; voices of

nature, of events of life, of ego, personal desires and ambitions, etc. (Farnham et al 1991; Neafsey 2006). Vocation discernment is then a human attempt to discover and authenticate the voice of God among so many (Lespinay 2009). And in order to ensure an adequate vocation discernment, some seminaries in the region of study employs as many voices as possible to assist in the process. Among various authors: Lespinay (2009), Hostie (1963) Haughey (2004), there are debates as to who should be the first person involved in the process of discerning the vocation of a candidate. Similar debate exists among the participants. But the seminaries believe, as the Church teaches (Congregation for Catholic Education 2008): irrespective of the fact that vocation is personal, God calls people through the Church therefore it is incumbent on the Church to take care of vocations as well as authenticate the vocations of the candidates who will serve God in the local church (John Paul II 1992, n.1; n.41). On this account, the seminaries involved as many people as they want. As a result, it was found that in the region, it is not only the seminary and church authorities that are involved in the process of vocation discernment. Rather it is also open to those who want their voices to be heard. This was discovered when the participants responded to the question of who should be involved in the process of vocation. The participants tried to narrow down the likely participants without success: some were selective while other were inclusive. At the end, it became a matter of whoever wants to make a reasonable contribution towards vocation discernment can submit his or her remarks or report to the authorities. In the process, it was found that there are those whose reports or remarks are required and there are others who may only volunteer remarks or report if they choose to. For this, the voices that one hears in the process of vocation discernment at the participants' seminaries are the voices of the

formators, the voices of the seminarians represented by the head-functionaries, the voices of the parishes of apostolic work represented by the parish priests and then the rest of the voices such as parents, family, friend, peers, etc. that want to be heard as discussed below starting with the functionaries.

i) Reports of the Head Functionaries

One of the popular and loud voices that assist the formators in the job of formation and discernment of vocations in the seminaries is that of the head functionaries. These are seminarians selected by the formators led by the rector with the assistance of some other seminarians, and entrusted with the leadership in the various functions and activities in the seminaries. These functionaries cover every aspect of the seminary life that without them in the Nigeria seminary setup, the formators would find the ministry of formation or serving in the seminaries extra challenging. They are like the staff that runs the daily affairs of the seminary. They are the on-the-spot custodians of the seminarians' way of life and activities. Each head functionary serves for one semester or two if the authorities deemed it necessary. They are the eyes and ears of the authorities of everyday activities and events in the seminaries. They report to the dean of students' affairs or to the rector or to the priest supervisor of each function where that is obtainable. That was why in his response to the question of the process of vocation discernment in the seminary, PR1 said: "First of all, we have head functionaries." Each hostel master keeps a record of who goes out from his hostel and when he comes back and also takes note of the hostel inmate who was not present in the chapel during a common spiritual exercise. The choir masters keep account of those who do not show up for choir practice or who are not serious about it. The librarian notes those who disturb in the library just as

the class prefects record those who did not attend class. And so on and so forth with all aspects of life and activity in the seminary. When needed arises, especially, during the annual screening, the authorities call for the records to see the other side of the candidates that they could not have seen without the head functionaries. These serve as part of their vocation discernment tools for the candidates.

ii) Apostolic Work Report

Another group that sends reports about the seminarians to the seminaries are the priests in charge of parishes. During the annual period of apostolic work or pastoral experience, the seminarians are sent to work with priests in the parishes. John Paul II approved this experience when he said that during the period, the seminarians “will get practice in some initial forms of cooperation with one another and with the priests alongside whom they will be sent to work. These priests have a considerably important role, in union with the seminary program, in showing the candidates how they should go about pastoral work” (John Paul II n.58). The seminarians would spend seven weeks in practical demonstration of their worth as future priests during the period. Some of them spend more than seven weeks by special agreement with the priest concerned. The parish priest would usually stipulate for the seminarian the type of ministry he wants him to perform depending on the needs of the parish or the priest himself. At the same time, there is always large room for personal initiative. This will test the seminarian’s intelligence and his ability to initiate uplifting programs as a priest and schedule the ministerial activities on his own. Most often the parish priest would send the candidate into the village to live and work with the people. John Paul II very much favors such pastoral experience. He prefers the parish pastoral experience to other areas of apostolate.

According to him, “When it comes to choosing places and services in which candidates can obtain their pastoral experience, the parish should be given particular importance for it is a living cell of local and specialized pastoral work in which they will find themselves faced with the kind of problems they will meet in their future ministry” (58). The seminarian gains a lot of pastoral experience when he is left for few weeks to work with the people in the village.

The apostolic work period is an opportunity for those who are not in the formation team to contribute their quota in the formation the seminarian and in the discernment of his vocation. This is because, at the end of the apostolic work, the parish priest of the place of the experience seeks reports from all those who came in contact with the seminarian during the period to know how he performed and behaved. In addition to his own observation, the priest sends a report to the seminary and to his vocation director of vocations or bishop (CDE; PTF). This report will also for a part of the tools for the discernment of the candidate’s vocation. The reports (in i and ii above) are required from the persons concerned.

iii) Other Reports

There are other reports that are not solicited or required but are very much welcome from other people. These are the reports from parents, family, peers, friends and those who know or have come in contact with the seminarian. Such people who have something reasonable to say about the seminarian that may be helpful in the discernment of his vocation are welcome by the authorities. Moreover, according to John Paul II (1992): “all the members of the Church, without exception, have the grace and responsibility to look after vocations” (n. 41). Though it is not required, the seminary authorities expect parents

to report their seminarian son if they notice that he is not living up to what is expected of a seminarian (PR1). Naturally, parents tend to protect their children, promote them and may even assign their seminarian son a one hundred percent score without thinking about it. At the same time, there are parents who do not close their eyes to the misdeed of their children. Such parents, according to some of the respondents, refused to endorse their son for ordination to protect the reputation of the priesthood (PRVD; CDE; CDM). All those listed under this subsection can do the same and thus contribute to the process of adequate vocation discernment.

It should be noted that all the reports do not need to be negative as some people may imagine. Reports of commendation for a seminarian as a nice, active, and humble servant may serve to confirm what is already in the official records of the authorities. It may also contradict what unkind person has reported against him. These reports help the formators to have some idea of who the seminarians are, how they behave when there is no formator around so as to assess them rightly. However, each report, whether it is positive or negative is not taken on face value by the authorities, they are investigated. And in the final analysis, it is the formators and the authorities that have the final say regarding the vocation of each candidate (CDE) as expressed in the next subsection.

iv) Formators and Discernment

Vocation discernment according to PRF is a continuous process. It lasts from the time a candidate is admitted into the seminary until the day he leaves the seminary either as a priest or as ex-seminarian. According to the *Guidelines for the Use of Psychology in the Admission and Formation of Candidates for the Priesthood* (Congregation for Catholic Education 2008, n. 3): “Formators need to be adequately prepared to carry out a

discernment that...allows for a reasonably sure decision” (n.3) to admit a candidate into the seminary or to dismiss him from the seminary “for reasons of unsuitability” (n.3). The intention of the Congregation here is that the formator should possess “in due measure, the sensitivity and psychological preparation” (n.4) that will enable him to adequately evaluate the “candidate’s true motivations, to discern the barriers that stop him integrating human and Christian maturity, and to pick up on any psychopathic disturbances present in the candidate. The formator must accurately and very prudently evaluate the candidate’s history” (n. 4). In this sense, the Guidelines added: “Thus, every formator must be prepared, including by means of specific courses, to understand profoundly the human person as well as the demands of his formation to the ordained ministry” (n. 4). These will in no mean measure contribute to adequate vocation discernment as pertains to psychological sciences.

On his part, Hostie (1963) believes that it is not every priest that can adequately discern whether the spirit of a candidate’s vocation is genuine or not but only the priest who has thorough knowledge of the seminarian and a priest who is entirely familiar with the particular spirituality the seminarian wishes to adopt or has actually adopted (75). This calls for the need to be deeply versatile in spiritual theology on the part of the formators. It also calls to mind the thoughts of Ekwunife (1997) who says Africanizing the formation of African priests should include creating in the seminaries the atmosphere of real home and family where fraternal love, care and appreciation of the other replaces the atmosphere of tensional fear, anxiety, suspicion or hate. This, in Ekwunife’s view, will enable the formation team to have close and thorough knowledge of the seminarians and understand them better and thus be able to evaluate or judge them objectively.

It is stated in chapter three that each of the participating formators has served a minimum of seven years in the formation and vocation discernment apostolate in the region. Armed with their knowledge, experience and the reports from those who have contact with the candidates, the formators engage themselves in the process of discerning the vocation of the candidates. Vocation discernment takes place every minute of the day in the seminaries, but the seminaries in the region have various set period of times when the formators gather and compare notes and views about the seminarians. The gathering usually takes place annually. Based on their observations and thoughts, the formators specifically focus their discernment on the four areas of priestly formation (John Paul II 1992, n. 43ff): Human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation. The accumulated reports from various persons and group of persons are added tools for the discernment process. It involves, among other things, thorough reviews of the reports from: the head functionaries, place of apostolic work and others. Whatever the formators make of their notes and from the reports and in turn report to the bishops will have its impact, favorable or unfavorable, on the seminarians because the bishops take reports from the seminaries as most authentic (CDE). Depending on the population of candidates in the individual seminaries, the screening may last up to one month in some respects.

According to some of the respondents, the screening or vocation discernment is not an easy task. For PRVD it is a very difficult issue even though he has been engaged in it for many years. PR1 also sees it as a difficult task, which has been made more difficult by the large number of candidates involved. Similarly, CDS expressed the view that vocation discernment could be difficult for anybody “because only God knows the heart and only God knows who he wants” for the priesthood. As a result, errors are bound

to occur. It is not easy to know the mind of God without divine intervention. The screening removes those candidates who did not meet up with some of the requirements within the expected time allotted to them. The names of those who are screened out and other categories are sent to their bishops with the advice that they should be withdrawn from the seminary (PR2). Normally, it is not the seminary but the bishops of the candidates concerned that will inform the candidates at the annual reunion, the results of the screening as it applies to each candidate (PR1). That is why there is much apprehension during most of the reunions. Based on the reports, the bishop may tell a candidate continue his formation in the seminary or to continue his formation but with a warning. He may also tell a seminarian that he will continue his formation after a period of rethinking outside the seminary, that is, on probation for about one year. He may also tell a seminarian to withdraw from the seminary. This last person will have to look for different vocation elsewhere.

With the elaborate process of vocation discernment operational here, one may wonder how some candidates still go through the formation anonymously as PR1 stated. A candidate is deemed anonymous when none of the formators can say anything good or bad about him; that is, when none of the formators can give account of him. It is also a problem when a candidate is admitted into the seminary with some psychological wounds and he goes through the formation to ordination with the wounds undetected. According to John Paul II (2008), such wounds “can block the development of moral qualities” and “can limit the candidate’s capacity” to make the expected progress towards the priesthood (n. 5). And such undetected and unhealed wounds may cause some “tragic experiences” in the church (n. 4). Sufficient number of qualified formators that will enable the

formators to engage with the students on one-on-one meetings may help to resolve some of the problems. The next section discusses some of the changes that the respondents believe will make some positive impact on the process of formation and vocation discernment in the seminaries of the southern region of Nigeria.

e) **Wind of Change**

There is always the wind of change and growth blowing in life and nature. From birth to death, the human person undergoes various stages of change which are necessary for a person to be fully human. When *Ecclesiastes* (Ch. 3:1) says there is time for everything as well as seasons for things under the sun, the Preacher also implies there is change in nature. There is equally change in the society. In other words, changes are prompted by the social conditions in the society. For the Church, making changes in the light of the situation of things in the society is indicative of observing the signs of the times. The Church believes in renewal for growth and development for better approach to issues.

One of the most significant wind of renewal or change that has blown over the Church in recent memory is the wind of the Second Vatican Council of 1962. According to the Council, “In every age, the church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel...Ours is a new age of history with profound and rapid changes spreading gradually to all comers of the earth” (The Catholic Church 1996, 165f). As a result, the Council deems it necessary to effect some changes in the liturgy in order to make it more meaningful to the people as it states: “The sacred council has set out to impart an ever-increasing vigor to the Christian lives of the faithful; to adapt more closely to the needs of our age those institutions which are

subject to change... Accordingly it sees particularly cogent reasons for undertaking the reform and promotion of the liturgy” (The Catholic Church 1996, 117). This brought some renewals in the Church some of which are overwhelmingly appreciated and some of which are not very much appreciated in certain quarters. However, it is not within the scope of this study to discuss all the changes and renewals the Second Vatican Council effected in the Church. This section of the study discusses the views of the respondents that the spirit of change and renewal that was initiated by the Council should be ongoing in respect to *ecclesia semper reformanda*. African Synod of Bishops and other similar synods in the Church are some of the means through which particular churches renew themselves in growth and development. According to the respondents, the wind of growth and renewal extends to church institutions such as the seminary. Hence they expect some change and renewal in the seminaries according to the light of the signs of the times. They are not unanimous on the type of change they anticipate, but their various views are articulated under the following headings: i) Modern Seminarian and Seminary ii) Formation in Freedom Openness to JAMB iv) Inculturation and Priestly Formation and v) Social Interaction with Women

i) Modern Seminarian and Seminary

The Lord Jesus Christ teaches that new wine should not be poured into old wineskins but into new wineskins so that nothing would be ruined of both the wine and the wineskins (Mk 2:22). This reference is made in relation to the views of some of the respondents that they are not being totally formed in the modern way in which they live. For some of the respondents, life is naturally dynamic. It is lived forward and not backward or static. For them, clinging to the old way of doing things when there is a new

way of doing it even better, is like living life backwards (CDE). The Church keeps talking about reforming and renewing her activities and institutions so as to remain relevant to the times and places of her ministry. This includes the special “program of priestly training” set up by each episcopal conference. Such program should be revised from time to time, with the approval of the Apostolic See, and be adapted to the particular “circumstances of the times and localities” so that the priestly formation will always synchronize with the pastoral needs of the regions concerned (The Catholic Church 1996, 365f).

For PRVD, the natural thing is to live life forward and training the modern seminarians according to the circumstances of their time and age is moving forward because things change and will continue to change. According to him, the age gap between him and the candidates is so wide that it is unfair to form them in the same mold with which he was formed during his years as a seminarian. This older formator is not expected to be replaced by a younger one. The seminarians need his wisdom and experience. He is expected to update himself through continuous education program for priests so as to be current with modern views and ideas in his field of service. In this way he will not deprive the seminarians of the modern means and ways of learning and formation stated by Vatican II. Many of the formators were ordained when computers and cell phones were unknown in the country. Now computers and cell phones are virtually everywhere in the country. As such, it is expected that the current or modern seminarians should be computer literate and cell phone savvy. Or they are formed in the modern way as PR1 indicated.

Incidentally, there is the expression of dismay among some of the candidate participants that the idea that they are being formed according to the signs of the times, to serve in the modern world does not seem to be completely real because in some seminaries, the use of personal computer is prohibited while the cell phone is virtually banned in all the seminaries (CDS). In other words, some seminaries allow the use of computers while some do not. Thus, it depends on the decision of seminary authorities. Otherwise, allowing or disallowing the use of the computer would have been general to all the seminaries in the region because they belong to the same province. The Pontifical Council for Social Communication's (2002) teaching on *The Church and Internet*, holds that candidates for the priesthood should be acquainted with the modern media of social communication that includes the Internet. According to the Pontifical Council, "Education and training regarding the Internet ought to be part of comprehensive programs of media education available to members of the Church. As much as possible, pastoral planning for social communications should make provision for this training in the formation of seminarians, priests, religious, and lay pastoral personnel as well as teachers, parents, and students," (n. 7). The Pontifical Council goes on to say: "This is necessary in order to communicate effectively with people - especially young people - who are steeped in the experience of this new technology, and also in order to use it well" (n. 5). The Pontifical Council approves the use of the computer or the Internet; it then behooves the local church to provide the teaching and learning opportunities for the candidates, especially on how to use them well.

With regard to the use of the cell phone, most of the candidates stated that cell phones are generally banned in all the seminaries. For the authorities, it is to protect the

candidates from the distractions associated with modern equipment. Moreover, some of the machines, like the cell phone, will ruin some seminary rules and regulations, especially, the rules of silence and discipline. The seminaries in the region have the rule of *magna silencia* which requires every seminarian to observe maximum silence during certain hours of the day and night. For instance, PR1 has a case where a seminarian communicates with his friend outside the seminary at four o'clock in the morning. He is supposed to be in bed and asleep, and not in any such communication. Hence, apart from the distraction it causes, PR1 entertains the fears that the rule of silence will be voided if seminarians are allowed to use the cell phones in the seminary. In addition, the ban on cell phone is necessary to maintain discipline and reduce noise in the seminary; because if it is allowed, the seminarian will use it everywhere including the noise sensitive areas in the seminary like the chapel. (PR1).

For the candidates, the fear should not exist when the matter has not been given a chance. For them, the authorities will only need to issue the guidelines or rules on how they want it to be used responsibly and that will guide each candidate in the seminary and later in the parish, if he becomes a priest. Seminaries in the southeastern region and Nigerian in general are famous for their emphasis on discipline and on rules and regulations. That should be maintained because it is working fine. But there are certain rules that were laid down so many years ago that need to be reformulated, relaxed or abrogated entirely especially, if they have become obsolete in the West where they originated. According to PR1, the cell phone is banned to save the rule of *magna silencia*, which is supposedly observed in the West without banning the cell phone. This may require finding out how the West has the rule of maximum silence all these years without

banning the cell phone so that it may be applied in the region. The finding may be the issue of discipline, which most of the southeastern seminarians are good at if they know or have the regulation. In other words, they will be equal to the task because they know that defaulting from the rule or regulation may mean instant termination of the offender's formation and expulsion from the seminary.

The use of these modern machines will not ruin the formation of the modern candidates for the priesthood as feared, otherwise Pontifical Council for Social Communications would not have approved it. The Internet, will enhance priestly formation, making certain things easy and simple for both the formators and candidates. For instance, on spiritual and academic bases, the Pontifical Council (2002) teaches that the Internet "offers people direct and immediate access to important religious and spiritual resources - great libraries and museums and places of worship, the teaching documents of the Magisterium, the writings of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church and the religious wisdom of the ages" (n. 5). A formator may give an assignment to the candidates from his room in the seminary and starts to read through them on his laptop from his hotel room in Lagos while attending formators' meeting. Instead of having heaps of assignment papers piled up on his table on his return. The machines may also save life in times of emergency. It is said that the proof of the pudding is in the eating. May be a trial will confirm or condemn what has been said. The next change proposed by some of the participants is on the system of formation and discernment.

ii) Formation in Freedom

Some of the participants made reference to freedom in relation to the process of formation and discernment of vocation. It was found that there was an alternative

program or system of priestly formation that offered the desired freedom but the program did not last long because of some objections from some formators. Not many of the participant candidates know about the short-lived system and so could only say little or nothing about it. But for the few candidates who experience the system, there is a lot of information on what it is all about because it is very popular among the seminarians of the seminary concerned. The seminarians generally know and refer to it as auto-formation, that is, self-formation and it is well-liked, well-spoken about and very well appreciated by the candidates concerned. They see it as the modern way of forming the modern priest. According to the participants who experienced it, the system offered freedom that enables candidates to engage in personal reflection and discernment. It offered compassion, care and concern from the formators who are there to guide, direct, counsel seminarians and to really help them to make adequate discernment of their vocations (CDE; CDU).

The above are in harmony with the views of Guy (2002, 62) who holds that while all the required psychological tests and other knowledge and preparations are necessary for adequate formation the candidates and the discernment of their vocations, “compassionate, sympathetic understanding way of working with people” like the candidates for the priesthood are equally necessary. According to Guy (2002), “The persons in charge of formation are there to guide these vocations and not to judge them. Their role is to assist the work of grace, making it possible to discern well the feelings and motivations which move the candidate” (62). It is to prepare each candidate, “to help him to see more clearly into himself: what he likes, what he can achieve by his own means, discovering within himself what he could do with his life.” Thus, “the goal is to

accompany each “candidate as he enters the ‘mystery of his own life’” (63). The participant formators like PR1 and PRVD, share similar views but the mode of their application at the seminaries makes the difference. When the seminarian goes home on holiday, the atmosphere of freedom he enjoys gives his parents some idea of the type of priest he will become if he receives ordination. A similar atmosphere: where the seminary is made to feel like a home away from his home, may equally provide the formators with similar information. According to them (CDE and CDU), when the converse is the case, the seminarians shrink into their shells in fear and the formators may rightly feel that the seminarians are not open to formation (PR1; PTF).

The Church has always been aware of the need for the seminary to be a family as has taught the need in different documents. In the *Optatam Totius*, the Church instructs that the major seminary administrators should under the leadership of the rector:

Form with one another and with the students a family such as the Lord had in mind when he prayed: “That they be one” (cf. John 17:11) and nourish in the students a delight in their vocation. The bishop, by his keen and affectionate care, should encourage the seminary staff and show himself a true father in Christ to the students. Finally, all priests should look on the seminary as the very heart of the diocese and should gladly help and support it (The Catholic Church 1996, 269).

Love of God and the other is a basic element that knits Christian community or family together in lasting bond.

John Paul II (1992) views the major seminary as a Christian community and he expresses this view from three connected Christian communal perspectives: community

perspective, human community perspective and ecclesial community perspective. From the community perspective: “It is a community established by the bishop to offer to those called by the Lord to serve as apostles the possibility of re-living the experience of formation which our Lord provided for the Twelve” (n.60). And in this seminary community various member “gathered by the Spirit into a single brotherhood, cooperate, each according to his own gift in the growth of all in faith and charity so that they may prepare suitably for the priesthood and so prolong in the Church and in history the saving presence of Jesus Christ, the good shepherd” (n. 60). The Christian community is a human community and so from “the human point of view, the major seminary should strive to become ‘a community built on deep friendship and charity so that it can be considered a true family living in joy’” (n. 60). And from the ecclesial perspective, John Paul II says: “As an ecclesial community, be it diocesan or interdiocesan, or even religious, the seminary should nourish the meaning of communion between the candidates and their bishop and presbyterate, in such a way that they share in their hopes and anxieties and learn to extend this openness to the needs of the universal Church” (n. 60). In all these, the Church presents the major seminary as a Christian community for what it really means, a friendly family of charity, unity, love, etc. And these are the qualities the candidates found and experienced in the self-formation system of training the future priests. This may explain why there is no expulsion from the YFT seminary for the time the self-formation system lasted.

When compared to the traditional method of formation, the candidates point to a lot of differences and changes that need to be made. They use words like intimidation, harshness, threat, rivalry, unjust expulsion, master-slave relationship, etc. to describe the

relationship between some formators and some candidates. And according to CDE: “In the environment of master-slave relationship, the idea of pretense, pleasing the master and hiding the real self is the order of the day.” (CDE). For CDU “when you use such harsh words on seminarians, some may close up, just hide everything and be following the rules sheepishly. But when they enter the ministry, they bring out their true color.” There are indications that these candidates who experienced the self-formation method of training are not happy with the authorities of some of the seminaries. Having had the experience of the modern method of priestly formation they refer to as formation in freedom that came to an abrupt end. They see every reason to change the traditional method but for the other candidates who have no idea of what they are talking about, there is no comment.

On the part of some of the formators, there are some candidates who do not like discipline and control. They want absolute freedom, to do things their own way, to leave the seminary compound every day or every weekend for various reasons (PR1). The method of formation in the region, even though it has been there for a long time is approved by the church and seminary authorities. It undergoes a review when the need arises. However, the implementation, according to some of the candidates, has to be reviewed. The formators share the view that their goal is to help the candidates bring out the best in them, to adequately discern their vocations. This implies that anything or person that inhibits the seminarian from opening up, from bringing out his best in order to attain adequate vocation discernment may not be in harmony with the spirit of formation of candidates for the priesthood and with the process of adequate vocation discernment.

Generally, it was found in this subsection, on the one hand, that there was a self-formation method of training the candidates for the priesthood that has been rescinded, but some candidates still think it is good for the modern time and would want to it to be revived. On the other hand, some of the formators seem not to know about the self-formation method and some seem comfortable with traditional method of formation and have nothing to fix about it. The next subsection discusses JAMB exam as a means of liberating the seminarians who feel they are not called to priestly ministry.

iii) Openness to JAMB

The JAMB entrance exam is taken annually for those who want to gain admission into a Nigerian university. There is also similar exam for those who wish to enter colleges or institutions of higher learning, as they are known in Nigeria. But the church authorities in the southeastern region prohibit the seminarians from taking any external exam they did not approved, such as the JAMB and similar exams. Some of the seminarians who are not certain that they will be allowed to continue in the seminary as well as those who have made up their mind to leave the seminary do take the exam anyway but secretly as a kind of their exit exam. But if the seminary authorities get a hint that a seminarian intends to take the exam he is expelled from the seminary for the highly competitive that is full of uncertainty. If he is unfortunate as not to succeed in the exam, that is if he fails to score up to the cut-off mark for the year, which depends on the course of study and university of choice, that will mean a year or years of academic setback, uncertainties and frustration for him. Hence it is always uncomfortable and risky endeavor for a seminarian to attempt the JAMB. But in spite of all that, some seminarians still take exam clandestinely and the authorities will only know about it if they succeed.

This hide and seek game over the JAMB has gone on for a long time and the church is not winning the game, especially with the development of more sophisticated technological means of registering and taking the exam. Hence some of the participants express the need for the authorities to reconsider and be open to it, to give approval to JAMB exam for the seminarians who are interested. They believe it may even serve as another tool for screening out some of those who do not have the right intention in the seminary. Seminary and church authorities as well as the seminarians know very well that all candidates in the seminary will not become priests and there is no immediate mark to identify those who will or will not reach the priesthood, or even those without the right intention. This call for the opening of all exit doors so that those who are not called, those who lost the interest, and those who want to leave for any reason can easily leave. As contained in *Optatam Totuis* (The Catholic Church 1996), the Lord will not leave the Church in want of priests on account of that:

In the entire process of selecting and testing students, however, a due firmness is to be adopted, even if a deplorable lack of priests should exist, since God will not allow His Church to want for ministers if those who are worthy are promoted and those not qualified are, at an early date, guided in a fatherly way to undertake other tasks. The latter should also be given sufficient direction so that, conscious of their vocation as Christians, they might eagerly embrace the lay apostolate (369).

Moreover, there are many candidates to choose from (PRF). Those who refuse to take the JAMB and those who took it but refuse to leave the seminary, according to PRVD, should be considered serious seminarians. The JAMB may also be seen as another

opportunity beyond the initial understanding of vocation, for a person to discern and decide, based on the knowledge acquired so far, to see if one still feels called to the priestly ministry. According to some of the participants like CDU, a seminarian should be free to opt out of the formation when discerns that he is not called to the ordained ministry.

That a seminarian should be free to leave the seminary, whenever he feels he is no longer interested in the priesthood, may be easy to say for any person. But it may not be easy to say by the authority that has been sponsoring him all the past years. This is an area that does not receive much thought. However, it feels like a parent will feel when his or her child drops out of school after years of sponsorship – disappointed, wastage of money. All the same, vocation to the priesthood is a gratuitous gift from God to human. It is not easy to know the young man who really possesses genuine vocation until he gets into the ministry. At the same time, a candidate is not accepted into the seminary on the condition that he must make it to the priesthood. It is the Lord that decides the outcome. Paul plants and Apollos waters, only God gives the increase (1Cor 3:6). And the believer should be ready to accept the outcome, likewise the authorities in terms of leaving the exit doors open. It is noted that the seminarian is free to leave the seminary when he likes, but no seminarian wants to leave the seminary abruptly, which will be a risky venture. He wants to make sure that he is leaving from the seminary to where he plans to be and not to waste any time roaming about in search of what he wants to do. That is for the expelled seminarian.

Next to this is also a view on academically related change that may be helpful to the church in the region. It involves the academic qualification a candidate has to show

after his eight years of study and formation in the seminary. The period of priestly formation in this region lasts at least eight years shared equally between philosophy and theology programs. The view for change says that the program of four years of philosophy and four years of theology can be reformulated to end in one bachelor's degree and one master's degree at the time of ordination of the suitably qualified candidate. The four-year philosophical program used to include the spiritual year but at this time, the spiritual year is a separate program and that may be an advantage should the view be considered by the authorities.

From CDE's perspective, a double bachelor's degree after eight years of study in the seminary sounds good but for people who are more conservative with time or program of study, a bachelor's degree and a master's degree can come out of it. The benefit of this can be seen in the region's priests' crave for further studies shortly after ordination. The idea of graduating from the seminary with a master's degree will significantly decrease the desire. It will also reduce the duration and consequently the amount of money it takes to obtain a doctorate degree because the priest may not have to go through a master's program.

In this subsection it was found that instead of prohibiting the seminarians from taking the JAMB exam, a successful JAMB result can be a part of the screening process. It was also found that the view to get two levels of academic degrees out of the formation period has been suggested before but was not taken up for discussion. The next subheading discusses the participants' view on the social interaction that should exist between the seminarian and the women folk as he prepares to work with them and for them in the priesthood.

iv) Inculturation and Priestly Formation

It was found that there are discussions and efforts at inculturation in the region, but there are still some aspects of the church or Christian life that inculturation has not touched. It is noted here that the event of the Second Vatican Council gave rise to much discussion and efforts at inculturation in Africa. But the idea of inculturation could be well perceived to have been there in God's salvific plan for the human race. According to the Synod of Bishops (1993) the entire content of the idea of inculturation is imbedded in the mystery of the incarnation as it is proclaimed in the gospel of Saint John (1:14): "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." Thus, God became man in Christ so that human beings might become God's children (n. 49). According to the document: "inculturation is a process by which Christian belief takes flesh in the cultures" (n. 50). The idea of inculturation could also be seen in the Lord's mandate to his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:19), and "the goal of inculturation is to make Christianity a religion that is acceptable to all" peoples and nations and cultures (Magesa 2004, 10). Inculturation is equally prefigured in the action of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost when peoples of different cultures received the message of salvation in their various native languages (Acts 2). In fulfilment of the Lord's missionary mandate, Paul "entered into dialogue with the Gentiles, peoples whose cultural and religious values were different from those of the Jews" (n. 49). He lived with them, ate with them and moved around among them while proclaiming the gospel of salvation to them. In other words, Paul immersed himself into the Gentiles, he made himself a Gentile, without losing his "Paulness," to win the Gentiles for Christ. Similarly, "Christianity becomes itself enriched when through inculturation it enters into dialogue with peoples and with

their cultures” (n. 49), because its message of salvation will be more meaningful to the peoples from inculturated perspective. Thus, “An inculturated evangelization will help peoples give flesh to evangelical values in their language and symbols, their history, politics, business life and own ways of developing” (n. 49). In that regard, the good news becomes their own good news and no longer foreign message.

It is the giving of African flesh to evangelical values, symbols, ways of developing, worshipping, training the future priests, African spirituality and of being authentic African church, etc. that has not been completely realized. It is on this ground that some of the respondents express concern that instead of moving forward, the region and Nigeria seem to remain stagnant or drifting back into the mud of colonial ways of doing things. According to CDE: “life is lived forward and not backwards.” And “repeating the mistakes of the past continuously” is not sign of progress, he added. CDE’s thought aligns with Iheanacho’s view that: “Rather than seek creative methods to enhance the prospects of Igbo Catholicism many among the indigenous Church leadership have stuck with the relics of out dated methods left behind by the Irish missionaries” (2004, 59). Although, Iheanacho particularized his thought on the church in Igbo tribe, his view can be applicable to other tribes of the region and to Nigerian in general.

Hence it could be said that the colonial masters have left Nigeria and her church, but their shackles are still here. The church in Nigerian has not been able to liberate herself completely from all those shackles. Some of those shackles, according to CDS, are left in the seminaries with their finger prints. For him, it as an “unfortunate” issue that in spite of the much talk about inculturation, and the formation of the future African

priests in the light of the signs of the times, the Nigerian priest is still being formed as if for western ministry. At the same time, the method of education in the seminary is still the “banking concept of education” left by the colonial masters which Freire (2003, 72ff) says is not the best method of education for liberation but the method that perpetuates dependency on the masters. On their part, the participants at the preparatory stage of the first African synod were also concerned that African priests are not being formed in African milieu. According to the Synod of Bishops (1993), “some Episcopal Conferences in Africa judge that the training being given to future priests and religious fails to root them well enough into their cultural inheritance” (n. 69). The participants deem it necessary that reform of the process of formation and change should follow so that future African priests will be formed in their own culture. They hold that where this change is not made and African seminarians continue to be formed in foreign culture “Some of those who become priests or religious in Africa may feel themselves alienated from their own culture” (n. 69). And “This state of things can lead to their living in a very insecure state, perpetually wearing a mask” (n. 69). For this and other reasons the participants believe that “the necessity and the urgency of inculturation are justified in Africa” (n. 49). The necessity of the change is generally accepted. It is the urgency aspect of it that the respondents are worried that it is not picking the expected steam.

Another formation issue that CDS points out for change concerns the spirituality with which the seminarians are formed which he says “is strictly Irish spirituality” instead of African spirituality. The *Instrumentum Laboris* (Synod of Bishops 1993) provides no immediate response to this but raises some more thought provoking questions that includes: “Could a spirituality steeped in African wisdom perhaps provide

a remedy to this condition?” It also asks, “How does one lead a truly priestly life and remain a man of one's people?” (n. 69). According to CDS: “we have African spirituality that is really congenial with our nature but sometimes we tend to abandon it as if it is inferior or as if it does not even exist, at times even deny it. But that spirituality helps seminarians to live their natural and spiritual life as well.” He also states: “we can be truly Africans and truly seminarians. So I think inculturation should be emphasized, not just in the changing of vestment or the vessels we use for the celebration of the Mass, but in the mentality of the seminarian and the whole formation program. It should reflect a true African identity.” People are naturally comfortable in their own skin, as such, African spirituality will enable the African seminarian or priest to be his authentic self in the ministry.

Next to that is the mode of dressing for the African seminarian during formation in the light of African milieu and inculturation. The respondent (PTF) does not speak of changing of the seminary outfit. He argues for additional clothing that is representative of African environment. The seminarians in the region wear the normal Church official religious attire, the soutane. The soutane or cassock is a clerical garment worn by priests and major seminarians alike. In Nigeria and most countries in the tropics, the color is white while many other countries have it in black color. According to PTF, the seminarian is expected to wear the soutane all the time, among other things, for identify. He is of the view that in the spirit of inculturation, it will be nice to have another kind of dress, informal dress, which the seminarians can easily wear some of the times in place of the soutane. For instance, certain day or days of the week may be dedicated to African attire or others whereby the seminarians are allowed to attend classes in clothes other

than the soutane. According to the *Code of Canon Law* (Canon Law Society of America, 1983): “Clerics are to wear suitable ecclesiastical garb according to the norms issued by the conference of bishops and according to legitimate local customs” (Can. 284).

Similarly, the bishops, as leaders in the inculturation process may, in consideration of the local customs and condition, authorize the seminaries to have some other African or other wears to support the soutane for a little change or for variety. Moreover, there are certain seasons of the year when the weather is hot that wearing the soutane in the heat of the day feels uncomfortable. The idea is to have some informal dress (not uniform) or simple clothes that the seminarians already have or they can easily purchase for informal occasions.

In this subsection, the respondents want the wind of change to bring change and renewal to all aspects of the church in order to make and keep the African church and her institutions authentically African. The discussion on the next subsection is centered on the social interaction that should exist between the seminarian and the female folks while in formation.

v) Social Interaction with Women

It was found in this subsection that the relationship between seminarians and women at some of the seminaries in the region is so negatively assessed that it seems that there is no cordial positive relationship between them. Some of the respondents express the displeasure that ordinary standing or talking with a woman is frowned upon by some of the formators and church authorities. As a result, the seminarians do not feel free to associate with the female folks or they can do it with fear and the risk of being misinterpreted and face the unfavorable consequence. And the consequence may range

from suspension to expulsion from the seminary. The negative impression, according to CSS does not only exist in the seminary but has even become a mindset among many local people. For him, it is when a seminarian discerns and decides to leave the seminary because it has become clear to him that his vocation is not the priesthood. His departure is interpreted by such people that he left or was expelled from the seminary because of a woman. Thus, the mindset is: behind the fall of every seminarian, there is a woman which is a very wrong notion. There is an unwritten rule for the seminarians, keep away from female folks or they will ruin your vocation. This enforces this erroneous notion. While there may be some reason for this or may be some elements of truth behind the unwritten rule, the generalization seems to be on the extreme. Women do not ruin a genuine formation for a seminarian. Rather it is a seminarian who may ruin his own vocation by his thoughts and words and by what he does or what he fails to do and not by sincere cordial godly relationship he has with women.

Some of the candidate respondents are both confused and afraid on how to handle the issue of relationship with women because they are fully aware that they cannot avoid association with women in the ministry when they become priests. When a seminarian or a priest is posted to a parish in the region, one of the first well-organized groups to welcome him is the women group. Women perform a lot of lay apostolate ministry or service that sustains the parish. The staff of the parish school are mostly women, likewise the staff of the healthcare facility attached to the parish. The same is equally true of those who clean the priests' house (rectory) and office as well as most of the cooks (chefs) the parish ever had. The priest meets with women at Mass every day. He meets with them at the prayer meetings and other meetings of the various pious societies and organizations

of the parish. The seminarian, who becomes a priest serving in the parish, cannot avoid these and other such meetings. The problem the formators are trying to avoid may also arise in the course of the parish ministry. Some of the respondents believe that a well-organized regular interaction with women will set them on the right part on how to respectfully and responsibly work with and for women in the ministry. They believe that seminarians should be allowed and even encouraged to have open cordial interactions with women just as they have with their own sisters and family members (CDM; CDE). In all, they want to be directed, they want: “healthy suggestion, healthy enlightenment, healthy upbringing to help the seminarian balance his life because when he becomes a priest he will find himself in the midst of the Catholic Women Organization and the Mary League Girls’ Association’ (CDE). This corresponds with Herr’s view that the candidate for the priesthood “must have a wholesome and healthy attitude toward sex. The man must recognize the fact of sexuality and sex differences and be able to reconcile in his own thinking the need for parenthood with the need for ministers” (80). Adequate response on the side of the formators and seminary authorities may transform social interactions in the seminary and with the seminarians. This will include adequate human formation for the seminarians.

The Church has always stressed the importance of affective maturity, understanding of human sexuality, and appreciation of celibacy on the part of priests and the candidates for the priesthood. Affective maturity and celibacy spring from human maturity and all three: celibacy, affective maturity, and human maturity are nourished. They are enhanced by adequate human formation which is the foundation of all the areas of priestly formation. According to John Paul II (1992): “The whole work of priestly

formation would be deprived of its necessary foundation if it lacked a suitable human formation” (n. 43). When the candidate is fully formed in all the areas of formation with effective integration, the result is a balanced personality fit and needed for the ordained ministry (Congregation for Catholic Education 1974, n. 2). Hence the responsibility lies on the formators to ensure that the candidates are adequately formed or helped to form themselves in these areas. With regard to human maturity, John Paul II teaches: the priest or candidate for the priesthood should seek to reflect in himself, as far as possible, the human perfection that is in Christ and “order that his ministry may be humanly as credible and acceptable as possible.” He “should mold his human personality in such a way that it becomes a bridge and not an obstacle for others in their meeting with Jesus Christ the Redeemer of humanity” (John Paul II 1992, n. 43). He should also “be able to know the depths of the human heart, to perceive difficulties and problems, to make meeting and dialogue easy, to create trust and cooperation, to express serene and objective judgments” (n. 43). He should equally “cultivate a series of human qualities... out of proper and due growth and realization of self,” and “also with a view to the ministry” (n.43) These qualities are necessary for him to be a balanced person, “strong and free, capable of bearing the weight of pastoral responsibilities” (n. 43). These should also include the formation of the candidate’s moral conscience which is intimately connected with formation in responsible freedom that calls for obedience to moral obligation (n. 44).

Pertaining to affective maturity, John Paul II (1992) explains that: “Affective maturity presupposes an awareness that love has a central role in human life” (n.44). According to him, “human cannot live without love. In other words, human “life is

meaningless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it” (n.44). The love at issue here is not about an aspect of a person but “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” (n.44) that involves the conjugal act of mutual self-giving. When properly imparted and accurately understood, “sexual education leads to understanding and realizing this ‘truth’ about human love (n. 44). John Paul II advises that “We need to be aware that there is a widespread social and cultural atmosphere which ‘largely reduces human sexuality to the level of something commonplace, since it interprets and lives it in a reductive and impoverished way by linking it solely with the body and with selfish pleasure’” (n. 44). This lends the strength of appropriateness to the respondents’ desire for guidance or direction to the right or responsible approach to relationships or association with persons of the opposite gender. John Paul II goes further to express the importance of such education. According to him:

Education for responsible love and the affective maturity of the person are totally necessary for those who, like the priest, are called to celibacy, that is, to offer with the grace of the Spirit and the free response of one’s own will the whole of one’s love and care to Jesus Christ and to his Church. In view of the commitment to celibacy, affective maturity should bring to human relationships of serene friendship and deep brotherliness a strong, lively and personal love for Jesus Christ. As the synod fathers have written, ‘A love for Christ, which overflows into a dedication to everyone, is of the greatest importance in developing affective

maturity. Thus the candidate, who is called to celibacy, will find in affective maturity a firm support to live chastity in faithfulness and joy.’ (n. 44)

John Paul II observes that sometimes a candidate may not only be a product of the society and culture that have erroneous interpretation of sexuality, but also from a family that has such or even more serious weaknesses, poor understanding and attitude to sexuality.

According to him: “In such a context, an education for sexuality becomes more difficult but also more urgent” (n. 44). However, if in spite of time lapse, the educational and psychological efforts to heal him and a candidates still exhibits grave immaturity such as “strong affective dependencies; notable lack of freedom in relations; excessive rigidity of character; lack of loyalty; uncertain sexual identity; deep-seated homosexual tendencies; etc. And should this should be the case, the path of formation will have to be interrupted” (Congregation 2005, n. 10). Affective immaturity will be a burden to the ministry of the candidate as a priest and will also affect his gift of celibacy and the virtue of chastity hence the need for utilization of the necessary tool for adequate vocation discernment.

For some of the respondents, such tools should include free and open social interactions with persons of the opposite gender, as may be organized or as may be warranted by some social and other gatherings in the seminary. According to CSS, freedom of social interaction would not only help the candidates manifest their affective maturity or immaturity, but will also enable the formators to judge the level of maturity and thus discern the genuineness of their vocations. In his words: “We should be allowed to act in freedom so that our full personality would be seen and help the authorities to discern the vocations. We should be formed all round and not only one side – the men way or the men side.” The idea of having for the priesthood, candidates with balanced personality

has already been stated above. But it has to be emphasized that it is one of the goals of priestly formation.

Discussion on affective maturity involves celibacy as a special gift for the ministry of the priesthood. This gift has to be protected from the threat of affective immaturity and from the ills of some Social and cultural displeasure. According to John Paul II (1992): “the charism of celibacy, even when it is genuine and has proved itself, leaves one’s affections and instinctive impulses intact, candidates to the priesthood need an affective maturity which is prudent, able to renounce anything that is a threat to it, vigilant over both body and spirit, and capable of esteem and respect in interpersonal relationships between men and women” (n. 44). Therefore, the candidate who is called to the celibate priesthood should be formed to understand clearly and positively, “without any ambiguities” and to “appreciate, love and live celibacy according to its true nature and...real purposes, that is, for evangelical, spiritual and pastoral motives” (n.44). And not “just as a legal norm or as a totally external condition for admission to ordination” (n.44). But “a choice of a greater and undivided love for Christ and his Church” (n.44) and after the example of Christ, to love all and each person. He should also be formed to love and live the virtue of chastity which is a premise for his preparation for the priesthood as well as its content (n. 50). As a result, John Paul II continues: “In order that the seminarian may be able to embrace priestly celibacy for the kingdom of heaven with a free decision, he needs to know the Christian and truly human nature and purpose of sexuality in marriage and in celibacy” (n. 50). Herr concurs with this view in this statement: “the applicant for the priesthood must have a wholesome and healthy attitude toward sex. The man must recognize the fact of sexuality and sex differences and be able

to reconcile in his own thinking the need for parenthood with the need for ministers” (80). On the other hand, to offer the priest or seminarian some friendly assistance to live his call to celibate priesthood, John Paul II (1992) advises that: “It is necessary also to instruct and educate the lay faithful regarding the evangelical, spiritual and pastoral reasons proper to priestly celibacy so that they will help priests with their friendship, understanding and cooperation” (n. 50). In other words, there are certain ways those who are not ordained, faithful women and men, can equally help the priests and candidates for the priesthood to live celibate and chaste life of their call.

Additionally, the Congregation (2005) instructs that all the emphasis for affective maturity or the ability for the candidate to live the celibate life should not be focused only on the avoidance of sexual relation because: “it is not enough to be sure that he is capable of abstaining from genital activity. It is also necessary to evaluate his sexual orientation, according to the indications published by this Congregation. Chastity for the Kingdom, in fact, is much more than the simple lack of sexual relationships” (n. 8). And the publication of the Congregation (2005) says the Church: “cannot admit to the seminary or to holy orders those who practice homosexuality, present deep-seated homosexual tendencies or support the so-called ‘gay culture,’” because “Such persons, in fact, find themselves in a situation that gravely hinders them from relating correctly to men and women” (n. 2). Thus, the call to celibate and chaste priestly life and ministry demands human and affective maturity as well as appropriate or correct manner of relating to men and women. And this is what some of the participating candidates asked for: the directives or guidance on “relating correctly with men and women” (n.2) within the formation period and not the prohibition, especially with the female folks.

It has to be stated at this juncture that the prohibition or restriction at play here has deep rooted tradition in most areas of the region and the nation, especially in matters of religion. In the recent past at the areas concerned, women must dress in certain ways and are not expected to be seen in the company of men unless when necessitated by certain events. To be regularly seen in the company of the opposite sex is often interpreted as sign of waywardness, untrained self or some form of immaturity which may carry some stigma. Even in the local churches of those areas, sex segregation is very conspicuous: women and men sit at separate sections of the church. Some modern priests are doing their best to end the practice but it is already in the subconscious. Some of these priests have gone to the extent of offering incentives for couples to seat together in the church during Mass. A visit to any church within the areas on any given Sunday will show how much success or failure the priests have earned in their attempt to break the barrier. On the other hand, for some priests, the arrangement is normal. For others, it does not matter whether men and women sit together or separately in the church since nobody is complaining. Most of the formators and authorities are products of the generation for sex segregation who frown at the modern priests who are changing the old order of doing things. The modern participant seminarian is like trying to take the change to advanced level of free open interaction with the opposite sex. But from their background, that is not normal for most of the formators. These are some of the factors responsible for how much room seminarians are allowed to interact with the female folks. The next section discusses the termination of vocation.

c) **Termination of Formation**

The termination of formation to the priesthood comes in various ways according to PR1. It may come abruptly as is the case when a candidate commits a scandal or one of the offences which attracts immediate and non-discussable penalty of expulsion from the seminary. Expulsion may also occur in cases of inadequate discernment where arbitrary decisions are taken based on what one or few formators think, feel or want because there is no laid down procedure or where the procedure is disregarded. All the above can devastate a candidate especially, if the candidate has genuine vocation but happened to make a mistake of spontaneous negative reaction, misguided act, a careless oversight, culpable ignorance, or similar mistakes. Termination of formation to the priesthood may also take a gradually process as in adequate vocation discernment. With a firm procedure of adequate vocation discernment, a candidate is gently and gradually led through his performances over the years to the point where he can see beyond any reasonable doubt that his path does not lead to the priesthood. For John Paul II (1982), such unsuitable candidates “should be firmly and charitably advised to follow another vocation (John Paul II 1982, n.6) There are reasons to believe that where this manner of friendly, gentle approach is adopted, expulsion from the seminary will start to assume a new, less hurtful meaning.

An ex-seminarian may proudly say: I decided to leave the seminary for this or that reason. But the phrase: “expelled from the seminary,” is a label no seminarian wants to be associated with because of the pains and some negative connotations often associated with it in some localities of the region. Instead of sympathy, an expelled seminarian in the area face may criticism, disparagement, humiliation, and defamation of character

from some of those who know he is expelled from the seminary. The various reasons for most of the expulsions here may be summed up in one word: “disobedience.” What constitutes disobedience varies from seminary to seminary and from authority to authority. For instance, the reason for which seminary “A” expels a seminarian may only merit a warning or suspension in seminary “B.” It thus depends on the seminary authorities: some are very strict and some are moderate. That is where the issue of adequate vocation discernment comes in to ensure that seminarians are not expelled for reasons that do not merit expulsion. While it is true that no seminarian is expelled without reason, according to PR2, the reasonableness of the reason matters a lot. Every seminarian knows the seminary catch phrases: “obedience is the first rule in heaven,” “obedience is better than sacrifice” and “obey before complain.” The importance of obedience is expressed and how seriously an offence disobedience is taken. The “disobedience” that is the basis of the expulsions has two major parts: disobedience to the rules and regulations of the seminary and disobedience to constituted seminary or church authority. Other proven acts of disobedience or disrespect outside these groups, like the family, when reported to the seminary authorities are also recorded against the seminarian concerned. That is part of the human formation. The seminarian is being formed to be the same person everywhere and every time, whether he is being watched or not. Failure to meet certain requirements during formation may also lead to the termination of the formation. For instance, the inability to meet the intellectual or academic requirements, in spite of getting every other thing right, will still lead to the termination of the formation by being “advised to withdraw” and seek a different career. Because it is a failure in one of the four areas formation: intellectual formation and also a

flouting (disobeying), one of the seminary rules and regulation that requires certain academic grade to proceed. But it is not a crime like that of a candidate who engages in exam malpractice.

As it stands, discernment of vocation is continuous process from the time of admission into the seminary until ordination. Likewise, expulsion of a candidate can occur at any stage of his formation even weeks or days before ordination if the positive arguments that prove his suitability happen to falter or change that late due to his deed or omission. Consequently, expulsion, as has been stated may result from deliberate act, culpable grave mistake and even from the misdeeds of a companion. That is why seminarians are always advised to be careful of the company they keep because the authorities here are not forensic experts who will spend months or years to investigate all the microscopic intricacies of how much or to what extent a candidate is involved in a particular act that merits expulsion. Here, a broad brush is used to paint all those within the vicinity of the issue and the guilt and punishment are distributed equitably.

i) Effect of Expulsion

Due to the abrupt nature of many expulsions, PTF describes it as “crash-landing” with devastating effects. The ability of a seminarian to survive certain expulsion without psychological disastrous effect or even death, depends on how emotionally strong the he is built, how much emotional and other supports he has and the level of formation he has attained. The nearer a candidate is to ordination, the greater the impact of his expulsion will have on him. The expelled seminarian is often deserted to lick his own wounds at that critical time when he needed the most support. And the first few weeks and months are the most critical. His disappointed and helpless parents have no clue how to handle an

expelled seminarian. All they may know or feel is that their son is in agony, highly distressed. And his fellow seminarians are in the seminary, not available to keep him company if the expulsion occurs when school is in session. Some of the priests he knows and who know him, do not want anything anymore to do with an expelled seminarian and may even be outright mean to him if he shows up in their parish. For those who have unfavorable and little or no sympathy for of an expelled seminarian, he is a sinner, a wolf among lambs that has been flushed out of the seminary. Consequently, the devastation could only be imagined and may last for many years, according PR1, before the seminarian recuperates. The effect of expulsion will be very much minimized with open form of formation where there is no secrecy and no surprises as in adequate vocation discernment. In this format, the seminarian will be helped to track or be informed/reminded of his performance on regular basis. He will be made to see his approaching expulsion and given the opportunity to save his vocation, if it is salvageable. Otherwise he prepares himself or is helped to prepare to leave the seminary.

It should be noted that the effect of expulsion is not only felt by the expelled seminarian but also by his family, friends, and close associates. It may also be felt by his parish, especially if he is getting close to ordination. There was a case of a seminarian who was expelled about a year before his ordination. Customarily in the region, at this stage of formation, the expectant and excited parish must have gone a long way in preparation for the ordination. When the expelled seminarian got home and narrated his story to his parish, there was an uproar. The parish took to the streets in demonstration against the authorities. Rarely, if ever, has a parish so much felt the effect of the expulsion of their candidate and express their pain so openly.

One of the reasons some expelled seminarians feel so devastated, almost inconsolable, is because there is no second chance. Each seminarian in the region knows that irrespective of how genuine his vocation may be or how great and wonderful he is as a seminarian. Anytime he strays into the area that merits instant expulsion, whether by accident or by design, and he is expelled from the seminary. That may be the end of his vocation; there is no second chance elsewhere in the region or country. CDU believes a second chance at priestly vocation elsewhere will be of immense help to the expelled seminarian. According to him, the expelled candidate's bishop "can release him to join any other diocese or religious congregation of his choice," which will finally confirm whether or not he is really called to the priesthood. CDU's view has a place in the directives of the Congregation for Catholic Education (2008). The Congregation has room for a second chance with certain conditions. According to the Congregation, "It is contrary to the norms of the Church to admit to the seminary or to the house of formation persons who have already left or, *a fortiori*, have been dismissed from other seminaries or houses of formation, without first collecting the due information from their respective bishops or major superiors, especially concerning the causes of the dismissal or departure" (n. 16). It also directs that "the previous formators have the explicit duty of furnishing exact information to the new formators" of the admitting seminary. On his part, "the candidate must inform the new formators about any psychological consultation previously carried out" (n.16). For verification of the result, he has to grant the new formators "access to the communication of the expert who carried out the consultation." The Congregation stipulates that the access can only be gained with the candidate's free written consent, (n. 16). When all the required information is obtained and verification is

completed, the candidate is granted another chance at his vocation. Incidentally, this second chance opportunity is currently suspended in the region of study to avoid conflict and abuse.

ii) Assisting the Expelled Seminarian to Adjust

Most of the participating priests are aware that expulsion can have devastating effect on a seminarian. As a result, they believe that it is wise to offer the expelled seminarian some assistance to stabilize him so that his life is not “destroyed completely,” (CDE; PR2). For PRVD effort should be made to see that “no seminarian leaves the seminary with bitterness.” This according to him “...every rector will be in sympathy with any seminarian who was asked to discontinue or any seminarian who leaves and we try to make the pattern friendly because you don’t know what this student here will be in the future.” Other participants expressed various views of efforts that should or that are being made to help the expelled seminarian. According to PR2, as soon as an expulsion has been pronounced, we “explain to the student concerned why we advised him to find his call in other areas of life style so that the person’s life is not destroyed.” And then spiritual, moral and psycho-social support is provided to him through the spiritual director and the psychologist. Also, their seminary academic program has been organized “in such a way that any seminarian who leaves can still fit well in the society.” Similarly, PTF is of the view that with the affiliation many seminaries to some local Nigeria universities, seminary academic programs should be designed in such a way that when a seminarian is expelled from the seminary, he may find it easy to continue his study in the concerned university. CDE opines that each seminary should include secular courses in their curriculum so that an expelled seminarian may use his certificate to find some

gainful job to help himself fit into the society. For CDM the diocesan authorities of the expelled seminarian can introduce him to the diocesan ‘Vocation Interest Promotion’ group or association to help him with job or with the adjustment he needs. On his part, PR1 believes it is not only the seminary or the church may help an expelled seminarian, his class mates, especially when they become priests and notice that he is not doing well. They should collectively help him as much as they can (PR1).

Another significant assistance the expelled seminarian needs to adjust is the timely release of the documents that will enable him to move on from the seminary and find his way in the society. PR2 and PR1 affirmed the importance of timely release of the expelled candidate’s transcripts and every other document he may need. According to PR2, “The certificates and other transcripts are personal documents of the seminarian as such the bishop or any other authority should not hold them back, deny or refuse it to the seminarian.” On his part, PR1 says he normally assures the expelled seminarians thus: “even though you are leaving here, if you have any problem about transcript I will assist you.” And he tries to keep his words to them.

This section presents the termination of formation. It identifies some of the issues that can lead to the termination of formation and the consequent expulsion of the candidate concerned from the seminary. Most of the respondents agree that expulsion can have a devastating effect on the expelled seminarian. As a result, they are of the view that it is important to make each expulsion as painless as possible through some seminary programs and any other initiative. This will enable the expelled seminarian to adjust smoothly to life in the society because he still has a future which may turn out to be of much benefit to the Church.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

a) Conclusion

This research explores the process of vocation discernment to the Catholic priesthood at the seminaries in the southeastern Nigeria. The intent is to provide the seminaries in the region with some additional tools to enhance their process of vocation discernment. The study is based on the premise that vocation discernment in the region is not as thorough as it should be at of some of the seminaries. The premise itself stems from the researcher's experience and others' shared experience during the eight years he underwent priestly formation. During the period of his formation, many seminarians are asked to leave or expelled. This prompted some questions about vocation discernment as contained under research questions in chapter one. Such questions include but not limited to: What is vocation discernment? How is vocation discernment carried out? Who are the agents of vocation discernment? And some questions also about expulsion of seminarians. These questions are expected to provide some answers to the research problems. That is, some problems envisaged to be responsible for some of the cases of inadequate vocation discernment as stated in *section c* of chapter one. They include: the problem of vocation boom, the type of relationship between the formators and the seminarians, fear of living the authentic self on the part of some of the seminarians, lack of or insufficient number of experts to detect latent harmful traits before ordination and the problem of some questionable expulsion of seminarians.

These problems are synthesized *vis-à-vis* some of the interview questions and in relation to the empirical findings of the study that utilizes the general theoretical literature

on the subject. In that respect, this concluding chapter of the study is a synthesis of the major findings of those problems that militate against adequate vocation discernment. It suggests some solutions to the problems way forward.

Problem with Vocation Boom

In line with the research hypotheses, it was found that due to the large number of seminarians, thorough or adequate vocation discernment is not always assured at some of the seminaries of the region. This stems from the fact that due to the pride of place the priesthood occupies in the region, many families are eager to have their children aspire for the ministry of the priesthood. The local churches also encourage young men in various ways to embrace the vocation to the priesthood. Consequently, there is a vocation explosion that sees large number of candidates for the priesthood in the regional seminaries, but with much lesser or insufficient number of formators to form them. As a result, the overwhelmed formators find it very difficult, near impossible to have that personal touch with each of the candidate, which is necessary for adequate vocation discernment (PR1). It is such that some of the candidates get swallowed up in the crowd and reach the priesthood without adequate vocation discernment that proves the suitability of a candidate for the priesthood. Thus, vocation boom without formator boom in the seminaries is found to be a problem to adequate vocation discernment. This calls for an increase in the number of formators in the seminaries or some other alternative plan to help improve the situation as expressed below.

To teach in the seminary is not a privilege offered to whoever wants it. There are specific requirements or qualifications the seminary educator has to possess. The Synod of Bishops (1994); the Congregation for Catholic Education (1993, 36), The Catholic

Church (1996, 369) as well as John Paul II (1992, n. 66), all have some specified caliber or qualifications the seminary formators should have. According to John Paul II (1992), “For this ministry, priests of exemplary life should be chosen, men with a number of qualities: ‘human and spiritual maturity, pastoral experience, professional competence, stability in their own vocation, a capacity to work with others, serious preparation in those human sciences (psychology especially) which relate to their office, a knowledge of how to work in groups’” (n.66). In this light, that one is a priest does not qualify him for the post of a formator in the seminary (CDE). It was found that not only that some of the regional seminaries do not have sufficient number of formators, some of their formators are not qualified according to the specifications of the Church (PR2). Additionally, to teach in the seminary is not the most attractive ministry for priests. As a result, priests are not hustling to teach in the seminary at the same rate as candidates are eager to enter the seminary. All these in some form contribute to the shortage of formators in the seminaries.

However, the solution to this problem is believed to reside with the diocesan bishops of the region. The region has many priests and the priests are under the authority of the bishops. It is therefore within the power of the bishops to select from among their best priests, those they wish to undergo the training to become seminary formators. Where there is no restriction to the number of priests per diocese, some of the dioceses in the region can conveniently donate up to eight or more of their priests for this purpose. Alternatively, if it is not possible to have sufficient number of formators from the dioceses, various congregations in the region can be approached for help. While that fails to solve the problem as well, they will have to consider a procedure to reduce the number

of new admissions into the seminaries each year. The bishops with their directors of vocations will have to work with the rectors and agree or recommend the proportionate number of candidates each diocese will have send to the seminary each year. The recommendation will consider, among other things, the precise number of active qualified formators in each seminary so that they can easily have complete control and account of all the candidates. With such design, it is assumed that no more will a seminarian remain anonymous or enter the priesthood anonymously. Rather each of them will have sufficient personal touch of some of the formators in terms of formation and vocation discernment.

Expert in Psychological Sciences

Related to the problem of insufficient number of formators, it was also found that there is the problem of insufficient or lack of experts in psychological sciences at some of the seminaries. These experts help to evaluate the candidates to detect as early as possible whatever psychological problems they may have. Incidentally, some seminaries have none or insufficient number of such experts. Consequently, the psychological suitability of some candidates are not evaluated while some others did not undergo the evaluation for the required number of times. As a result, there are reports of some priests who at various points of their ministry develop or manifest some psychological problem which could have been detected in the seminary if they had gone through the required psychological evaluations. The problem statement of the study referred to such psychological problems that manifest themselves after ordination as *latent harmful trait*. It thus demonstrates that many of such problems have been there long before ordination but concealed within the psyche.

The problem may be solved by employing sufficient number of experts in the psychological sciences per seminary. It may also be solved by ensuring that all the candidates for the priesthood undergo the required number of psychological evaluation at various stages of their formation before ordination (PTF). According to the Congregation for Catholic Education (1974, n. 38), “many tragic experiences” will be avoided by early detection through the evaluations. In the light of the Congregation’s requirement for the suitable psychologists to attend to the candidates, it may be more profitable for the local churches of the region to have their own well-trained psychologists both priests and lay people. In that regard, they may have a durable team of experts in psychological sciences and there will be no fear as to whether they have the same faith and view of vocation and priestly life with the candidates they may evaluate. The experts are not required to be part of the formation team (Congregation for Catholic Education 2008, n.6). But their relationship with the church will enable them to be available whenever their expertise is needed by the formation team or the spiritual directors for the candidates.

Relationship with Seminary Authorities

Another stated problem that affects adequate vocation discernment is the kind of relationship that exists between the seminarians and the authorities. The Church teaches that the seminary should be a family of love, peace, and unity in Christ. It is incumbent on the authorities to ensure the realization of such familial environment. According to the Catholic Church (1996, 369) successful formation of the candidates will depend on the manner of thinking and acting of the seminary administrators and teachers in the seminary family. According to the document, “Under the rector’s leadership they are to form a very closely knit community both in spirit and in activity and they are to constitute

among themselves and with the students that kind of family that will answer to the Lord's prayer 'That they be one' (cf. John 17:11) and that will develop in the students a deep joy in their own vocation" (n.5). On his part, the bishop should "prove himself a true father in Christ to the students themselves" (n.5). Similarly, John Paul II (1992) speaks of friendly and family atmosphere in the seminaries as follows: "The major seminary should strive to become 'a community built on deep friendship and charity so that it can be considered a true family living in joy'" (60). In this spirit, some of the participating candidates express the desire to have that kind of loving, caring seminary family where true freedom and self-development will enable the candidates realize adequate vocation discernment.

It was found, however, that the relationship between the seminarians and the authorities at some of the seminaries is not as cordial as it should be. Some of the participating candidates complain of a master-slave relationship that is rift with fear as well as words and acts of intimidation directed to some of them. At the seminaries concerned, the relationship between the seminarians and the formators is at its best, too formal and at its worst, the "master-slave relationship" of the colonial years. Some of the authorities seem to wield such power to retain or dismiss seminarians they personally deem unsuitable for the priesthood without reference to adequate vocation discernment procedure. There is fear, tension and much talk or threat of suspension and expulsion in the seminary, etc. As a result, the scared seminarians try their best to avoid the authorities. By so doing, the seminarians also hide talents, personal initiatives and certain behaviors that will help to discern their vocation accurately.

The resolution of this problem will depend on the authorities application of the Church's teaching on the issue as contained in the *Optatm Totius, Pastores Dabo Vobis*

and other related documents. The environment of freedom of association and friendship between the seminarians the authorities will among other things, provide the seminarians with the atmosphere to engage in serene personal vocation discernment. It will also release the tension and dispose them to directly or indirectly provide the authorities with some true pictures of who they really are for the discernment process. It may not be rightly said that vocation discernment that was made under tension, frustration, fear, anger, or stressful condition is adequate vocation discernment. CDM expressed surprise at seeing seminarians of a religious congregation eating with their priests as they normally do and talking with the Rector as friends. There is need for the spirit and attitude of brotherly love, trust, respect, humility, regard, care, and concern for the other between the formators and the seminarians.

False self

This is also one of the concerns stated as a contributing factor to the problems of vocation discernment. And it was found that some seminarians do not live their authentic self in the seminary due to fear. Fear, as an inhibiting factor, can minimize and suppress the freedom of self-expression, authentic living and relationship. It can also instigate some sense of falsehood or false self before the person who stimulates the fear.

According to Neafsey (2006) false self is born out of perceived fear or experience that “one’s actual emotional reality” or expression of the authentic self, which is not bad in itself, would not yield positive outcome before the authorities. And so, to appear acceptable to the authorities, or to avoid being called the bad one for having a different view from others’, some of the candidates chose to put on “a kind of inauthentic mask that is motivated by the need to adjust or conform to the expectations...., either to win

their approval or to avoid their rejection” (54). Rejection by the authorities is an experience no seminarian wishes to have. As a result, candidates make concerted effort to ensure they will not encounter such “misfortune.” According to CDE, during the time of a certain rector who allows seminarians ample freedom to live their life as they should, the seminarians lived their life authentically. They were open to the formators, to spiritual director and to their formation in general. But later, when the open doors of freedom were closed under a different Rector; the seminarians retracted into their shells and put on false fronts.

The foregoing shows that seminarian who put on false self, do so as a reaction, in defense or to protect them in an unfavorable condition: fear of rejection. And this is a problem for adequate vocation discernment because it is not easy to detect every attitude of falsehood. Since fear is a reason for false self, the authorities may consider a measure that assures the seminarians real freedom from fear to live their life as they should: freedom of expression and association.

Problem of expulsion

It was found that some seminaries in the region have good, elaborate procedure. They have a network pattern of vocation discernment that involves many persons. But the manner in which some seminarians are dismissed from the seminaries raises concern as to how or whether process of vocation discernment is being adequately implemented. There are cases of unexpected expulsions that leave the seminarians concerned in utter bewilderment. Such kind of expulsion hurts more than others. That is why the reasons for expulsions should not be all confidential as it is often the case with some seminaries. In

this manner, many expulsion incidents tend to lose the teachable or learning moments they would have been to the rest of the seminarians.

John Paul II (1982) advises that: “Seminarians who are really unsuitable for ordination should be firmly and charitably advised to follow another vocation,” he implies there should be a procedure for the termination of the formation of a seminarian. Adequate vocation discernment just does that. It selects the suitably qualified candidates for the priesthood and graciously encourages or directs the unsuitable candidates to seek a different vocation. But the abruptness, randomness, and the secrecy of the reasons for some of the expulsions leave sufficient room to doubt the proper application of a procedure for adequate vocation discernment. The solution lies in a firm procedure of adequate vocation discernment that ought to be followed at all times.

Certainly, the region is blessed with lots of seminarians to choose from, but that should not be a reason to expel a seminarian at the least offence or because a certain formator does not like him without reference to proper vocation discernment procedure. The discernment of vocation which determines whether a candidate leaves or continues with the priestly formation, should have a firm procedure as demanded by the Fathers of the first African Synod, so that when a seminarian is asked to leave, it will be clear to him and to others that it is the right thing for him and for the Church. It is true that expulsion of a seminarian is the punishment due to his shortcomings. The intention is not to ruin his life as a participant suggests. The primary intention is for the good of the Church and the good of the Church is not opposed to the good of the members of the church like the expelled seminarian. The expelled seminarian, probably, in good conscience, attempted to serve the church in the priestly ministry but failed. The failure is regrettable but life

has to go on. Hence the church has nothing to lose by guiding such her failed, weak child to his area of strength where he may serve God as a Catholic Christian in a different capacity.

With regard to the research questions, the study provides answers to: what is vocation discernment in the region, how vocation discernment is conducted and shed light to some of the problems that affect adequate vocation discernment. It also identified the agents of vocation discernment and shows that the formators and candidates do not have all the tools they need for adequate vocation discernment. It equally points out that the four cardinal areas of formation as enunciated by John Paul II are necessarily fundamental to both formation and vocation discernment

The study also expresses that each ordination marks the completion of a formation and a discernment process which formally started the day the candidate showed up in the seminary. Each successful discernment must have the stamp of the bishop's final stamp of approval otherwise, ordination will not take place. The study also shows that some of the seminaries of the region have a good network of collaborators outside the seminaries, such as parish priests, parents, and others who come in contact with the seminarians. They are also formators and vocation discerners in the various ways they contribute to the forming of the seminarians. On the issue of what makes a candidate unsuitable for the priesthood, the basic is the inability to meet up with the requirements of the areas of formation: human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral formation. As the study shows, there are other things (sometimes controversial) the formators may decide as disqualifying factors in their seminaries. The study advocates for smooth sailing dismissal of unsuitable candidates so that no candidate will be devastated for an attempt

to serve the Lord of love and peace. The study observes that efforts or plans are still in progress on how to help the expelled seminarians.

Generally, some of the seminaries in the region have really good procedure for adequate vocation discernment which will produce the suitable qualified candidates for the priesthood if they are consistently applied. But the problem with the procedure or method of vocation discernment is secrecy and surprises. The process of the discernment of a candidate's vocation should not be hidden from him. He does not need to be surprised with the final outcome of the discernment of his vocation. That is why most of them are devastated when the outcome is negative. Each seminarian should be part of the process of his vocation discernment from the onset. His progress and set back, strength and weakness should be laid open to him. He should be encouraged or helped to turn his bad to good, his good to better and his better to best. If in the end he fails to meet the requirements, he will not be surprised by the outcome because everything about his progress or retrogress is open to him from the beginning. He will only be surprised if he is granted more favor than he expected out of his performances.

Another issue for consideration stems from John Paul II's (1982) statement that unsuitable candidates should be "charitably advised to follow another vocation" (1982). While the seminaries in the region do well to dismiss the candidates found to be unsuitable for the priesthood, the charitable aspect of the message has not yet gained much traction with the authorities. Some dismissed seminarians are traumatized depending on the condition of their dismissal. Such a seminarian needs that charitable advice, encouragement or whatever charity the church can afford in order to enable him pick up his broken pieces to see what he can make out of it as he tries to follow another

vocation. The participating formators indicate that there are plans at different stages and at different seminaries in that regard. When completed, it will be nice if the best of the plans is adopted by all the seminaries in the region to abate the problems of the young men who wanted to become priests but fell short of the demands.

Limitations

This study is limited by its scope, the number of participants and the number of seminaries involved. It should have involved more participants of different class levels and all the seminaries in the region so as to obtain more knowledge of vocation discernment in the entire region.

b) Theological Reflection

The process of discernment for the call to ministry in the New Testament can be traced back to Christ himself. Jesus knows from the beginning the magnitude of the ministry and mission he will accomplish on earth. He knows he will need human instrumentality to work with. They are those who will help to spread the good news of human salvation so that the message will be handed over from one generation to another in perpetuity. To discern and select those who will be entrusted with the ministry, Jesus devoted an entire night to prayer. As Luke states it: In those days Jesus went “to the mountain to pray, and he spent the night in prayer to God. When day came, he called his disciples to himself, and from them he chose Twelve, whom he also named apostles (Lk 6:12-13). According to Mark, Jesus chooses the Twelve so “that they might be with him and he might send them forth to preach and to have authority to drive out demons” (Mk 3:14- 15). Jesus knows the importance of the ministry he will entrust to apostles that is why he devotes an entire night to prayer in order to choose the right persons for the job.

Later Jesus made it clear to his disciples that he purposely chose them. In his words: “It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you” (Jn 15:16). It is Jesus who calls and chooses persons for the ministry. He also empowers others or enlightens those who call upon him in prayer to make the right choices. The evidence of Jesus’ response to prayer in times of discernment and choice are seen in the life and ministry of his apostles.

It is through prayer and casting lots that the apostles are able to find the right replacement for Judas in the ministry. According to *Acts of the Apostles*, the apostles prayed thus: “You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this apostolic ministry from which Judas turned away to go to his own place” (1:24-25). With the prayer and casting of lots Mathias is chosen as one of the apostles in place of Judas. Similarly, it is during prayer and fasting that the Spirit calls or demands to have Paul and Barnabas set apart for a special mission (Acts 13:2).

These show that prayer is very important in the process of discerning who is called to ministry. In other words, prayer is necessary in the process of vocation discernment both for the formators and the candidates and also for the community of the faithful. From the above biblical passages, it is in or through prayer that the Lord chooses or indicates those he has chosen for the ministry. According to Kiechle (2005), “Anyone facing decisions ought to discuss with God everything that moves him or her: desires and doubts, hopes and fears, feelings of being torn or pressured, and the anticipation of joy and satisfaction” (71). The prayer could be private or communal and it could be at any

time provided there is the quiet atmosphere conducive for it. According to Kiechle “The moment we enter silence, our inner self comes to life; we become more sensitive and more receptive to subliminal messages revealing the things hidden behind the concerns, impulses, motives, and powers that remain otherwise unnoticed” (69). During the time of the silence and prayer, other thoughts that are not very pleasant may also be revealed. In the words of Kiechle, “during these quiet periods we may also become conscious of the dark elements of fear, disorderly thoughts and urges, hurtful experiences, feelings of guilt, crazy images, chaotic thoughts, and burdens carried over from our past. These are likely to make any discernment more difficult, but we must accept and examine everything in order to gain clarity. If we sweep anything under the rug, it will return in some other form and negatively influence our behavior without our being conscious of it” (71). The revealed thoughts and experiences during prayer will enable the candidate to make firm resolution, discern and decide the ministry he feels called to serve. He will decide whether with the things he knows and remembers he still feels that he is called to the priesthood.

In this light, one can see that it is not only the formators that discern the vocation of the candidates for the priesthood. The candidates can make their own vocation discernment and decide that the ministry of the priesthood is not for them even before the formators can think about it. That is why the candidates need that atmosphere of freedom and quiet to reflect and discern their vocations. On their part, like Jesus, the formators may devote themselves to prayer prior to the day for a serious decision on the vocation of a candidate so that the Lord will make the choice through them.

i) Pastoral Planning

The Lord Jesus is the pattern and model of Christian living. As the leader of ministerial life and service, he demonstrates a method of making discerned choices regarding those to be entrusted with ministry. As the gospels state, after a night of prayer he calls his disciples together and chooses from them twelve persons whom he named apostles. Following this pattern, all those concerned with the selection of the candidates for the ministry should also devote a period of time to prayer for God's enlightenment to discern and select candidates with genuine vocations for the priesthood. On their part, the candidates for the priesthood should also pray about their vocation. Since each vocation discernment lasts throughout the period of formation, the candidates should commit themselves to daily or regular prayer for vocation discernment. This is specifically personal prayer and not the communal prayer. The prayer could be said after the reception of Holy Communion at each Mass, during morning meditation, or at a spare time of one's choice. The community of discerners, that is the seminary, should consider communal prayer for vocation discernment that can fit into the seminary prayer program at regular intervals. This will afford all and sundry the opportunity to pray for vocation discernment. There are already prayers for vocations out there, but the proposed one here is specifically for vocation discernment. The intention is that God may enlighten both the seminary discerners of vocations and the candidates for the priesthood in their decisions for genuine vocations.

For broader assistance, a written prayer for vocation discernment should be extended the faithful in the parishes. They should be encouraged to pray for adequate

vocation discernment in their private prayers and when they come together as a church community.

ii) Recommendations for future Research

This study is only a scratch on the body of a mountain of works that could be written on adequate vocation discernment in southeastern region and Nigeria. It may serve as a stepping stone for those who want to undertake a research on the topic or related topics. Such topics may include:

1. Formation of the formators: Study on the program for the preparation of seminary educators to enhance formation and vocation discernment.
2. Self-formation (auto-formation) as an alternative method of formation and vocation discernment to the current method in regional seminaries.
3. Comparative analysis of the use of personal computer and cell phone in the seminaries of the region and seminaries in the developed countries – are they good or harmful to seminary formation.

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Appendix A

CULTURAL-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF VOCATION IN THE SOUTHEASTERN REGION OF NIGERIA

Challenges and Prospects of Vocation in Southeastern Nigeria

This is a brief historical survey of vocation to the Catholic priesthood in the southeastern region of Nigeria. The regional particularization here is because this study is region-specific. Moreover, the establishment of the Christian religion in the vast and cultural diverse Nigeria was not a one-time event nor was it established by one set of evangelizers - missionary congregation. Different regions of the country received the Christian gospel message of salvation at different periods. In the same manner, due to cultural diversity, each region has responded in its own way to the faith and to vocation to the priesthood.

According to Obi (1985), the seed of Christianity was sown in southeastern region of Nigeria in 1885 by missionaries primarily from France. The first place the missionaries touched ground was Onitsha at the bank of the River Niger. Generally, according to him, the Christian message was relatively well received and appreciated in this region which led to its rapid growth. In due course, as the gospel message continued to spread to the hinterlands, the need arose to train the natives to help in the evangelization of their people through the priestly ministry. As a result, the first seminary in the region was officially opened in 1924 at Igbariam with 6 minor seminarians on roll. Because of the strict rules and the rigorous training, only one of them, John Cross Anyogu, was able to make it to the priesthood in 1930. From Obi's account, records also showed that only one candidate

enrolled for the priestly formation in 1925. The candidate succeeded to ordination and later became a Cistercian Monk. He was beatified by John Paul II as Blessed Father Cyprian Michael Iwene Tansi on March 22, 1998.

After Father Tansi, as Obi's study shows, there were no other new enrollments to the seminary for about three years, 1927 to 1930. The reason for the poor response to the priesthood on the part of the young men at the time and place could be understood. The celibate nature of the Catholic priesthood was not part of the culture of the people. The people of the region understand marriage as ordained by God for every person who has reached marriageable or matured age. For them it means prosperity, blessing and continuation of the family lineage. The people pride themselves in multitude of children. The more children a family has the more prestigious it is. Hence they also practiced simultaneous polygamy for which the traditional priests were known. Inability or deliberate refusal to marry was seen as a bad omen, a curse or some kind of psychological or spiritual problem. For this reason, many families and young men did not support the idea of the celibate Catholic form of the priesthood.

Another problem for the poor response to the priestly vocation at the time was the outright rejection of many of the people who put up a brave front and expressed the desire to become priests. Such people defied the tradition and the stigma attached to prolonged or permanent bachelorhood as well as the aggression of their families and the native custom, only to be turned away at a point or have stumbling blocks placed on their progress. The aggression and refusal of the concerned families to support the candidates is understandable. What was not understandable or substantiated and which was one of the major factor that militated against the growth of vocation in the early life of the

Catholic Church in the region was, among other things, the decision of the missionaries not to grant many of the natives admission into the seminary or to frustrate them out of the seminary. This according to Eke (1985) was due to the deep ambivalence with which the expatriate missionaries viewed the vocation of the indigenous aspirants in addition to “ethnocentric ignorance of the missionaries and even racial arrogance.” There are reasons to believe that it was not only Nigeria aspirants to the priesthood that encountered such human made problem but some other African countries as well. Hence the act merited the condemnation of the Vatican Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of Faith (Propaganda Fide) as “The neglect of African vocations and initiative” (Eke, 307). The provincial Archbishop of the then Southeast was equally sad about the situation and expressed his frustration as follows:

If our number of native priests is already not much greater it is because we put them through a long course of preparation. This is not because they do not give sufficient promise in the seminary. On the contrary the general comment of those in charge of the seminary, is that they are too keen on their studies, and are over-exemplary in conduct. But these young men have only just emerged from centuries-old pagan tradition and habit. (Eke, 308)

This shows how open and receptive the candidates are to the gifts of the Holy Spirit and to the grace of vocation. Unfortunately, attempt was made to stifle their zeal instead of encouraging them. However, due to some changes brought about by Propaganda Fide, their clarification of the biases of the missionaries, the perseverance of the early native seminarians, and priests that paved the way, the region has 14 indigenous priests between 1952 and 1953. At the same period, there are 31 senior seminarians, 183 junior

seminarians and 217 expatriate priests (310). By 1956, there were 65 senior seminarians; in 1967 the number rose to 174 and to 235 in 1970. By 1973/74 the number exploded to 448 with the ordination of 70 priests within the period. And by 1974/75 there were 529 seminarians in the seminary (310). The geometric growth has not stopped to date thereby giving rise to the building of many more minor seminaries and some major regional seminaries. The region currently has three ecclesiastical provinces, seventeen dioceses (*Table 1 A.1*), 5 major seminaries and 2,544 major seminarians as at 2008. These do not include three other major seminaries owned and run by different religious congregations in the region. It has to be noted here that the first seminary, Saint Paul seminary at Igbariam was later relocated to a permanent site at Enugu in 1951 and renamed Bigard Memorial Seminary.

In the light of the above, the southeastern region and Nigeria in general is currently experiencing what has been dubbed vocation boom. Table A.1 below shows a recent three-year figures of priestly ordination in the region. It is thanks to the pioneer priests and religious and to Second Vatican Council who for the changes it brought to the African church

Vatican II Africa

The Second Vatican Council is said to have largely contributed the growth of the church and vocations in Africa through its God-inspired reformations in the Church. The pre-Vatican II church in Africa was a western colonial church, while the post-Vatican church is the people's church. Vatican II brought the awareness of history and culture in the church as well as the freedom to worship God in the African context. It also brought a new realization of ministry and the respect for diversity (Jagoe 2005). Since then the

church here is experiencing a rapid growth on daily basis. As a result Lettinga (n.d.) states that “there are now more practicing Christians in Africa than on any other continent.”

Another factor that contributed to the growth and still keeps the church growing in Africa is the wave of neo-evangelical movements that is sweeping across the continent prompted by Pentecostalism. The Vatican II freedom of worship, association with other denominations in its ecumenism, led to a grass-root evangelization that revives dormant Christians and converts non-Christians especially the adherents of African Traditional Religion (ATR) generally referred to as pagans. During the early days of Christianity in Africa when ATR was the dominant religion, many Christian converts in parts of the continent were persecuted and even outlawed in their then pagan communities. Similarly, now that Christianity is the dominant religion, especially in the southeastern Nigeria, the remaining ATR adherents are not outlawed, but they are known and regarded as idol worshippers or evil people by many Christians. Every effort is being made to convert all of them to the new life of the Christian gospel. However, it should be noted that though there is currently a vibrant Christianity in Africa, the growth rate varies from region to region. According to Zalot (2002), “one of the fastest growing areas of Roman Catholicism today is sub-Saharan Africa. Over the past twenty years the number of African Catholics has more than doubled, seminaries are at or near capacity, and Catholics represent significant percentages of national populations.”

Nigeria is one of the sub-Saharan countries and the most populous country in the African continent (Jagoe 2005). Her southeastern region which is made up of mainly enthusiastic and committed Christian population plays vital role in the ministry,

development and progress of the church in the region and other parts of the country. The enthusiasm and growth in the region was equally felt and is still being felt in the areas of vocation to priestly and religious life. While visiting Nigeria in 1982, John Paul II hailed the Bigard Memorial Seminary as one of the largest seminaries in the world. At the same time he reminds the church and seminary authorities that the presence of a large number of candidates for the priesthood should not be a reason to accept low quality of performance. John Paul II (1982) advises that “Seminarians who are really unsuitable for ordination should be firmly and charitably advised to follow another vocation” (John Paul II 1982). This is a call for adequate vocation discernment.

Like the mustard seed, the church and its vocation to the priesthood in the southeastern region has a humble beginning. It went through difficult periods and has since been blessed to serve the needs of her growing Christian population and those of other regions and Africa. The table below contains the three provinces of the region and their dioceses. It shows also the ordination figures for three years period and that it is not all the dioceses in the region have the vocation boom. Generally however, the vocation growth is something to be grateful to God.

Table A.1: Ecclesiastical Provinces, Dioceses, and Ordination Figures

Dioceses by Ecclesiastical Province	Ordination Figures in the Last Three Years		
	2014	2013	2012
Calabar Province			
Calabar Archdiocese (Metropolitan)	3	4	3
Ikot Ekpene Diocese	6	5	6
Ogoja diocese	3	3	5
Port Harcourt Diocese	5	8	4
Uyo Diocese	4	6	5
Total	21	26	23
Onitsha Province			
Onitsha Archdiocese (Metropolitan)	14	21	20
Abakaliki Diocese	10	9	14
Awgu Diocese	2	3	2
Awka Diocese	18	14	13
Enugu Diocese	9	21	17
Nnewi Diocese	17	9	10
Nsukka Diocese	19	14	22
Total	89	91	98
Owerri Province			
Owerri Archdiocese (Metropolitan)	9	10	7
Aba Diocese	9	8	5
Ahiara Diocese	-	-	5
Okigwe Diocese	20	16	18
Orlu Diocese	21	18	4
Umuahia Diocese	10	3	5
Total	69	65	44
Totals	179	182	165

Appendix B

BRIEF HISTORICAL REVIEW OF THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE MINISTERIAL PRIESTHOOD TO THE COMMUNITY OF THE FAITHFUL FROM APOSTOLIC TIME TO THE PRESENT

Introduction

During his salvific ministry on earth, Christ called, commissioned, and confers on his apostles certain divine powers that are not given to the rest his disciples. By such empowerment Christ set them at the fore front of the community of his disciples as leaders. Vatican II says they were chosen in order to ensure that the people of God would always have pastors and enjoy continual growth (The Catholic Church 1996, 25f).

As recorded in *Acts*, after the ascension of Jesus Christ, the disciples committed themselves to prayer (Acts 1:12-14) as they awaited the fulfillment of the promised Holy Spirit. Within the period of waiting Mathias was elected and enrolled into the college of apostles (1:21-26). Later, when the promised Spirit descended on the disciples on the day of Pentecost, the Church was born. From that day onwards, the apostles started to proclaim the risen Lord publicly. A miraculous conversion and baptism of three thousand persons geometrically increased the number of believers. And that marked the beginning of the daily growth in the number of the community of believers (*Acts* 2). As the number of believers increased and the Church spread, the need for more leaders or ministers began to arise. As the title goes, this text is a presentation of a Historical Review of the Relationship of the Ministerial Priesthood to the Community of the Faithful from Apostolic Times to the Present.

The Apostolic Period (c. 33 - c. 100 AD)

Acts stated that the members of the young church devoted themselves to daily meetings at the temple, to the teaching of the apostles, to communal life, to the breaking of bread in their homes and to prayers. To provide for their material needs, many of them sold their property and possessions and distributed the proceeds among the believers, each according to his or her needs (Acts 2:41-47). They lived happily, united in one mind and one heart, lacking nothing as they have everything in common (4:32). And “With great power the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great favor was accorded them all” (4:33).

The Seven Deacons

With the number of converts and believers increasing by thousands, some group of Hebrew volunteers assumed the service of the daily distribution of the material needs of the community. Incidentally, their method of the distribution was not favorable to every member and that led the Hellenists to complain “against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution” (6:1). As a result the apostles required the community to elect “seven reputable men, filled with the Spirit and wisdom” who would be charged with the task of the material welfare of the community. The apostles prayed over the seven men and laid hands on them (6:3, 6). This gave the apostolic community their first group of people empowered and commissioned by the “laying on of hands” by the apostles to serve the people. Later this group of seven servants of the people of God came to be known as the seven deacons and the imposition of hands and prayer over them came to be known as ordination (Schillebeeckx 1981, 7, 39). According to Toups (2008, 34), the election and installation of the deacons is “the

first written account of ‘ordination’ performed by the Apostles.” Hence the modern phraseology for the event: the ordination of the seven deacons.

Local Church Community Leaders and Ministry of the Apostolic Era

With the growth in number of believers and the establishment of many Christian communities outside the Jewish territory, the apostles mandated more people to serve as local church leaders who helped the apostles in the ministry or served as leaders in other local communities. The Jerusalem community in addition to the apostles and deacons had presbyters and prophets (Acts 11:27; 15:4); the community in Judea had presbyters (Acts 11:29-30), and at the church in Antioch there were also prophets and teachers (Acts 13:1).

At this time, the laying on of hands has become a tradition of empowering and commissioning chosen believers to various leadership positions or to ministerial and missionary service; a tradition that later became highly important for the Church in the liturgy of ordination (Schillebeeckx 1981, 46, 67). The various leaders and ministers were either selected by the apostles (Acts 1:23-26; 6:1-7), mandated by the apostles as Paul mandated Titus to appoint Presbyters in Crete (Titus 1:5) or approved by the apostles in the sense that they did not object to such appointments made by the consensus of the communities concerned (1 Tm 4:14; Jm 3:1). It was believed that those who were given leadership or ministerial roles were “reputable men, filled with the Spirit and wisdom.” Paul elaborated on the criteria (1 Tm 3:1-10) and cautioned against hasty appointments or hasty laying on of hands (1 Tm 5:22).

Function of the Church Community Leaders

The community churches and their leadership during the apostolic time were more charismatic than structurally organized. The functions of the leaders are not tightly defined where they are defined at all. In this vein they did almost if not “everything the apostles did” (Schillebeeckx 1981, 7; Galot 1984, 158ff). For instance the deacons like Stephen and Philip performed other functions than caring for the material needs of the believers. Stephen worked great wonders and signs among the people. He engaged the members of the Synagogue of Freedmen, Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, etc. in a debate with wisdom and the spirit they could not withstand. And he also spoke boldly before the Sanhedrin (6:8-10; 7).

Philip became an evangelist and preached in Samaria, performed miracles, converted and baptized the people of the city, a large number of converts that prompted the Church in Jerusalem to send Peter and John to visit the city (8:5-17). Philip also instructed the Ethiopian eunuch and baptized him (v35-38).

As there were unspecified functions among the early church leaders, in the same way some of the leadership titles were used interchangeably because their life and ministry did not depend on it. For Schillebeeckx, “according to the self-understanding of the first Christians, the Christian community is a ‘community of God,’ a ‘community of Christ,’ and a ‘temple of the Holy Spirit’” (5) or mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem where everybody is a first born child (Heb 12:22-23). In this light according to Schillebeeckx (9), the communities saw themselves as brotherhoods without ranks or status and as communities of believers who received variety of charismatic gifts to build up the Church. They did not see the gift of leadership as ministry in the sense it

has today. In the words of Osborne (1988, 92) “The quality of the ministerial person stands in the forefront, not the function of the ministry.” Ministry or gift of leadership for them was just one of the many services which all the members of the community owe to each other because no one person can do all that should be done in any given community (Schillebeeckx, 9).

Patristic Period

This is the period of the Apostolic Fathers, the immediate successors of the apostles. Among them were Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, and Polycarp of Smyrna. The patristic period is believed to have lasted from the time of the death of the last Apostle, John, about AD 100 through the Middle Ages to AD 451, the Council of Chalcedon. Within this period, the notion of ministry was given more theological meaning and validity and viewed with greater dignity. The Apostolic Fathers deemed the office proper to bishops and priests very “essential to the life of the faithful” and for this reason, they “must be guaranteed and validated through ordination which becomes binding on the recipient” (Toups, 40).

As already stated, during the apostolic era, ministry in the Church was not strictly defined such that even the title “Apostle” was not reserved for the twelve apostles alone but extended to other prominent ministers of the period (Galot 1984, 158f). But during the patristic era, the Fathers of the Church endeavored through their teachings and writings to give it more shape and form, to solidify and formalize Church ministry especially the ministry of priesthood.

27 to 210 AD

This period marked the shaping up of Christian ministry and the naming of ministry with some awareness of ordination ritual. Most people of this time easily translated episkopos to bishop and presbyteros to priest (Osborne, 89ff). Under this period, there were also documents, persons and place or events that impacted the Church in terms of ministry. One of such documents is the Didache. The Didache is also known as the *Teachings of the Twelve Apostles*. It has an anonymous author and it is said to be older than the canonical gospels. This document reveals more about how the early “Christians saw themselves and how they lived their everyday lives than any book in the Christian Scriptures” (Milavec 2003, ix). According to Milavec it was “written in the generation following the death of Jesus when the message of Jesus was not yet encapsulated in stories about Jesus” (ix). For Osborne (1988) it may have been written alongside the New Testament writings (92).

Without detailed information on ministry, the Didache recognizes the episcopate as a dignified office of ministry that deserves respect in the Church. It says in 15:1-2: Appoint, then, for yourselves, bishop and deacons worthy of the Lord, men gentle and not money-loving and truthful and tested; for to you they likewise serve (unpaid) the unpaid public service of the prophet-teachers. Do not, then, look down upon them; for they themselves are your honored ones with the prophet-teachers (Milavec 2003, 35). For Didache, appointed leaders in the community, from the bishop to the deacon, ought to be respected by the community as servants of God and the community.

Clement of Rome

Another important written document of the period under review is the Letter of Clement of Rome, the third successor of Peter at Rome. The first letter of Clement I addressed to the Corinthian Christian community was written in Rome between AD 90 and 100 due to a rebellion that occurred there against Church leadership (Osborne, 93). Therein, Clement, among other things, condemned as “unjustifiable” the untimely removal of several Corinthian presbyters from their ministerial office.

He spoke of preserving the order of doing ministry as commanded by the Lord and to perform liturgical functions (offerings and sacrifices) at the right hours and by the proper minister because there were some services reserved for the high priest. Clement enjoined that while the bishops, presbyters and deacons perform their duties according to stipulations, the lay persons should also be bound by the laws that pertain to them (40). He recalled that the apostles received the mandate of the ministry of evangelization from Jesus Christ in orderly way according to the will of God. And the apostles in due time appointed bishops and mandated that at the end of their service they should also appoint other eminent men, with the consent of the whole Church to succeed them and continue the ministry (42). These ministers who serve the flock of Christ in keeping with the instructions they received, Clement wrote “cannot be justly dismissed from the ministry. For our sin will not be small, if we eject from the episcopate those who have blamelessly and holily fulfilled its duties” (44).

This letter showed that there was a strained relationship between the Corinthian community of the time and their ministers that led to the forceful removal of those ministers. It also suggests that at the time, there was a known differentiation between the

ordained and the lay people. In the letter, Clement did not only defend the sanctity of the order of ministry, he also showed the structure of the Church. He equally showed the privilege of apostolic succession, an honor that belongs to the ordained, especially the bishops, which has to be respected.

Ignatius of Antioch

Born in Syria around AD 50, Ignatius did his ministry in Antioch as their bishop and died a martyr in Rome between 98 and 117 AD. On his way to martyrdom he wrote seven letters to various Christian communities. In the letters, Ignatius is mindful of the Church hierarchy. He consistently makes it clear that the episkopos (bishop) is the chief shepherd (president) of each local church and immediately under him are the presbyters (priests) and then the deacons. In the eighth chapter of his letter to the Smyrnaeans he writes:

See that ye all follow the bishop, even as Jesus Christ does the Father, and the presbytery as ye would the apostles; and reverence the deacons, as being the institution of God. Let no man do anything connected with the Church without the bishop. Let that be deemed a proper Eucharist, which is [administered] either by the bishop, or by one to whom he has entrusted it. Wherever the bishop shall appear, there let the multitude [of the people] also be; even as, wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church. It is not lawful without the bishop either to baptize or to celebrate a love-feast; but whatsoever he shall approve of, that is also pleasing to God, so that everything that is done may be secure and valid. (D'Ambrosio 2010)

He also wrote similar letter to the Trallians. The fourth chapter of his letter to the Philadelphians about oneness in the Church reads in part: “Take ye heed, then, to have but one Eucharist. For there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup to (show forth) the unity of His blood; one altar; as there is one bishop, along with the presbytery and deacons, my fellow-servants: that so, whatsoever ye do, ye may do it according to (the will of) God” (D’Ambrosio 2010). Ignatius of Antioch sounds similar note in his letter to the Magnesians all of which show how much he loves and wishes to preserve the respect and integrity of the ministry and its structure.

Generally, the Ignatian letters contained lots of urging, advice, admonitions, persuasions, or outright condemnation that demonstrate during his day there was not absolute peace and unity in the ministry, especially at most of the particular churches he addressed.

Polycarp of Smyrna

In the sixth chapter of his own letter Polycarp of Smyrna reminded presbyters the good heartedness they should possess and how devoutly they should undertake their pastoral care ministry (Osborne 1988, 103).

Irenaeus of Lyons

Irenaeus was born between 140 and 160 established an historical connection of the Church to the apostles by enumerating “those who were appointed as bishops in the churches by the Apostles and their successors to our own day” (Osborne, 107) because during his time authentic faith has to be traced back to the apostles.

Some other eminent Fathers of the Church that made mark on the church ministry included **Clement of Alexandria** (c. 150 – 215), **Origen of Alexandria** (185 -232),

Tertullian of Cartage (c. 160 -225) and **Hippolytus of Rome** (c. 170 –c. 235); and they all wrote in favor of hierarchical structure of ministry and the Church. In addition to writing in favor of the hierarchy, Tertullian introduces in the Church ministry the concept of “*ordinatio*” (Schillebeeckx 1981, 39). At that time the word means an appointment or incorporation of a Christian as minister in a Christian community. It also means “the canonical appointment of a Christian to the college of office-bearers” (Schillebeeckx, 38f). For the modern Catholic Church, *ordinatio* is the rite by which a person is integrated into a Church *ordo* such as *ordo episcoporum*, *ordo presbyterorum*, or *ordo diaconorum* in a religious and liturgical act that is a consecration, a blessing or a sacrament (United States Catholic Conference 1994, n.1537, 1538).

Ordo has not always been the prerogative of the above mentioned three groups of ministers. Unlike before, *Ordo* or order and its cognate *ordinatio* or ordination has become exclusive words to designate or empower the clerical aspect of early Christian ministry (Osborne 2006, 42). And that has remained the case till date as the Church teaches (CCC, no. 1538).

210 to 600 A.D.

Osborne treated four major processes that strongly influenced the Church and ministry of this period. These included the process of: “theological development of apostolic succession as a guarantee of orthodox Church ministry; increased clericalization, in which the ordained ministry in the Church became more and more separated from the laity; increased theologizing on ministry in the Church in which the notion of ‘priest’ (hiereus) or “*sacerdos*” becomes dominant” (131). Included also is “diversification in the pastoral ministries occasioned by the pastoral needs of a growing

Church” (131). For this reason, the presbyters are empowered, “given the task of providing pastoral care for the rural Christians” almost without any restriction (Osborne, 156; Schillebeeckx 1990, 145; Power 1999, 32).

The Medieval Period to the Council of Trent (600 – 1563)

Osborne reckoned the medieval period (600-1000 AD) as the period of the foundation of the scholastic theology of the priesthood - theology, which proved to be so strong and almost immovable. This period saw the divide (though without severing some fundamental Christian unity and history) between the churches of the East and the West (Osborne, 166).

The Scholastic Period (1000-1400 AD) had a number of theologians who strongly held that the heart of the priesthood is the Eucharist (207). On this account, they did not only place the priest, as the bearer of the Eucharist, ahead of the bishop but at the apex of the priesthood and at the same time removed episcopacy from among the sacrament of Holy Orders.

Following the scholastic era is the Reformation Period (1517–1648) whose key issue was not the theology of the priesthood but the theological issue of “the relationship of grace and good works; the question of justification; the place of the Word in both Christian theology and Christian practice; the authority of the pope” (219).

The reformers prompted the Council of Trent (1545-1563), which addressed many of the incorrect and or heretical ideas and teachings circulated by the Reformation theologians (Osborne, 248). Drawing from the scholastic and medieval theology of the priesthood, the Council stated that the sacrifice (of the Eucharist) and the priesthood are necessarily linked but at the same time pointed out that the priest is not ordained only to

offer sacrifice. He is more than a “sacrificer” (Palmer 1981, 771). The Council reaffirmed the traditional Church teaching rooted in the scriptures that the people of God are “a priesthood” (Ex 19:6; 1Pt 2:9) but it condemned the view that all the people of God (Christians), without any qualification, are priests in the order of the new covenant (Fischer 1987, 59; Toups 2008, 63).

A review of all the above shows that the introduction of terms of distinction like naming each ministry, structuring the ministry, defining and redefining the order of the priesthood, and so forth did not favor the Church very much. It did not foster the commonality and brotherhood that existed in the early Church between the ministers and the faithful. Instead the terms of distinction weakened bonds; ended or muffled the charismatic spirit of the early Christian community. They also created gulf between the laity and the clergy (Mohler 1970, 50-51); and dimmed or eliminated entirely some ministry of the laity.

According to Schillebeeckx 1990: “in the ancient church the link between the community and its leader was so strong that to begin with it was impossible for the leader to be moved to another community” only on compassionate grounds in exceptional cases (41). According to Mohler, when the “priestly aspect of the Christian ministry is emphasized a growing distinction appears between the clergy and the laity” (69) with little or no regard to the ministry of the faithful. Put differently, Mohler writes: “While the priesthood became exclusively associated with the bishop and priests, the priestly view of the whole people was lost sight of” (107). For Schillebeeckx, these are some of the efforts in the process of sacerdotalizing the ministry of the Church (48, 49). And as Philibert (2000) stated, it was “the move away from the pragmatic involvement of the

laity in the Church's evangelization and ministry and toward a spiritualization of their life and faith that made them more observers than participants in the Church's cult and ministry" (16). All these issues have some place in the agenda of the Second Vatican Council for deliberation and solution as explored below.

The Second Vatican Council: 1962 - 1965

The immensity of the impact of Second Vatican Council on the ministerial life of the Church in the modern time was met with great applause. According to Madges (2006) the Council was "the most significant event in Roman Catholicism over the last four centuries" (xi). It was also "the largest, the most momentous, and the most opportune of councils" (xi). Among other things, the Council "brought the Roman Catholic Church into an honest engagement with modernity at the precise historical moment in which the world was shifting from modernity to what can only be called a postmodern epoch" (Madges, 63). For Philibert (1999, 64), the Council changed the old trajectory that was raising many questions about the sensitivity of the Church on the plight of the laity in the ministry of the Church. Such that instead of a Church that has the sacraments, it teaches and presents a Church that is a sacrament in which everybody is a free participant. The Council recovered and updated Church ministry, the two priesthoods of the Church, in the light of the signs of the time.

According to the Council Fathers, the priesthood comprises ministers invested with sacred power to serve the people of God, their brothers and sisters (The Catholic Church 1996, 25f). These ministers are the bishops who possess the fullness of the sacrament of order (The Catholic Church 1996, 329f). The other groups are the priests who received the sacred order through the bishops (The Catholic Church 1996, 317).

They receive the function of the bishops' ministry but in a subordinate degree (The Catholic Church 1996, 318f). Next are the deacons who are ordained to the ministry and not to the priesthood (The Catholic Church 1996, 42f). The Council described priests as the "prudent cooperators of the episcopal college and its support and instrument, called to the service of the people of God" (The Catholic Church 1996, 39ff). These priests, the Council continues, "constitute, together with their bishop, one presbyterate, though dedicated in variety of duties" (The Catholic Church 1996, 39ff). Their functions as co-workers of the bishops include among others: to serve as pastors, in the name of the bishops, to the family of God entrusted to their care as their role in leading and building up the Church (The Catholic Church 1996, 327ff). Thus, the council made it clear that the ministry of the priest is mainly if not entirely about serving the people of God.

From the above and more, it could be stated that the Vatican II made many major contributions in the historical development of the ministerial priesthood. One of them is the restoration of the bishop to the ordained ministry (Osborne 1988, 211) with powers to control the priests and regulate the celebration of the Eucharist and divine worship among Christians (The Catholic Church 1996, 36ff). Vatican II also expands the narrow views of the ministerial priesthood presented by previous theological and historical thoughts and thereby advances "more serenely and completely the meaning and value of the priesthood in the life of the Church" (Galot 1984, 181; Osborne, 208f).

For Vatican II the ministerial priesthood functions for and with the community because both are partakers and coworkers in Jesus' ministry of salvation. In *Lumen Gentium* (The Catholic Church 1996), the Council teaches that like the priest, the laity "by Baptism are incorporated into Christ, are constituted the people of God, who have

been made sharers in their own way in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ and play their part in carrying out the mission of the whole Christian people in the church and in the world” (48f). Thus the Council teaches that the non-ordained people of God are not outsiders and should not be seen as such in the ministry of the Church. In the words of the Council:

Since he wishes to continue his witness and his service through the laity also, the supreme and eternal priest, Christ Jesus, gives them life through his Spirit and ceaselessly impels them to accomplish every good and perfect work. To them, whom he intimately joins to his life and mission, he also gives a share in his priestly office of offering spiritual worship for the glory of the Father and the salvation of humanity. Hence the laity, dedicated as they are to Christ and anointed by the Holy Spirit, are marvelously called and prepared so that ever richer fruits of the Spirit may be produced in them. For all their works, if accomplished in the Spirit, become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ: their prayers and apostolic undertakings, family and married life, daily work, relaxation of mind and body even the hardships of life if patiently borne (see Pet 2:5). In the celebration of the Eucharist, these are offered to the Father in all piety along with the body of the Lord. And so, worshipping everywhere by their holy actions, the laity consecrate the world itself to God. (The Catholic Church 1996, 52).

Furthermore the Council states that as the priestly mission of Christ does not belong solely to the ministerial priests, in the same way the hierarchy does not possess a monopoly of the prophetic mission of Christ. Rather the laity equally play significant role

in this aspect of Christ's mission in accordance with their vocation (The Catholic Church 1996, 35ff).

Similarly, the Council addresses the Laity's participation in the kingly mission of Jesus thus: "The Lord desires that his kingdom be spread by the lay faithful also: the kingdom of truth and life, the kingdom of holiness and grace, the kingdom of justice, love and peace. In this kingdom, creation itself will be set free from the slavery of corruption and will obtain the glorious freedom of the children of God" (The Catholic Church 1996, 54ff). In these texts the Council expresses the divine right and inclusion of the laity in the salvific mission of Jesus which ought to be respected in the ministry of the Church.

Conclusion

The Church of the apostolic period dwelt in harmony and was more of charismatic in nature. Incidentally, the harmony that was characteristic of the first Christians dissipated in the course of history and gave birth to ranks and differentiation in ministry. According to Mohler (1970, 91), "As the Christian presbyters and their episcopal leaders took on more of the sacerdotal robes of the New Israel in the late second, third and fourth centuries, bishops became high priests, the presbyters, the sons of Aaron, and the deacons levites;" the laity is left out and made onlookers. And the created differentiation between the two priesthoods was strengthened.

Vatican II opened the windows of ministry and diversified the ministry that has hitherto been reserved for the clergy and thus made many of the ministries of the Church accessible to the laity. Consequently, the post-conciliar era has seen lay ministry occupy significant place in the life of the Church. As such, it has pushed past the time when the priesthood could be considered in isolation. For Galot (1984) there should be

collaboration or coordination between the priests and laity since they both work for the good of the same Church. Such realization led to vivid and tangible explosion of lay ministries in Church (Hubbard 2000, 127). Consequently “Today more and more Christians work in direct Church ministry. There are many parishioners, young and old, who wish to work not simply in planning a picnic but in educating converts or bringing Communion to the sick. Most pastors are assisted by several full-time ministers and by many part-time ones” (O’Meara 2000, 72). In similar words Hahnenberg (2006) indicated that as a result many laypeople have taken up ministerial services for the good of the Church:

Parishes today witness a variety of volunteers and active laypeople offering many of the services once reserved exclusively to the ordained. And full-time lay ecclesial ministers - lay directors of religious education, pastoral associates, youth ministers, liturgical coordinators, and others - have become some of the pastor’s most important collaborators. The ministerial team that now constitutes most parish staffs has without a doubt enriched and expanded the ministerial base of the contemporary Church. (104)

Lending additional similar voice, Hubbard (2000) points to the evidential manifestations of the growth of lay ministry in the post-Vatican II Church. According to him:

In the liturgical life of the Church, lay persons proclaim the scriptural lessons, serve as cantors and musicians, act as ministers of hospitality and extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist, and in some places are responsible for leading Sunday worship in the absence of a priest. All of the liturgical rites have been revised to provide for a more active participation by the worshiping community, and the

implementation of the restored Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults requires that lay persons fill many roles to enable it to work effectively. (127)

Additionally, in the same spirit the laity is motivated to initiate veritable associations and movements to support themselves and for spiritual growth, and thus contribute in no mean measure to the dynamism of the Church. As Hubbard puts it:

The most dynamic spiritual renewal movements in the last few decades have been led and often initiated by lay persons, such as Cursillo, Charismatic Renewal, Marriage Encounter, Foculare, youth ministry movements, ministry to divorced and separated Catholics, bereavement support, and other similar groups. Along with their traditional involvement as catechists in the faith formation of children, youths, and adults, lay persons are being called upon to expand their activity as evangelization becomes a more explicit aspect of the Church's mission. (128)

This ministerial dynamism in the Church has changed the old trajectory, the ministry of the ministerial priest and the ways he experiences ministry every day (Hahnenberg, 104). By moving beyond the distinctions and dichotomies of ordained and not-ordained priests, the priest attains "a vision of the ordained priesthood grounded in the one priestly people of God" (105), because "The priesthood, the ministry, and the community do not exist apart in a world of books or bureaucracies" (O'Meara 2000, 72). Rather "the ordained priesthood exists within and for the priesthood of all the faithful" (Hahnenberg 2006, 124).

Finally, let it be noted, according to Hubbard that the laity has come on board the ministerial train and there is no thinking that they will ever disembark any time because they have not only the ecclesial but also the divine mandate to ministry. Thus the original

harmonious ministerial relationship that was lost and is now found has come to stay and is supposed to gladden those involved in the ministries of the Holy Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church.

Appendix C

VATICAN II THEOLOGY OF THE PRIESTHOOD WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD

Introduction

The Second Vatican Council document in line with the scriptures, teaches that all the people of God are priests (The Catholic Church 1996, 14f; Ex 19:6; 1 Pt 2:9). In this general sense, priesthood is responding and living the Christian call to life of holiness and of spreading the kingdom of Christ in the world, which is the vocation of all believers. Under the *Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People – Apostolicam Actuositatem* (The Catholic Church 1996, 405f) the Council indicates that the Christian vocation is, of its nature a vocation to the apostolate by which the Church through the instrumentality of men and women carry out the mission of Christ in various ways. In addition to this general meaning of the priesthood, there is also a sense where the idea is reserved to a selected group of people. This selected group, the ministerial priesthood, is only a dimension, an offshoot of the general priesthood of the entire people of God - the faithful. It is the intention of this text to explore both notions of the priesthood from Vatican II perspective and within the framework of the people of God.

Priesthood of the Faithful

In its broad analysis, as contained in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (United States Catholic Conference 1994), “The whole Church is a priestly people. Through Baptism all the faithful share in the priesthood of Christ. This participation is referred to as the ‘common priesthood of the faithful’” (n.1591). For Vatican II Council,

it is the priesthood of all the faithful, priesthood of the baptized or the royal priesthood. In *Lumen Gentium* (The Catholic Church 1996, n.14f) the Council states: “The baptized, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, that through all their Christian activities they may offer spiritual sacrifices and proclaim the marvels of him who has called them out of darkness into his wonderful light” (The Catholic Church 1996, 14f). Further in *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (The Catholic Church 1996, 318), the Council reiterates: “The Lord Jesus ‘whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world’ (Jn 10:36) gave his whole mystical body a share in the anointing of the Spirit with which he was anointed (see Mt 3:16; Lk 4:18; Acts 4:27-110:38). In that body all the faithful are made a holy and kingly priesthood.” As a result: “there is no such thing as a member who does not have a share in the mission of the whole body.” Thus, to be a Christian is fundamentally to share in the mission of Christ.

Although every Christian has the same call through baptism, and is empowered by the same spirit and each has a share in the mission of the one body of Christ; Paul teaches that for better accomplishment and progress of the mission, there is division of labor in that one body of Christ. That is, God assigns different tasks to different members of the body for the good of the entire body. According to him, there are “first, apostles; second, prophets; third, teachers; then, mighty deeds; then, gifts of healing, assistance, administration, and varieties of tongues” (1 Cor 12:28). Each person receives as God deems fit so that all may contribute in different ways to the building up of the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:4-14).

Further, Paul judges the different functions necessary and exhorts believers to see them not as division in the Church but as a way God demonstrates the importance and uniqueness of each person in the common goal of building up the body of Christ, the Church. For Paul the different parts of the body are necessary for the body to be complete and they complement one another otherwise the body will be deficient. In his words: “If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God placed the parts, each one of them, in the body as he intended. If they were all one part, where would the body be? But as it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I do not need you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I do not need you” (1 Cor 12:17- 21). In this analogy of the body, Paul demonstrates in a very significant manner the importance and indispensability of each part of the body. At the same time he also shows that they do not have the same or have equal responsibilities (1 Cor 12:12-27).

One of the gains of apportioning functions in a community is that it usually gives room for persons to recognize or manifest and express their talents or vocation more profoundly. And it is believable that a good community leader will apportion functions to the members according to what he or she feels a person is able to do within the circumstances of the place and time. This is applicable to the community of the faithful. During his salvific ministry, Christ commissions and entrusts to the apostles certain responsibilities or put differently, he confers on them certain divine powers that are not given to the rest of the members of his body – the community of believers. Some instances include but not limited to: the power of the keys (Mt 16:19); the power to forgive sins (Jn 20:22-23); the power to celebrate (reenact) the redemptive sacrifice in his

memory (Lk 22:19-20); the power to care for his lambs and sheep (Jn 21:15-17). By the empowerment Christ sets these people at the fore front of the community of his disciples as leaders. Vatican II calls them pastors and ministers chosen by Christ to utilize the power they received to serve, in collaboration with their brothers and sisters. That is the community of believers, for the building up of the body of Christ to ensure steady growth. In the words of the Council: “In order to ensure that the people of God would have pastors and would enjoy continual growth, Christ the Lord set up in his church a variety of offices whose aim is the good of the whole body. Ministers, invested with a sacred power, are at the service of their brothers and sisters, so that all who belong to the people of God and therefore enjoy true Christian dignity may attain to salvation through their free, combined and well-ordered efforts in pursuit of a common goal” (LG 18). Here the Council presents the ministerial priesthood as well as the ordered or hierarchical structure of the priesthood as the way Christ planned his community of believers, the Church.

In addition, considering the unique way the apostles are called, chosen and assigned their specific functions, both individually and collectively (Mk 1:17-20; Lk 6:12-13), and the great responsibilities Christ entrusts to them, one is heartened to affirm them as men specially chosen from among the rest and set apart for unique functions among their brothers and sisters - the faithful. This gives meaning to the notion of two categories of the priesthood in the Church: the priesthood of the faithful that comprises all the baptized and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood which is made up of people chosen from among the former (the priesthood of the faithful). With this brief

presentation of the notion of the priesthood of the faithful, this discussion will now turn to the ministerial priesthood.

Ministerial Priesthood

The ministerial priesthood is also known as the hierarchical priesthood because of its hierarchical structure. It is a reserved ministry or function in the Church in the sense that it is not open to everybody like the priesthood of the baptized. While the priesthood of the faithful is conferred through the sacrament of baptism, the sacrament of initiation into the community of believers (Christianity), the ministerial priesthood which is received after one is baptized, is “conferred by the sacrament of Holy Orders” with the task “to serve in the name and in the person of Christ the Head in the midst of the community” (United States Catholic Conference 1994, n.1591). For better understanding, “Holy Orders” is defined as “the sacrament through which the mission entrusted by Christ to his apostles continues to be exercised in the Church until the end of time: thus it is the sacrament of apostolic ministry. It includes three degrees: episcopate, presbyterate, and diaconate” (n.1536). These three degrees of the ministerial priesthood are briefly explored below.

The Episcopate

The episcopate or the office of bishops comes first in the hierarchical structure of the ministerial priesthood. But at the zenith of this Episcopal level is the Pope, the Roman Pontiff. Known as the supreme pontiff and the successor of the Apostle, Peter, the Pope is the leader of the entire people of God. In the *Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church – Christus Dominus* (The Catholic Church 1996), Vatican II Council states:

“In this church of Christ the Roman pontiff, as the successor of Peter, to whom Christ entrusted the care of his sheep and his lambs, has been granted by God supreme, full, immediate and universal power in the care of souls. As pastor of all the faithful his mission is to promote the common good of the universal church and the particular good of all the churches. He is therefore endowed with the primacy of ordinary power over all the churches (283f).”

Together with the pope, the bishops form a college that assists him in the leadership and governance of the people of God. In this manner he is the visible symbol of unity in the Church as the Council writes: “The Roman Pontiff, as the successor of Peter, is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity both of the bishops and of the whole company of the faithful” (The Catholic Church 1996, 31ff). The collegiate unity that exists at this level of the hierarchy is vital to the oneness of the Church and is believed to be respected and relished by the people of God.

While the pope, the bishop of Rome, is known as the successor of Peter, the rest of his brother bishops are known as the successors of the apostles and the apostolic college they formed sees to the pastoral wellbeing of the flock of Christ (29ff). Thus, in the service of the universal Church, the bishops as the successors of the apostles and the possessors of the fullness of the priesthood “Together with its head, the Supreme Pontiff, and never apart from him” exercise “supreme and full authority over the universal church” (The Catholic Church 1996, 285). On their own, in addition to the assistance they render to the pope, the bishops are also entrusted with particular and collective responsibilities within the Episcopal priesthood for the good of their particular churches and or the universal Church. In the words of Vatican II: “United in One college or body

for the instruction and pastoral government of the universal church, the bishops, in shared solicitude for all the churches, exercise their episcopal function, which was given them at their episcopal consecration in communion with the supreme pontiff and subject to his authority. Each of them exercises this function individually in that portion of the Lord's flock which has been entrusted to him, each bishop having responsibility for the particular church assigned to him. On occasion a number of bishops will cooperate to provide for the needs common to different churches" (284). The portion of the Lord's flock entrusted to a bishops is the faithful in his diocese or area of jurisdiction. The Council defines diocese as: "a section of God's people entrusted to a bishop to be guided by him with the assistance of his clergy so that, loyal to its pastor and formed by him into one community in the holy Spirit through the Gospel and the Eucharist, it constitutes one particular church in which the one, holy catholic and apostolic church of Christ is truly present and active" (288f). The bishop is sometimes referred to as the chief shepherd of the flock of Christ in his diocese.

As the proper ordinary and immediate pastor of the people of God in his diocese, it is incumbent on the bishop to see to their correct and adequate instruction, sanctity and governance (289). As the pope needs the assistance of the bishops to govern the universal Church, in like manner, to perform their tasks effectively in their vast dioceses, the bishops need the assistance of the priests in their dioceses and the laity as well. The next subheading will discuss the priests as ministers in the Church.

The Presbyterate

The Vatican II Council teaches that the bishops possess the fullness of the sacrament of Orders (The Catholic Church 1996, 28f; 329f). Next to them and

subordinate to them is the order of the presbyters - the priests. A person receives the authority to minister to the people of God as a priest at ordination. Priestly ordination in the Catholic Church is a “sacramental act which integrates a man into the order of bishops, presbyters, or deacons, and goes beyond a simple *election, designation, delegation, or institution* by the community, for it confers a gift of the Holy Spirit that permits the exercise of ‘sacred power’ which can come only from Christ himself through his Church” (United States Catholic Conference 1994, n.1538). At ordination priests “are consecrated in the image of Christ, the supreme and eternal priest (Heb 5:1-10; 7:24; 9:11-28), to preach the Gospel and shepherd the faithful as well as to celebrate divine worship as true priests of the New Testament” (The Catholic Church 1996, 39ff). It is through the instrumentality of the bishops by laying on of hands and the epiclesis that priests receive the sacrament of Orders and thus the privilege to participate in the ministry of Christ. As the Council puts it: “Through the sacred ordination and mission which they receive from the bishops, priests are promoted to the service of Christ the teacher, priest and king; they are given a share in his ministry through which the church here on earth is being unceasingly built up into the people of God, Christ’s body and the temple of the Spirit” (317). The priests are not ordained to new and different ministry rather they are ordained to participate to a certain degree in ministry of the bishops from whom they receive ordination. According to the Council, by ordination: “The function of the bishops’ ministry was handed over in a subordinate degree to priests so that they might be appointed in the order of the priesthood and be co-workers with the episcopal order for the proper fulfillment of the apostolic mission that had been entrusted to it by Christ” (318ff). Thus, no priest is ordained for himself but to support and work with the

bishops in the humble service of the people of God. In this collaborative service the Council observes that priests are “prudent cooperators of the episcopal college and its support and instrument, called to the service of the people of God, constitute, together with their bishop, one presbyterate, though dedicated to a variety of duties” (39ff). Further the Council teaches that it is by being “joined with the episcopal order the priesthood shares in the authority by which Christ himself builds up, sanctifies and rules his body. Hence the priesthood of presbyters, while presupposing the sacraments of initiation, is conferred by a special sacrament which, by the anointing of the holy Spirit, puts a special stamp on them and so conforms them to Christ the priest in such a way that they are able to act in the person of Christ the head” (318ff).

By this, the Council highlights the place of the priest in the hierarchical ministry and also points to some basic principles closely associated with the priesthood with particular reference to the presupposed sacraments of initiation. The sacraments of initiation in question here are Baptism and Confirmation. These are basically required sacraments without which the holy Orders cannot be validly received. According to the code of Canon Law, before any candidate may be admitted into the seminary for formation and consequent ordination to the priesthood, he must first submit specifically the “documents of the reception of baptism and confirmation and any other things required by the prescripts of the program of priestly formation” (Canon Law Society of America 1983, Can. 241 #2). As regards the “special stamp” mentioned above; by that the Council references the Church’s teaching on “indelible spiritual character” which is imprinted on the candidate who validly receives the sacrament of holy order at ordination (The Catholic Church 1996, 28f; 318ff). The Church teaches that because this sacrament

(like baptism and confirmation) confers the sacramental character, it is permanent and as such “cannot be repeated or conferred temporarily” (United States Catholic Conference 1994, n.1582). The catechism of the Church states it thus: “The three sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders confer, in addition to grace, a sacramental *character* or ‘seal’ by which the Christian shares in Christ's priesthood and is made a member of the Church according to different states and functions. This configuration to Christ and to the Church, brought about by the Spirit, is indelible; it remains forever in the Christian as a positive disposition for grace, a promise and guarantee of divine protection, and as a vocation to divine worship and to the service of the Church. Therefore these sacraments can never be repeated” (United States Catholic Conference 1994, n.1121). The veracity of this doctrine is manifest in the fact that under normal circumstances, no person who has received any of these three sacraments would need or be required to receive it a second time. And since the sacraments endure throughout the recipient's life, the teaching that they “can never be repeated” or be effaced is in sequence. This traditional teaching of the Church can be traced back to the Council of Florence in 1438 A.D. and that of Trent in 1545 A.D. Both councils anathematized anyone who denied that sacramental character is indelibly stamped on the soul of the recipient of these sacraments (Council of Trent 2010). With emphasis on the priesthood, the council of Trent justified the condemnation of those who taught contradictory doctrine in the following words: “But since in the sacrament of order, as also in baptism and confirmation, a character is imprinted which can neither be effaced nor taken away, the holy council justly condemns the opinion of those who say that the priests of the New Testament have only a temporary power, and that those who have once been rightly

ordained can again become laymen if they do not exercise the ministry of the word of God” (Council of Trent 2010). This age long teaching on the permanency of the ministerial priesthood; a theology of the New Testament priesthood, finds support in the *Letter to the Hebrews* which is an allusion to the Book of Psalms: the Lord has sworn an oath and he will not change his mind: you are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek (Heb 5:5-6; 7:17-21; Ps 110:4).

This teaching has met with some criticisms and serious challenges especially in the recent decades which have seen so many priests leave the ministry and the resultant much talked about laicization. For instance, Father Sullins is cited as saying that not less than 25,000 American priests have left the priesthood since 1970 (Oppenheimer 2012). While the issue is a matter of concern for the Church, it has not changed the teaching. Instead it has gotten the backing of the Church law (Canon 290) which stipulates that even if a priest loses his clerical state “by a judicial sentence or administrative decree,” of the Church or “by rescript of the Apostolic See,” it does not affect the validity of his ordination per se because “Once validly received, sacred ordination never becomes invalid” (Canon Law Society of America 1983). The Church reiterates this stand in one of her most recent important documents, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* where she states: “It is true that someone validly ordained can, for grave reasons, be discharged from the obligations and functions linked to ordination, or can be forbidden to exercise them; but he cannot become a layman again in the strict sense, because the character imprinted by ordination is forever. The vocation and mission received on the day of his ordination mark him permanently” (United States Catholic Conference 1994, n.1583). From the above, it is evident that the Church emphasizes the validity of ordination,

however, the question of when the Church determines that an ordination is not validly received is a different issue and not within the scope of this discussion. But suffice it to say that the Church concerns herself with assurance of adequate, up to date, method of vocation discernment prior to ordination.

The Diaconate

Next to the order of presbyters is the diaconate or office of the deacons. In the hierarchical order of ministerial posts, the diaconate is at a lower level. The deacons receive the imposition of hands like the priests but “they do not receive the ministerial priesthood” (n.1596), rather a ministry of limited service than that of the priests. Vatican II Council teaches that by the grace of ordination the deacons are strengthened and “dedicated to the people of God, in communion with the bishop and his presbyterate, in the service of the liturgy of the word and of charity” (The Catholic Church 1996, 42f). With regard to their specific functions, the Council states that through the authorization of the competent authority, deacons are allowed to: “administer Baptism solemnly, to reserve and distribute the Eucharist, to assist at and to bless marriages in the name of the church, to take Viaticum to the dying, to read the sacred scripture to the faithful, to instruct and exhort the people, to preside over the worship and the prayer of the faithful, to administer sacramentals, and to officiate at funeral and burial services” (The Catholic Church 1996, n.42). Thus, in all humility, they serve the humble people of God through the sacraments and the charity of their heart in the name of the Church by bringing to the lowly comfort and consolation after the manner of Christ the great Deacon (n.42f).

According to the Council, this office (diaconate) can be conferred on matured married men and also on suitable young men for whom the law of celibacy must remain

in force (42f). While the married men become permanent deacons the celibate young men, depending on the formation they receive or the goal of their formation, may transition to the order of the presbyterate, hence the two categories of the diaconate – transitional and permanent.

Christology of the Priesthood

In various ways the Vatican II expresses and demonstrates the apostolic connection of Church ministry by tracing its origin back to the apostles which ultimately leads to Jesus himself. In this way the Council presents a Christology of the ministry of the priesthood. The Council's presentation holds that having been sent by the Father, Jesus in turn chose and sent his apostles "whom he sanctified by conferring on them the Holy Spirit so that they also might glorify the Father on earth and procure humanity's salvation" (The Catholic Church 1996, 283). By sending his apostles to spread the good news of salvation, Jesus intends the continuation of his redemptive ministry on earth (Mt 28:19-20). It is also his intention that there will be successors to the apostolic college (Jn 17:20-21; Acts 1:24-25; see also The Catholic Church 1996, 29f). The successors of the apostles were their close associates: those who are conversant with the demands of the ministry or as Peter would have it: those who have experience of the ministry directly from Christ himself as it was in the case of Mathias who replaced Judas (Acts 1:21-22) or indirectly through the apostles as in the case of Luke (Lk 1:1-4). In this light the Fathers of the Vatican II Council state thus:

Not only did they have various helpers in their ministry, but, to ensure the continuation after their death of the mission entrusted to them they gave, by will and testament as it were, their immediate collaborators the task of completing and

consolidating the work they had begun, urging them to tend to the whole flock, in which the holy Spirit had appointed them to tend the church of God (see Acts 20:28). They accordingly designated such men and ruled that on their death other approved men should take over their ministry. Among the various ministries which have been exercised in the church from the earliest times the chief one, according to tradition, is that performed by those who, having been appointed to the episcopate through an unbroken succession going back to the beginning, are transmitters of the apostolic seed. Thus, according to the testimony of St Irenaeus, the apostolic tradition is manifested and preserved throughout the world by those whom the apostles made bishops and by their successors down to our own time. (The Catholic Church 1996, 27).

Continuing the Council writes: “The bishops, therefore, with priests and deacons as helpers, took on the ministry to the community, presiding in God’s place over the flock of which they are the pastors, as teachers of doctrine, priests for sacred worship and ministers of government” (27). In these passages, the Council articulates the apostolic succession of Church ministry which is Christological in orientation and proof of the authenticity of the ministerial priesthood as divinely instituted ministry of and by Christ. The passages also highlight the hierarchical structure of the ministerial priesthood.

The Two Priesthoods

It has already been stated, the body of Christ is made up of two categories of the priesthood of Christ, the ministerial priesthood and the priesthood of the baptized. And so in the body of Christ, there is no member who does not have a share in the mission of Christ (218ff) and in the offering of sacrifices to God. The ministerial priests participate

in the priestly mission of Christ by offering liturgical sacrifices for the people of God within stipulated times and places. On their part, the laity, the priesthood of the baptized, that is “all the faithful except those in holy orders and those in the state of religious life specially approved by the Church” (n.48), do not require such formalities. Rather “The ordinary actions of their daily life become the very essence of the offering that the faithful make to God along with Christ’s sacrifice” (Philibert 2000, 2). Expounding on this Vatican II states: “For all their works, if accomplished in the Spirit, becomes spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ: their prayers and apostolic undertakings, family and married and life, daily work, relaxation of mind and body, even the hardships of life if patiently borne (see Pt 2:5). In the celebration of the Eucharist, these are offered to Father in all piety along with the body of the Lord. And so worshipping everywhere by their holy actions, the laity consecrate the world itself to God. (The Catholic Church 1996, 52). Basically, the difference between the priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial priesthood depends of the sacrament received and the sacred or divine power such sacrament confers. Baptism and Confirmation are the initial sacraments or the sacraments of initiation that make every recipient a Christian and participants “in their own way in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ” (48). These sacraments confer on the recipients “a common dignity of members deriving from their rebirth in Christ, a common grace as sons and daughters, a common vocation to perfection, one salvation, one hope and undivided charity” (49, 50). As it stands, the ministerial priest was first a member of the priesthood of the baptized before he felt the call (Heb 4:4) for the life-long commitment to tend the flock of Christ (Jn 21:15-17; 1 Pet 5:1-3) as a pastor. Therefore, what sets the ministerial priest “apart,” but not separate

from the people of God is that he received an additional mandate through the sacrament of Orders to serve his brothers and sisters – the people of God in a special way (The Catholic Church 1996, 320f). And the one who serves is not greater than the one who is served (Lk 22:27). According to the Catechism, the ministerial priests or ordained ministers are essentially conferred with the “sacred power for the service of the faithful.” It goes further to say: “Ordained ministers exercise their service for the people of God by teaching (*munus docendi*), divine worship (*munus liturgicum*), and pastoral governance (*munus regendi*)” (United States Catholic Conference, n.1592).

Within the framework of the people of God therefore, there is no gainsaying that the three degrees of the ministerial priesthood (episcopate, presbyterate and diaconate) are by default inseparable from the priesthood of the faithful for the fact that they exist for and because of the faithful, people of God. In the words of Hubbard (2000):

The priesthood, in other words, only makes sense if there is a community to be served. For the priest exists for the sake of the people, not the people for the sake of the priest. This is not to suggest that the priest is merely an employee of the people, to be ordered about as they see fit. No, the priest is called and sent by God, vested with the power and responsibility of the ordained to act in the person of Christ. He is nonetheless there for the people, as his ‘ministerial priesthood is at the service of the common priesthood’ of the faithful and directed to the unfolding of the baptismal grace of all Christians. (133)

From all that has been said so far, none of the ministries: episcopate, presbyterate or diaconate has ever presented itself as standing unconnected to the people of God rather they are evidently and entirely dedicated to the service of the people of God in various

degrees. These demonstrate the divine connection and the inseparable ministerial relationship between the two priesthoods.

Both categories of the priesthood and their associated ministries had special expressions in the apostolic era when all the believers, both the leaders and the led, or the ordained and the not-ordained members of the faithful lived in harmony, sharing in common what they have and every attention is focused on Christ and the service rendered and not so much the rank or status of who renders the service. But in the course of time, things changed and emphasis begins to be laid on titles and naming of ministries and the priesthood of the faithful virtually lost its meaning and ministry. As Philibert (2000) stated: “For centuries, the faithful had been dispossessed of their proper role in the Eucharist, thinking that the Mass was the action of the ordained which they piously watched from afar and from which spiritual benefits trickled down to them. They did not fully own what St. Augustine called “their own mystery” of their unity with Christ their head” (60). This deprivation continued until Vatican II. The event of the Second Vatican Council provides new breath of life, resuscitates and accords the priesthood of the faithful the recognition and pride of place it deserves in the contemporary Church and theology of the priesthood. For this and many other accomplishments, Gaillardetz (2008, xviii) describes Vatican II as “the most significant event in Roman Catholicism over the last four centuries.” It is also “the largest, the most momentous, and the most opportune of councils” (Madges 2006, xi). For Gaillardetz, it “brought the Roman Catholic Church into an honest engagement with modernity at the precise historical moment in which the world was shifting from modernity to what can only be called a postmodern epoch” (63).

What is seen here as Vatican II's redefinition of ministry gives ministry more meaning, widens its scope and promises a better future in the ministry of the Church.

Madges sees the fresh meaning, broader scope and better future of ministry manifest in the integration of the laity and their collaboration with the clergy in the ministry of the Church as the realization of some of the promises of Vatican II. As he articulated it, Vatican II promises:

A church internally renewed and externally engaged with the world. It was the promise of a church in which the laity would share equal responsibility with the clergy for advancing God's reign. It was a church in which Catholics would feel compelled to join other Christians and members of other religious tradition or no religion in effectively addressing the joys, hopes, and anxieties of the world's people, especially the poor and the marginalized. In short, it was a church that would be not only a sign, but also an effective instrument of union with God and unity among all peoples. (Madges, xi)

Promise for a better future, according to Denny (2006, 55), does not necessarily mean a future radical change or profound turnaround of what is currently obtainable. As such the Church of the future he sees "is not the church as it exists in some time that has not yet arrived. Rather, the church of the future is the church of the present open to the possibilities that await it with the developments of history." The Church currently enjoys that openness to possibilities thanks to Vatican II and one of the results is more rooms for ministry especially on the part of the laity.

Conclusion

The priesthood is a vocation, to be a Christian is also a vocation and every Christian vocation is a gift from God. At the same time, according to John Paul II, Christian vocation is never bestowed outside the Church, “Instead it always comes about in the Church and through the Church” (John Paul II 1992, 35) and for the Church. The effectiveness of each vocation lies in using it to build up the body of Christ, the Church to which everyone, whether of priesthood or the baptized or ministerial priesthood is called. As a result, in the Second Vatican Council’s theology of the priesthood within the framework of the people of God everybody is called according to his/her gift to a life commitment and active participation in the ministry and mission of Jesus Christ. The ministry of rendering humble service to all men and women in the Church in imitation of Christ who came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many (Mt 20:28). It is also in imitation of Saint Peter who: accepted to tend and care for the flock of Christ (Jn 21:15-17) and continued to remind believer of the truth and saving mission of the gospel up to the evening of his life (2 Pt 1:13ff). And equally in imitation of Saint Paul who made himself everything for everyone in order to save some (1Cor 9:22).