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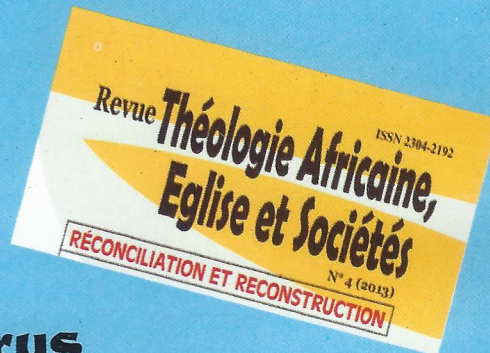
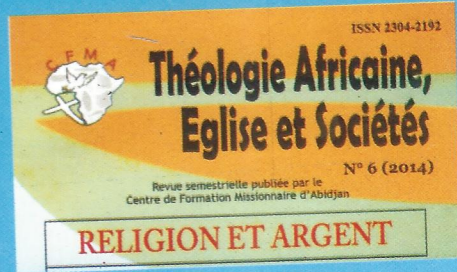
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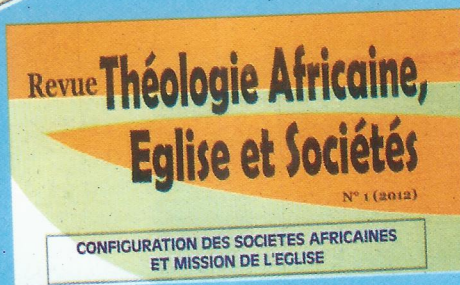
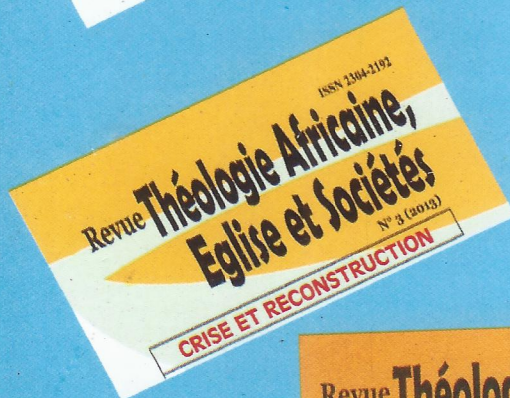
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THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN THE FORMATION OF PRIESTS IN AFRICA

Mary Sylvia Chinyere NWACHUKWU

The present paper is both an inquiry into the legitimacy of the participation of women and an appreciation of the contribution women have made so far in this field. My reflections on this topic are built from different sources. They are taken from the Church's documents that define the nature and goals of new evangelization, from written documents on the historical and cultural transformations which have taken place in regard to the understanding of women and their role in human society, from the Church's definitions of the goal of priestly formation, and from my experience of many years of 'partial' collaboration in the formation of priests in Nigeria. I would, therefore, want to begin this discussion by, first of all, addressing the general topic of New Evangelization: Mission and Formation. Further reflection on the goals of priestly formation and of women's participation in the achievement of these goals would flow from an understanding of new evangelization as it is defined in the Church today.

New Evangelization Characteristics

The expression "New Evangelization" is a vocabulary of the Second Vatican Council, but it became popular with the encyclical of Pope Paul VI, *Evangelization in the Modern World*, which was written in response to the new challenges that the contemporary world creates for the mission of the

Church¹. In their pontificate, three Popes that succeeded Paul VI used the term to define a definite style of evangelization that is new, not in its content, but in its ardor, method and expression². By so doing, they redirect and refocus the Church's pastoral priorities. The new evangelization contains a number of characteristics:

a. It is "Spirited": Evangelization is born from the spirit of the Pentecost who turned the apostles into courageous heralds of God's wondrous deeds, making them capable of speaking to each person in his or her own language, and with boldness even when it meets with opposition (*EG*, 259). It is guided by the same Holy Spirit who encourages, motivates, nourishes and gives meaning to our individual and communal activity (*EG*, 261).

b. It is Christocentric: The primary reason for evangelization is the love of Jesus which we have experienced and which urges us to proclaim and share this love with others (*EG*, 264). Its foundation, centre and summit is personal encounter with Jesus Christ. This call to re-evangelization, that is, personal encounter with God's love in Jesus, changes the Christian's perception of self and of the world, and leads to a delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing (*RM*, 91). Every return to this divine source brings about new expressions and new avenues of mission (*EG*, 11; *RM*, 33; *RH*, 1).

c. The call is universal: it is inclusive; it is the task of the entire people of God. The entire Church must come to embrace this calling to proclaim Christ to all peoples and to

¹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, New York, Knopf, 1994, p. 114.

² JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Missio* (*RM*), 1999; *Redemptor Hominis* (*RH*), 1979; BENEDICT XVI, *Verbum Dei* (*VD*), 2011; FRANCIS, *Evangelii Gaudium* (*EG*), 2013.

make it a normal part of Catholic life³. For this to happen, Christians should be led to experience the gospel message as good news in their lives. On this lies what Pope Francis calls 'the joy of proclamation'. Authentic and effective evangelization demands a joy that is shared and a gift of self in generosity.

d. It is directed to individuals and entire cultures: the new evangelization is a comprehensive process of Christianization. It should embrace both individuals and entire cultures, intending to transform them intimately through the integration or incarnation in them of authentic gospel values that lead to 'a civilization of love' (*RM*, 51-52). It is not just a matter of reaching out (unilaterally) to this culture but of interacting with it, getting to the core of the problems of men and women today with evangelical and charismatic resources. It is a matter of promoting true humanity, showing the power of the Gospel.

e. It calls for a genuine Christian and Missionary Spirituality: the evangelizer is first of all a disciple of Christ who is called to holiness of life (*RM*, 51). The missionary spirituality calls him or her to apostolic charity which enables the burning desire for the Church and for the salvation of souls, which the disciple lives out as Christ did. According to John Paul II, "it is not possible to bear witness to Christ without reflecting his image, which is made alive in us by grace and the power of the Spirit" (*RM*, 87).

It is interesting to note that these characteristics of new evangelization are emphasized in Church documents that define the goals of priestly formation and ministry. A discussion of the participation of women to the formation

³ This characteristic received emphasis in *Redemptoris Missio*. Cf. 1-3, 11, 23, 27, 30-32, 42, 47, 49, 71-72, 92.

of seminarians would prove illusory if it does not feature in the goals which the Church had set for their formation. Moreover, a proposal of goals without adequate means of achieving them would prove abortive. Therefore, a study of the goals of priestly formation in Church documents constitute a background for a discussion of the legitimacy of the participation of women in the realization of these goals.

On the Goals of Priestly Formation

Speaking of the importance of priestly formation, Vatican II Decree on Priestly Training, *Optatam Totius (OT)* states that "the desired renewal of the whole Church depends to a great extent on the ministry of its priests (*OT*, 1). While laying great emphasis on certain areas of concern, this Decree specifies the goals to which formation is directed. It states that

... the goal of priestly formation is a "living contact" with the mystery of Christ. This formation should open students' minds to the mystery of Christ and allow them to adhere to him as friends in an intimate companionship their whole life through⁴.

These introductory statements encapsulate the teachings of nos. 8, 14 and 16 of the document, which emphasize that the seminarian should be taught to develop on close personal relationship with Christ and his mysteries so that they can initiate into it the flock entrusted to their care. This is an emphasis on the Christocentric character and personal orientation of new evangelization. This particular goal derives from Vatican II's understanding of the nature and goal of priestly ministry. In the Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, *Presbyterorum Ordinis (PO)*, the Council

⁴ VATICAN II, *Optatam Totius*, Boston, Pauline Books and Media, 1999, p. 332.

describes the priest as bound by different relationships. He is in relationship with Christ to whose life he is configured (*PO*, 12), with his bishop (*PO*, 7), with his brother priests (*PO*, 8), with the people he is called to serve after the model of Christ (*PO*, 6 and 9), to the word of God and to the sacraments (*PO*, 18). Therefore, a priest's fidelity is measured by his fidelity to these relationships.

The practical means for achieving these goals are also described in relational terms. Proposed as contributing a great deal to the realization of these goals are:

- a. Spiritual training that is closely knit with the humanistic, philosophical, theological and pastoral education. Central among this doctrinal training are: faithful ecclesiology that explains the Church's communal and apostolic nature and disciplines that expound the mystery of Christ and of salvation history (*OT*, 13-16).
- b. The presence of formators - administrators and teachers - selected "from the best men", prepared in sound doctrine, suitable pastoral experience and special spiritual and pedagogical training, who under the leadership of the Rector, constitute with the students a united family that lives the Gospel ideal (*OT*, 5). They create an environment in which the candidates are socialized into living situations of vibrant faith and of practical witnessing to Gospel values.
- c. Doctrinal training should be complemented by development in the seminarians a proper human maturity, made evident in emotional and psychic stability. Moreover, they should be led to acquire esteemed human virtues, such as compassion, refinement in manners, modesty in speech, goodness of heart, sincerity, self mastery, zealous pursuit of justice, friendliness and fidelity to one's promises (*OT*, 11; *PO*, 3).

d. Seminary discipline that encourage students to accept the authority of superiors from personal conviction, and to acquire self mastery, develop team spirit and wise use of freedom (*OT*, 11).

e. Sufficient personal relationship with the Bishop, who with a constant and loving solicitude, prove himself a true father to the seminarians (*OT*, 5).

From the description of the goals of priestly formation above, there are a number of areas of focus for priestly formation today and for the demands of new evangelization (a) Formation is a school of evangelization where formators and formatees live as those who have experienced the love of God in Jesus and who engage in a common effort to conform themselves to Christ crucified (*OT*, 9). Formatees should be led to experience the gospel as good news in their lives so that they can share it with others. (b) Formators are primarily evangelizers who are not called to fulfill a set of tasks dutifully despite their personal inclinations and wishes. They are those open to the Holy Spirit, capable of a generous self donation and of sharing this love of God with others. (c) The spirit of new evangelization questions the inability for relationship and personal commitment in the modern person. It also questions a complacent Church which is satisfied with doing things the way they had always been done. As Pope Francis says, Christocentric living would lead to a proper understanding of ecclesial communion and encourage us to embrace new expressions and new avenues of mission (*EG*, 11). For collaboration to be effective tool of evangelization in the Church, the Church must grow in the right understanding of communion and in living encounter with Christ.

What Could Women Contribute to the goals of priestly formation as they are presented in the foregoing paragraphs? An understanding of this task could be reached by having a clearer picture of the developments that have occurred in the Church's theology and in the world's events and culture.

The Participation of Women in the Formation of Priests

I begin my reflection on this topic with my experience of teaching in an open seminary and living in a formation community for priests.

My Experience

Should women participate in the formation of priests? This question has been asked and is still being discussed as a strange phenomenon. The question as to the legitimacy of men in the formation of women religious could also be an issue but it is not as famous as the one under discussion. For instance, about 90% of indigenous female religious congregations are founded by men, Bishops. The religious congregation to which I belong is a good instance, and also exceptional because, in the very early years of its foundation, the founder, Bishop of a Diocese in Nigeria, left the young girls to the care of two trusted priests whose fatherly care and tutorship of the young candidates are still remembered and treasured today. There was another case of a female religious who was founding a male religious congregation in Nigeria. Just two years after, this foundress died and many people said funny things about her. On hearing that the foundress died, a priest said to my hearing, "how would she survive? Is it not abnormal for a female to train he-goats?" The idea is strange to many African ears, that a woman should found a male religious congregation or be a formator for male candidates, but this is not the case when men found a congregation for females. Many other people would think that it is more normal for men to train fellow men and women their fellows.

As a lecturer in two major seminaries in Nigeria and a community member in one of the formation houses for candidates to the priesthood, I have had experience of

diverse reactions from people who hear that I teach or live in a seminary. I would like to refer to an interesting experience I had in 2002 at the beginning of my teaching apostolate at the Spiritan International School of Theology (SIST) Attakwu, Enugu and the Spiritan Formation Community in the same compound⁵. My sisters who had heard that I had been posted to the seminary were calling on phone to ask me to prepare for the worst. Even fellow women found it bizarre! Some said the seminarians and some of the priests would look down on me. Others advised me to postpone the appointment until I was better prepared to meet the intelligent seminarians in class or they would disgrace me. All these reactions made me a little jittery but I was encouraged by previous experiences I had gained where I lived as the only woman in a group of men. While in school at the Biblicum, Rome, I was one of the two women in a class of about twenty-six in my first year. Since there were very few women at the Biblicum in the late 1990's, I was also most of the time the only female on a seminar, team or committee. These experiences gave me a perception of myself that came to determine my relationship with people of different backgrounds. I learnt that in spite of the pervasive cultural bias about women, I have a bigger share in the effort to determine the way people think about or relate with me. This was especially because as I entered Biblicum, which was considered a school not for light minds, I strove primarily to meet up with what being a student required from me. I shunned the prevailing stereotype of racial and gender determinisms, those of being first of all African and then a woman, and instead, I did all I could to put my intelligence to good use. I determined to make my school mates see me, not as an African, no less as a woman,

⁵ SIST is a school of Theology belonging to the Holy Ghost Fathers and Brothers in Union of Circumscription of West Africa, whose students come from eight different African countries: Nigeria, Cameroon, Ghana, Gabon, Kenya, Congo Brazaville, Tanzania, Zimbabwe.

but as a colleague, a fellow human being on a journey to a common destiny. This was the frame of mind I had when I joined the faculty at SIST.

In my first year of lecturing at SIST, there were seminarians who were too shy to look at me directly when they talk with me. There was a particular case of two seminarians in the class of 300 level, who each time, would keep their heads bowed all through my lecture hour, neither answering questions addressed directly to them nor contributing to the discussion in class. It was clear to me that they were constrained by the school policy to be present in the class. With time, this situation began to change, and as the lecture sessions grew to become more interesting, the two students opened themselves up to the fact that I had come to stay. One of them told me later that he was struggling with the reality of having a woman as lecturer in a seminary.

There are some who think the presence of women in houses of formation for priests is an aberration. Some simply ask me, "How do you survive?" They imply that I should be somewhat a 'super-woman' to survive there. For these latter, women, generally, do not have the brain and the emotional strength that would withstand the intelligence and advances men generally exhibit. For others, the presence of women in a seminary would be a serious distraction to the seminarians. I do not doubt that the seminary could be a very sensitive place. However, the same question of the legitimacy of presence of women in male dominated environments had been asked in less sensitive environments. Those women were greeted with extraordinary accolade, who were first to break the barriers raised over some professions that were previously reserved for males, namely, the military, airforce, police, aviation schools, high political posts, and such other professions. In recent times, however, women are participating successfully in different spheres of life, areas that were previously reserved only for men. This breaking of barriers is welcomed in modern society as progressive and

good for the human society. Moreover, over time, women have built up an image and status that enable them to occupy these positions profitably and to contribute to the development of the human society. There is a growing trend in women advancing to top political posts. It would be necessary at this point to appreciate the historical developments that have made the present discussion possible.

Historical and Cultural Transformation in the Perception of Women

The history of humanity has recorded tremendous changes in the perception of the woman, in the understanding of the relationship between man and woman and in the definition sex-based roles. In nearly every nation, culture, society, and in every religion, women have been regarded as inferior to men, weak (incapable of real strength), lacking in intelligence, and therefore as incapable of contributing anything to the society. Until the 20th century women virtually everywhere were excluded from the key aspects of modernity; the woman was confined to the family where her role was defined strictly in procreative terms. She was denied many of the opportunities given to the man to achieve self fulfillment through education, work, political activity and choice of life partner. Within the family where her roles are defined, the woman was an object of pleasure and exploitation, and her fortune was determined by her ability for procreation and service to others.

One can fully appreciate the interesting transformations in the life of the woman which became possible from the latter half of the 20th century. For centuries, religious, political and social institutions have advocated for the respect of the legitimate rights of women to education and to the promotion of their wellbeing as human beings equal in dignity and rights with men. Greater responsibility for this change is given to the socio-cultural changes which came

with feminist movements but also to a greater extent with the modernization of Western societies⁶. The sudden entry of women into public life caused an upheaval in all the traditional male habits in the family, society and Church. John XXIII lists this phenomenon among the signs of the times⁷. It became possible for women to study, attend university, acquire the right to individual freedom, and little by little gain access to all the professions that were said to belong to men. Thanks to these developments, biological differences are no longer the decisive factors for defining the relationship between men and women. In almost every cultural environment, and no longer only in the Western world, modernity has also led to the collapse of sex-determined roles. These turn out of events were appreciated by John Paul II, in his Letter to Women, where he says,

I cannot fail to express my admiration for those women of goodwill who have devoted their lives to defending the dignity of womanhood by fighting for their basic social, economic and political rights, demonstrating courageous initiative at a time when this was considered extremely inappropriate, the sign of a lack of femininity, a manifestation of exhibitionism and even a sin!⁸

As these events take place in the wider society, the role and position of women in the Church continues to be one of the most controversial issues, a challenge with pastoral implications. The challenge which this topic constitutes for the Church is the topic of a study seminar organized by

⁶ Cf. Lucetta SCARAFFIA, "Socio-Cultural Changes in Women's Lives", in PONTIFICIUM CONSILIUM PRO LAICIS, Study Seminar on *Men and Women: Diversity and Mutual Complementarity*, Roma, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2006, p. 15-22.

⁷ JOHN XXIII, Encyclical Letter, *Pacem in Terris*, p. 22.

⁸ JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to Women* (June 29, 1995), 6: *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 87 (1995), p. 756.

the Pontifical Council for the Laity in 2006. A renowned member of this Council says in her paper at the seminar:

To respond to the current challenges of a new evangelization and of the construction of a culture of love at this time in history, it is fitting that the Church continue to be committed to helping women and men to be aware of their identity, dignity and mission, and to strengthen interrelationships based on mutual respect and appreciation, in recognition of the existing differences and in dialogue⁹.

The following paragraphs present arguments for the legitimacy of the participation of women in priestly formation.

Arguments for the Legitimacy of the Participation of Women

Woman in the Design of God

The woman is a unique creature in God's design. The Yahwist account of creation of the woman in Gen 2:18-25 reveals so much about her uniqueness and about God's purpose and design in creating her. This story reveals one of the most fundamental truths about the man - woman relationship in creation. John Paul II's interpretation of this text differs considerably from the arguments found in Patristic interpretations, which had been used across the centuries to promote the idea that woman is inferior and subordinate. In place of this, there is an understanding of

⁹ Maria Eugenia Diaz DE PFENNICH, "Participation and Collaboration in the Life of the Church", in *PONTIFICIUM CONSILIIUM PRO LAICIS*, *Ibid.*, p. 178 (p. 175-180). DE PFENNICH is a member of the Pontifical Council for the Laity and of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. At the time of this Study Seminar in 2006, she was the President of the World Union of Catholic Women's Organization (WUCWO) and Vice President of the Conference of International Catholic Organizations.

the text in terms of the complementarity and completeness of humanity. According to John Paul II, the text depicts the man, lost in the midst of the garden and in search of a subjective definition of himself. In the creation of woman, the man overcomes his solitude through a return to non-being (analogy of sleep) to the discovery of communion, which truly defines the image of God in the human being¹⁰. The woman represents the man's other or complete self - his rib, "bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh" - which emphasize their homogeneity. She represents creation's fullness and fulfillment, indispensable for man's self realization and for creation's completeness¹¹. Without her, the task of life is simply to care for the garden (Gen 2:15); but with her, man realizes that the full meaning of life is achieved through communion, through relationship in which one exists with and for someone. In the words of John Paul II, "the presence of the feminine element, alongside the male element and together with it, signifies an enrichment for man in the whole perspective of his history, including the history of salvation"¹².

Another characteristic of the woman as Genesis presents it, consists the description of the woman as Eve, meaning, the mother of the living (Gen 3:20). This implies that by nature, the woman is created to extend and nurture life in others. Whether married or not, she is imbued with maternal instinct, and this is proper to her special mission. Women have the natural propensity to nurturing and preserving the life of others, even at the cost of their own lives. They are structured in their being to promote a culture of life and of its preservation in creation.

¹⁰ JOHN PAUL II, *The Theology of the Body. Human Love in the Divine Plan*, Boston, Pauline Books Media, 1997, p. 44-46.

¹¹ Cf. Katrina J. ZENO, *Discovering the Feminine Genius. Every Woman's Journey*, Boston, Pauline Publications, 2010, p. 34.

¹² JOHN PAUL II, *Ibid.*, p. 49.

Women in the Ministry of Jesus

The incentive for a fuller incorporation of women in the pastoral life of the Church is offered by God himself who sought the participation of a woman in the historical events of salvation: "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children" (Gal 4:4-5). Mary, the Mother of Jesus, is presented as the prototype of this role of women, both through co-operation in the Incarnation and in the time of the Church as the "Queen of Apostles". During his earthly ministry at Cana in Galilee (John 2) and while on the cross (John 19), she had a special position and played an outstanding role in the life of the apostles as a woman who understood the mysteries and mission of her Son. Besides the mother of Jesus, there were other women who helped Jesus in his ministry. They followed him wherever he went and provided for his needs (Luke 8).

Jesus expressed deep appreciation to the feminine response of women to his teaching about the mysteries of God. He took the reaction of the sinful woman at the house of the Pharisee as starting point for explaining the truth about forgiveness of sins (Luke 7:47). He also defends another woman whose anointing of his feet became symbolic of the preparation for his burial (Matt 26:6-13). Women were present at decisive moments in the ministry of Jesus. The Canaanite, SyroPhoenician woman's dialogue with Jesus brought about a change in the pastoral strategy of Jesus (Mark 7:24-30; Matt 15:21-28). Her faith encouraged Jesus to begin a ministry among the Gentiles when he did not intend to (Matt 15:28). Women were those who passed the test of loyalty and fidelity to Jesus at the most trying moments of his life and ministry. They were with him through the way of the cross, at the foot of the cross and at the tomb (John 19:25). Mary became the first eyewitness of the resurrection

(Matt 28:6-10; John 20:16-18). Women demonstrated to Jesus "and to his mystery a special sensitivity which is characteristic of their femininity" (*MD*, 16).

These ideas from the interpretation of Gen 2-3 and instances from the ministry of Jesus show the importance of including women in the formation of priests. The following paragraph presents proposals for areas of participation.

Areas of Participation

The participation of women in priestly formation can be looked at in two ways: direct and indirect formation

Direct Formation

Church documents register sufficient appreciation of women and their uniqueness. They emphasize the importance of collaboration with women and the necessity of their active participation in the life of the Church. To this effect, Pope Francis says,

I readily acknowledge that many women share pastoral responsibilities with priests, helping to guide people, families and groups and offering new contributions to theological reflection. But we need to create still broader opportunities for a more incisive female presence in the Church. Because "the feminine genius is needed in all expressions in the life of society, the presence of women must also be guaranteed in the workplace" and in the various other settings where important decisions are made, both in the Church and in social structures (*EG*, 103).

The seminary is numbered as one of those places in the Church where important decisions are made, and which necessarily needs the presence of women. Unfortunately, these words of appreciation for women are only on paper. There is no direct presence of women in the formation of

future priests. For some local churches in Africa, it is still unthinkable that a woman should be part of the teaching staff in a seminary. While a few seminaries in Africa have opened their doors to the presence of more women, yet women do not participate directly in formation. They do not contribute as members of decision-making committees or board. They are appointed as domestic, office or medical staff, and in some seminaries there are few female teachers. Where women participate, they do so only indirectly.

Indirect Formation

Although women do not participate directly in priestly formation, they do so indirectly through different ways by being present within the formation community. These are discussed below:

Participation of Presence by women (religious)

The presence of religious women within a formation community would be an effective means of evangelization. This does not mean that any religious woman could be posted to live in the seminary. Just as 'the best of men' are chosen from among priests and sent as formators to seminarians, so those religious women could be sent who can contribute to the formation of future priests through a witness to life of holiness, a life given totally to God and to others in imitation of Jesus. This is important for one of major challenges of evangelization in modern times, namely, materialism and hedonism. Through their life and work, they bear witness to values that are rare in our society and which are desired in a priest: frequent communion with God in prayer, total availability to God and to the Church, harmonious community life, poverty and abnegation, self-sacrifice in obedience, sincerity and faithfulness. These ideals constitute the basis for the emphasis which Pope Francis gives to a

renewed understanding of evangelization and mission: "... life is attained and matures in the measure that it is offered up and in order to give life to others. This is certainly what mission means" (EG, 10).

Where women are actively present, their enhancing function is accomplished in different ways. First of all, the presence of women in a seminary inspires in the seminarians personal hygiene and decorum. Another area of enhancement concerns aesthetics, the tint of beauty in things and events. The woman has an eye for beauty and pays attention to details which men may consider of no consequence. From them, the seminarians could learn to take better care of the physical environment of the parish or of their community.

Open Seminaries

This is a proposal to open the seminaries to non-seminarians, especially to female religious. I explain the benefits of this with my personal experience. As the school of theology in which I teach opened its doors to non-seminarians, I found interesting the transformation that took place in the life of the seminarians as the first female students joined them in class. Besides obvious dedication to neatness and dressing, the seminarians became more sensitive to the need for good manners. With the arrival of the women, the student's handbook was updated to include a definition of accepted behavioral codes. This would not have been considered necessary in an all-male environment. This kind of exposure is a necessary preparation for the seminarian, as he leaves the seminary for the larger society.

Historical events have shown that men who grow up in all-male environments do not experience the joy of full humanity. It has also been proved that those who study alongside women make a difference in the pastoral field. In places where people do not have opportunities of contact

with women, they grow up with either timidity or anti-women attitudes, and the biases about women which they inherit from their cultures. For them, anything woman is colored by negativity and underestimation. On the contrary, seminarians who spend years of study in an open seminary are able to make a re-appraisal of women before they become priests, which proves helpful and encourage meaningful collaboration with women. What they come to know about women would no longer be what they had heard people say about them. With women listening to lectures with them, holding conversations and contribution on a topic, being on the same seminar or committee, and doing exams, their perception of women change drastically. With the realization that women could be more intelligent, and that they possess extra-ordinary strength and resilience, the seminarian comes to grow in greater respect. This opportunity for co-education lead to mutual respect and appraisal in men and women; they grow to regard themselves not as competitors, but as collaborators in pastoral activities.

Another benefit of open seminary is the living experience of growing in affective maturity and balance relationship. One of the ways in which a priest is defined is his ability for relationship, yet balanced human relationship is a big challenge for priestly ministry today. A necessary foundation for priestly formation is a suitable human formation. It is certain that the grace of ordination in a priest does not remove the fact of the humanness of a priest. Jesus is fully God and human. He had an open relationship with people of different classes and of women; he did not deny his humanity in order to live out his divinity. However, there is the tendency in formation to emphasize the spiritual, to reward apparent holy attitudes and to give less attention to the formation of human and relational attitudes. It would not be mistaken to say that many priests and religious do not know how to relate with people of the opposite sex as another human being. The notion of woman appears to be

synonymous with sex. Some seminarians cannot look at women in the eye, and sometimes the presence of a woman cause ripples and becomes an opportunity for funny gossip. Where women participate in priestly formation, the benefits are obvious: affective maturity and growth in responsible relationship become possible.

*Inclusion of women on Faculty Staff
and formation committees*

It is important to encourage in all seminaries, what a few of them are already doing by admitting qualified women on their faculty staff. The participation of women in priestly formation should grow from domestic assistance, office staff to inclusion into the academic staff and into the decision-making board, for instance, the formation committee. Seminary administrators should benefit from the good number of women theologians who could be relevant for seminary training. The presence of woman on such committees would have far reaching effects. Moreover, if students do not have the experience of women collaborating actively with their formators, they would not do the same when they become parish priests.

Women as Spiritual Directresses

There is a particular vision and ideal, which women bring to reality, and which often elude men. Seminarians could benefit from the peculiar insight and discernment that is characteristic of the woman. At this time when the Church wants to be a sign of tenderness, compassion and mercy, some benefit could be got from being directed by a capable woman who can transmit such virtues. Males are more prone to thinking normatively, logically and mathematically, according to the saying, "If you keep the seminary rules,

the seminary will keep you". Certain feminine virtues are considered important for the nurturing of vocations. For students that find discernment of their vocation difficult, there is need for greater dedication, unwavering fidelity, and patience which women can readily offer. Men's logical and normative thinking might easily encourage "a non serious, undetermined" seminarian to leave. A woman shows discreet and tenacious strength and an edifying patience and companionship which could revitalize a candidate with a wavering decision.

Evaluations

Important as it is to the Church and to human society, priestly formation needs the active participation of women because where those innate values which they symbolize and transmit are lacking, the society suffers and transmits violence. The following observations can be made, although they do not claim to be exhaustive:

a. The new evangelization makes a primary demand on all, namely, personal encounter with Jesus Christ. This is what the church calls re-evangelization. This encounter is able to change us from within, to bring about that mental revolution which Paul speaks about in Rom 12:1, turning our minds to God and helping us to think, speak and act like God. It will, moreover, prevent our relating with others from a private, narrow-minded spirituality that does not represent God's plan.

b. In many papal encyclicals and apostolic exhortations, there is generous appreciation of the feminine genius, of women's natural capacities, such as their aptitude in creating relationships, building community and living the values of mercy, tenderness and care of life in all of its forms. These documents encourage more participatory roles of women in pastoral activities so that through natural capacities, women could promote the image of a Church which breathes life,

reconciliation, hope, acceptance, mercy, trust in the love of God. In spite of these encouragements, many ecclesiastical institutions still shut their doors to feminine influence. It is certain that the participation of women in the formation of priests would give birth to a church with a better and more complete human face. If this is not happening, it could either be because we are not reading the papal documents or we have closed our hearts to the Spirit.

c. In the Church, women are noteworthy for their peculiar way in which they respond to the Gospel through pastoral action, their commitment to social transformation inspired by evangelical values, especially in the areas of education, works of charity, care of and the building up of the parish and of the priests. These are values that should motivate the common search for the complementary mission of men and women and initiatives of solidarity in pastoral action.

d. There are challenges which the modern society poses to new evangelization: culture of selfishness, materialism, sexual abuse, lack of responsibility and integrity of life. In order to respond successfully to these great challenges, what is needed above all is less solitary living, in the midst of changes already taking place in the world, which is bringing women on board in the transformation of the human society. A more open engagement of man and woman in an inclusive environment will encourage growth in esteemed human virtues.

e. Importance of environmental Factors: Environmental factors are important in the formation of individuals. Environment does not only refer to the physical structures and the area in which the seminary is located; it also includes the persons of the formators, the nature of human relationship within the seminary community, the level of involvement of the formators to the life of the seminary community, the prayer life, the diet; all these contribute to environmental factors in formation. In agriculture, the nature of the soil, the climate and human factors contribute to the growth

of a plant. Therefore, besides the physical structures and the geographical location of the seminary, all other factors function as the climate which is very determinative to what a priest becomes after the years of formation. One of the ways in which the seminary climate is contaminated is through the habitual anti-woman expressions uttered in the place and negative behavior towards them. In the presentation of Jesus' relationship with women in the Gospels, we find nothing which reflects the negative presentation of women through history. At his time, popular opinion labeled women as public sinners and adulteresses, but Jesus adopted a way of relating with, speaking to and about women that constitutes an innovation with respect to the prevailing custom of that time. His words and works "always express the respect and honor due to women"¹³. He calls the woman bent over a "daughter of Abraham (Luke 13:16); while the Pharisees talked of the sin of the woman who wetted Jesus legs with her tears and wiped them with her hair, Jesus himself appraised her great love (Luke 7:37-47). He also did not publicly condemn the woman caught in adultery when everyone condemned her (John 8:3-11). These episodes show not only how a positive appreciation brought out the best in the women; they are also a confirmation of how Jesus made women find in his words and action their own subjectivity and dignity.

Conclusion

I conclude this essay with an idea that summarizes all that had been said above. The caption above does not imply that an all-male environment is not human. The idea expressed here is that there are some fundamental values linked to women, who become the privileged sign of such values in the society. Benedict XVI explained this in 2004, while he

¹³ JOHN PAUL II, *Mulieribus Dignitatem*, 13.

was still a Cardinal, in his letter to Catholic Bishops on the collaboration of men and women in the Church and in the world¹⁴. Among such values are: the capacity to live for the other, which is linked to the woman's physical capacity to give life; unconditional love and sacrifice. Note that pregnancy is a remarkable process that shifts the focus and efforts of the woman's entire body to the task of developing and preserving the new life within her womb. Even when a woman does not marry, this virtue is a reality that structures the female personality in a profound way. According to Benedict XVI, "it is women... who even in very desperate situations, as attested by history, past and present, possess a singular capacity to persevere in adversity, to keep life going even in extreme situations, to hold tenaciously to the future, and finally to remember with tears the value of every human life"¹⁵. This feminine capacity is opposed to the rigidity and generalizations which are so often fatal for the existence of individuals and society.

Although these values are tagged 'feminine', they are, above all, human values. They designate the fundamental human capacity to live for the other. In Jesus Christ, God demonstrated the import of this virtue for human redemption. As images of God, every human being, male and female, have this virtue, but it is more pronounced in women for which they become its reminder to human society¹⁶. It is what John Paul II describes as 'genius of women', which he used to advocate for the active and significant presence of the woman in the family¹⁷. Pope Francis expresses deep appreciation in this feminine genius where he says,

¹⁴ Cf. Joseph Cardinal RATZINGER, "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World", in *PONTIFICIUM CONSILIUM PRO LAICIS*, *Ibid.*, p. 219.

¹⁵ Cf. RATZINGER, *Letter to the Bishops*, 13, p. 219-220.

¹⁶ Cf. RATZINGER, *Ibid.*, p. 222.

¹⁷ JOHN PAUL II, *Ibid.*, p. 809-810.

The Church acknowledges the indispensable contribution which women make to society through the sensitivity, intuition and other distinctive skill sets which they, more than men, tend to possess. I think, for example, of the special concern which women show to others, which finds a particular, even if not exclusive, expression in motherhood (EG, 103).

Therefore, in a formation community, which is equivalent to a family setting where the features of priests take shape as in a womb, the active participation of women should be desired and understood as a channel of humanization accomplished through those values that are rediscovered and relived, thanks to women.

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