

Media and Ministry: Examining the Role of Priests in Nigeria in New Evangelisation

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ABSTRACT

The society that we live in today is complex. This is because of the myriad of challenges human beings are confronted with on a daily basis. These challenges come with advances in technology especially the explosion of Information and Communications Technologies (ICT). Priests who are involved in active ministry are not immuned from the challenges that the digital world presents. Sadly too, they have not been able to take advantage of the media for ensuring new evangelisation. This has left a large number of nominal Catholics away from the Church. With this motivation in mind, the researcher embarked on a qualitative study titled: "Media and Ministry: Examining the Role of Priests in Nigeria in New Evangelization" to assess the situation. It discovered that lack of being media savvy, fear and playing the ostrich, lack of collaboration as well as lack of a unified National Communication Pastoral Plan are factors militating against the effective use of the media for new evangelisation in Nigeria by priests. It recommended inclusion of media studies in formation, being media savvy and encouraging youth in media-ministry as possible panacea. The study concluded that if priests are conscious of the role of the media as a catalyst for change, they would be better positioned to guarantee the romance between media and ministry towards bringing the lost sons and daughters of the Church back to the faith in Nigeria and beyond.

Keywords: Catholic, Church, Media, Ministry, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

For Pastors of souls in Nigeria, the era of new evangelisation presents many challenges. The razzmatazz associated with Protestantism and Pentecostalism which packages and repackages the gospel message to the highest bidder has put many Catholic priests on their toes. While it is argued that the Catholic Church has rich theological content because of her history and pedigree, Protestantism and Pentecostalism are increasingly debuting newer ways of sheep-stealing through repackaging their messages on telecasts and various media platforms such as TV, radio and the Internet. Although names like Archbishop Fulton Sheen of Blessed Memory and Bishop Robert Barron have distinguished themselves as media-personalities in the United States of America, in Nigeria, the media does not seem to attract priests.

It could be argued that Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah, Father George Ehusani and late Father Munachi Ezeogu amongst few others have paid their dues as far as using the media in service of the gospel is concerned, their doggedness is simply a drop in an ocean because Nigeria ranks

second after Congo as the country that has the highest number of priests in Africa. Notwithstanding this challenge, Nigerian priests have not rested on their oars as far as the Great Commission of Christ is concerned. This is because, they are convinced that: "The Church exists in order to evangelize, that is, to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace" (Evangelii Nuntiandi, No. 14).

This resonates with the demands of New Evangelisation that touches on Mission ad gentes which means "mission to the nations" especially where Christ is not yet known, developing Christian communities where the Church carries out her activity and engaging in pastoral care with fervent faith as well as pushing the nubs of New Evangelization which involves bringing back to fold baptized Catholics who have lost the faith and those living a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel. This situates priests at the centre of this "Re-evangelisation Process" with the hope that they are able to navigate between media and ministry in order to bring the light of Christ into virtual space.

In a country where the virus of ethnicity and son of the soil syndrome is the in-thing, the paper challenges priests to situate their role as authentic ministers in changing the narrative of a polarized society. “The truth is that there is minimal communication and too many unhealthy bickering, quarrelling, and even bad blood within the Church in Nigeria” (CBCN, Acta, 2004, p. 89). What is more, cyber-crime is on the increase. “It is no longer an assumption that the advancement of technology and a media-savvy populace provides a leeway for faceless people to not only threaten the peace of societies but also cause harm to unsuspecting members of the public” (Chinda, Shuaibu & Dyikuk, 2018b, p.41). This ugly phenomenon is called cyber-bullying. In order to surmount these challenges, in the spirit of mission, the paper aspires to challenge priests to carry out their duty of caring for souls seriously through ongoing evangelization methods. Since “The means of communication are able to facilitate evangelization processes towards a better appreciation of the Christian faith,” (Dyikuk, 2017a, p.044) the priest is expected to be media savvy and at home with the world of Information and Communications Technologies (ICT). *The Guide To The Training Of Future Priests Concerning The Instruments Of Social Communication* has rightly noted that in the past few decades, the instruments of social communication have continued to exercise enormous influence on practically every aspect of society out of which arise the emergence of many teachings, exhortations and norms from the Church’s teaching authority which benefit not only the faithful but also priests in the contemporary world (Guide to the Training of Future Priests Concerning the Instruments of Social Communication, 2014, No.4). To this end, Pope Paul VI noted that: “The Church would feel guilty before the Lord if she did not utilise these powerful means that human skill is daily rendering more perfect. It is through these that she proclaims ‘from the housetops’ the message of which she is the depository. In them she finds a modern and effective version of the pulpit. Thanks to them, she succeeds in speaking to the multitudes” (Evangeliu Nuntiandi, No. 45). This demonstrates the curial place of media in ministry as it relates to new evangelisation.

DECONSTRUCTION OF CONCEPTS

Media

Media are institutions which gather process and disseminate information to wide number of

audiences. They are described as the Fourth estate of the realm (Thomas Carlyle, British House of Commons, 1841) which ranks after the Executive, Judiciary and Legislature. As to the types of media there are, we have traditional media which comprises of radio, television, newspaper, magazines and periodicals and social or new media which is characterized by speed, interactivity and media convergence (combination of video). Radio which has the widest outreach is considered for commoners, television for the middle class and newspaper, magazine and periodicals, for the elite in society.

Ministry

For the purpose of this study, we would understand ministry as the pristine call of Christ to fulfill the injunction of discipleship as enshrined in Matthew 28:16-20 which says: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit...and behold I am with you until the end of the ages.” This is the noble vocation of ministerial priests of the new and everlasting covenant established by Christ. The ministry of priests can be viewed from *mission ad intra*, within and *mission ad extra*, from outside (Dyikuk, 2018).

Priests

Priests are sacred persons who together with the faithful share in the three *munera* of Christ, namely his priestly, kingly and prophetic mission. However, since other Christians merely share in the call to holiness by virtue of anointing with Holy Chrism, priests are consecrated and set apart like Aaron in the line of Melchizedek Prince of Salem. It is this anointing that makes priests ministers of the Word and Sacraments in line with the mandate of Christ and his Church. Our basic understanding here is Catholic priests who are validly ordained by a Catholic Bishop according to laid-down canonical and liturgical norms of the sacrament of Holy Orders. The sacrament of Holy Orders include: Diaconate, Priesthood and Episcopacy. Although all Bishops are priests, only the Bishop has the fullness of the priesthood.

The priest is *Alter Christus*, another Christ. He is the person who introduces the faithful to the life of Christ: In Baptism, he facilitates the washing away of original and actual sin; in Holy Eucharist, he feeds the faithful with the bread of life; in Confirmation, he makes of the faithful,

soldiers of Christ who are meant to proclaim him without fear or favor; in Anointing of the Sick, he facilitates physical and spiritual healing; in Penance, he ensures forgiveness of sins; in Holy Matrimony, he adorns the Church with couples who give birth to offspring and form the domestic Church and through Holy Orders, he acts as another Christ who preaches, teaches and sanctifies the people of God.

New Evangelization

Generally speaking, evangelisation involves kerygma, catechesis and apologetics. It concerns preparation for the reception of the Sacraments of Christian Initiation, mystagogia or ongoing conversion through preaching, teaching and deepening formation in the faith throughout a person's Christian life and faith-journey as well as living out the faith in one's prayer, liturgical worship and moral life (Egan, 2019). However, it was Pope Saint John Paul II who first used the phrase "New Evangelisation" in 1983 in an address to Latin American Bishops. In section 33 of his encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio*, John Paul II employed term to draw the attention of the Church to three different situations for evangelisation namely - *Mission ad gentes*, Christian communities and the new evangelisation (Cotter, 2013).

From its Latin derivative, *Mission ad gentes* means "mission to the nations" especially where "Christ and his Gospel are not yet known." Christian communities are communities in which the Church carries out her activity and pastoral care with fervent faith through ongoing evangelisation. In this sense, New Evangelisation involves a situation "where entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel. In this case what is needed is a 'new evangelization' or a 're-evangelization'" (*Redemptoris Missio*, No. 33). This shows that New Evangelisation is a call targeted at a specific group of people - Those who have fallen-away from the Christian faith (Cotter, 2013).

LITERATURE REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

An Overview of the Church in Nigeria: Catholic Priests in Perspective

Like Congo Democratic Republic, Nigeria boasts of the highest number of priests in Africa. Although the exact statistics of priests in Nigeria seems unavailable, Bunson is of the view that there are nearly 42,000 priests in Africa which is

more than one-tenth of the world's priestly population. He adds that almost 42,000 of the world's 115,500 seminarians, nearly 40 percent, come from the region noting that Africa had a little beyond 2,000 seminarians in 1960, (2015). With nine Ecclesiastical Provinces, 55 dioceses, a basilica and a population of about 40 million faithful, the Church in Nigeria has remained a pillar of spiritual, pastoral and social transformation of the society through the synergy between priests, religious and laity (Dyikuk, 2018).

Expectedly, through the robust contributions of priests and religious, the Church has made giant strides in the work of evangelisation in line with its primary mission through *mission ad intra* and *mission ad extra*. This means that Catholic priests in Nigeria work within their various dioceses or orders and also travel abroad to bring the good news to those who once brought the faith to us. By engaging in *mission ad extra*, they are currently re-evangelising Europe, North America (Anyanwu cited, CSN, 2017; Bunson, 2015; Ojo, 2002; Onaiyekan, 2013 & Badejo, 2016) and other far-away missions.

Both diocesan and religious priests in Nigeria are involved in media education and evangelisation. As part of fulfilling its primary role as the image maker of the Church in Nigeria, the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN) through the Directorate of Social Communications handles the internal and external communication of the Church by networking with other Archdioceses and Dioceses. They do this through sending and receiving news items to and from various dioceses. For instance, the CSN publishes calendar for Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) and the directory for liturgical use throughout the year. In fact, the Directorate of Social Communications is responsible for the public relations of the Church in Nigeria (Dyikuk, 2018).

It should be noted that the CSN also ensures that parishes and institutions adequately prepare for the World Communications Day (WCD). The Directorate of Social Communications often leads the way by organising the celebration of Holy Mass by the Bishop-Chairman of the Commission as part of events to mark WCD. Also, dioceses usually organize lectures, talk-shows, seminars, rallies, press releases and press conferences where media professionals within the secular sphere interact with those who work at various diocesan directorates of communication.

Features and Characteristics of New Evangelisation

Before commenting on the features and characteristics of new evangelisation, it is important to understand the key texts that highlight New Evangelisation. These are: John Paul II's missionary encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio* of 1990, Vatican Congregation for the Clergy's, General Directory for Catechesis of 1997 and John Paul II's Apostolic Letter, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, of 2001. In *Redemptoris Missio*, John Paul II maintains that what is needed is primary proclamation, the basic communication of the Gospel, on-going pastoral care of the faithful and New Evangelisation targeted at those who have drifted from the practice of the faith (Egan, 2019).

Meanwhile, *The General Directory for Catechesis* stressed that New Evangelisation should be employed in situations, contexts and cultures where many are baptised but few practice the faith, people have drifted or have no real, personal and dynamic relationship with Christ and his Church (Egan, 2019). The document surmises: "In many of the great cities, for example, a situation requiring *missio ad gentes* can coexist with one which requires new evangelization. The boundaries between pastoral care of the faithful, new evangelization and specific missionary activity are not always clearly definable" (GDC, 1998, No. 59).

In *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, John Paul II stated that we need an evangelization that is new in its ardour, methods and ways of expression. In summary, New Evangelisation has three characteristics or features - new ardour, new method (Christo-centricity) and new expression and new expression (culturally conscious) (Egan, 2019).

Demands of New Evangelization in the New Media-Age

In this discourse, it is vital to understand the mind of the Church concerning *New Evangelisation* especially in a new media-age. Before we delve into that, it is worth recalling that Pope Emeritus, Benedict XVI established The Pontifical Council for the New Evangelisation in 2010 as a way of reclaiming to the faith those who have either left the Church or are cold in the faith. Two years later, precisely in 2012, there was a Bishops' Synod on the New Evangelisation to address these concerns (Cotter, 2013). We shall highlight elements which are necessary for New

Evangelisation based on the expectations of the Church. These are - Checkmating indifferentism and secularism, responding to the great commission, exploring the breadth and richness of faith, establishing a conscious and personally-lived faith and debuting new methods and expression of evangelisation

Checkmating Indifferentism and Secularism

The Church demands that the faithful should be able to challenge indifferentism and secularism. In his speeches and encyclicals, Pope Benedict XVI has consistently condemned the twin-evils of indifferentism and secularism: "Our own time, then, must be increasingly marked by new hearing of God's word and a new evangelization. Recovering the centrality of the divine word in the Christian life leads us to appreciate anew the deepest meaning of the forceful appeal of Pope John Paul II: to pursue the *mission ad gentes* and vigorously to embark upon the new evangelization, especially in those nations where the Gospel has been forgotten or meets with indifference as a result of widespread secularism" (Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, No. 122).

Responding to the Great Commission

It is the mind of the Church that engaging with New Evangelisation in the digital age is a response to the Great Commission which Christ entrusted to his Apostles and to her. Perhaps it is reason why John Paul II noted: "I sense that the moment has come to commit all of the Church's energies to a new evangelisation and to the *mission ad gentes*. No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church can avoid this supreme duty: To proclaim Christ to all peoples" (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, No. 3).

Exploring the Breadth and Richness of Faith

No meaningful discussion on New Evangelisation can take place if the faith itself is not explored in its entirety. Since the Catholic faith is dynamic and rich, the Church expects that the people of God explore its breadth and richness as a prerequisite for ensuring New Evangelisation. In his address to the Catholic Bishops of America, Pope John Paul II stressed that: "The new evangelization in which the whole continent is engaged means that faith cannot be taken for granted, but must be explicitly proposed in all its breadth and richness" (John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America*, 1999, No. 69).

Establishing a Conscious and Personally-Lived Faith

The wave of Protestantism and Pentecostalism has brought a new brand of Christianity in Nigeria which demands a practical approach to the faith. What this means is that Christians are called to establish a conscious and personally-lived faith in their communities and the world. Again the words of John Paul II are worth noting here: “To this end, it is more necessary than ever for all the faithful to move from a faith of habit, sustained perhaps by social context alone, to a faith which is conscious and personally lived. The renewal of faith will always be the best way to lead others to the Truth that is Christ” (John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America*, 1999, No. 73).

Debating New Methods and Expressions of Evangelization

Young people across the globe and especially Nigeria have always complained that Catholic Liturgy is boring. The wave of new Pentecostal movements has not helped matters. It would seem that John Paul II saw tomorrow when he noted that the Church: “Look(s) to the future with commitment to a New Evangelization, one that is new in its ardor, new in its methods, and new in its expression” (John Paul II, *Address to the Latin American Bishops*). The ardor, new methods and new expressions that the Holy Father spoke about relates to preaching and catechesis. We would consider some factors which militate against the harmony between media and ministry as it relates to *New Evangelization*.

Media and Ministry: Factors Militating Against Priests’ Role as Agents of New Evangelisation in Nigeria

The paper seeks to create a harmony between media and ministry among Catholic priests in Nigeria. To achieve this, it draws attention to some factors militating against priests’ role as agents of New Evangelisation in Nigeria. These include: Lack of being media savvy, fear and playing the ostrich, lack of collaboration/shared responsibility and lack of unified national communication pastoral plan. We shall briefly discuss them thus:

Lack of Being Media Savvy

There are indications that many priests in Nigeria are not media savvy. Badejo (2016) argues that “the Church in Africa does not yet command sufficient media power and savvy.” He further decried the “Poor contemporary

communication culture of instantaneity of contact and networking in spite of the advancement in digital and electronic media” as well as “Poor competence of communication personnel with new technology and skills of the trade” (Badejo, 2016). It is not unlikely to find priests who cannot operate a computer let alone a Smartphone. In this category are those who are stuck to the analogue way of doing things so much so that they are not familiar with the trappings of media developments such as PowerPoint Presentations or the use of social media. Sadly too, some indulge in sexting or posting pictures of food, drinks, luxurious cars or fanciful houses they recently built. The current spate of kidnapping of priests in country may not be divorced from this.

Fear and Playing the Ostrich

For a long time, priests have been afraid of the media. This fear has made many of them to play the Ostrich in the face of a daring media that wants to know everything about the internal workings of the Church. The coverage of the conclave which brought Pope Francis in is a case in point. Perhaps the media-bullying which the Church received when the sex scandals of some priests in America made headlines on CNN and BBC news has further made priests circumspect of engaging with the media. Understandably so, playing the Ostrich only presents greater avenues for the media to taunt the Church through its priests.

Lack of Collaboration/Shared Responsibility

Lack of collaboration and shared responsibility which engages the youth in media and ministry in Nigeria is partly responsible for the rise in crime, yahoo-yahoo and cyber-bullying. In his latest 53rd WCD message Pope Francis regrettably noted that: “Statistics show that among young people one in four is involved in episodes of cyber-bullying” (2019). In 2007, The Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) reported that the number of cyber crimes in Nigeria had hit 91.6 million which ranks Nigeria third globally behind the UK and USA (Danbatta cited in Adekunle, 2017).

Because the youth-apostolate in Nigeria has not fully directed the young towards media service through the word, the number of young people who are recruited by politicians as thugs is alarming. Those who are frustrated as a result of unemployment and poverty end up committing suicide. If pastors of souls engaged them meaningfully in media-related matters, the sad

development of lack of collaboration and shared responsibility in media and ministry would be put in check.

Lack of Unified National Communication Pastoral Plan

Although Holy Mother Church has always laid emphasis on the need for all dioceses and Episcopal Conferences to formulate pastoral communication plans to guide the work of evangelisation, the Church in Nigeria has not been able to produce a workable Pastoral Plan for Communication for use in particular Churches throughout the country which would reflect the Church's universal vision of dialogue. We hope that this would come true soon.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

RECOMMENDATIONS

By way of recommendation, it is important to underscore the role of priests in Nigeria in new evangelisation in light of the new media age:

Inclusion of Media Studies in Formation

Because of the increasing nature of advances in media technology, the modern priest ought to be trained in the rudiments of media-sophistication. This is why seminary curriculum should include media studies in the formation of future priests (Guide to the Training of Future Priests Concerning the Instruments of Social Communication, 2014, No.27). This would furnish them with details on current trends in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). This way, they would be better equipped to function as priests of the 21st century who have the bible on their right hand and the newspaper on their left as the late Archbishop of Jos, Gabriel Gonsum Ganaka of blessed memory use to say.

Being Media Savvy

By the same token, priests ought to be media savvy. By this we mean that they should be comfortable with the media. The truth is, as we saw during the sex scandal that rocked the Church in the United States of America, priests were afraid of the media and so went into hiding. Because they were playing the Ostrich, the media began to face them head-on. Perhaps if the Church prepared many of its personnel to be media savvy, those who are trained would be on the same page with secular media-professionals. Therefore, it is crucial to be interested in the dynamics of modern media by listening to news, knowing how to use virtual space for acquiring knowledge, social

interaction, business transactions and also, how to use the computer. It is also essential to know how to face the media during interview and to anticipate the questions that the secular media are likely to ask priests. This should be done side by side packaging or rebranding the content of homilies for optimum results. More priests should be interested in radio or TV programmes.

Encouraging Youth in Media-Ministry

Statistics have shown that the youth are the people who use the media the most. As such, in line with the demands of new evangelisation, pastors of souls are charged to further encourage the youth in media-ministry. This entails galvanizing support for the production of catholic movies, music, flyers and also drama or choreography. Parishes can invest in catholic-oriented media productions for the propagation of the faith and showcasing Catholic Action.

Debuting an Online-Church

The increasing online presence of almost every organisation in the world calls the Church to increase her online presence. In a previous study, I made a case for debuting an online Church where those who do not know about the faith can be introduced to the basics of the faith like the 10 commandments, 6 laws of the Church and the 7 sacraments. WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter et al are veritable platforms for this adventure in the new era of evangelisation. "The Church can cash in on the numerical strength of the youth using Face book, Twitter and WhatsApp to create what the researcher refers to as an Online Church – This entails a forum where the message of the gospel is transmitted either in English, French or vernacular through short messaging systems, Sunday and weekday reflections, rich Christian photo-enhanced messages, caller tunes, hymns and videos on YouTube, to mention just a few" (Dyikuk 2017b, p.047).

Engaging Lapsed Catholics through Social Media

In like manner, we are living in a society where some of our members are cold in the faith due to mid-life crisis, poverty and sickness. There are many nominal-Catholics who come for Mass thrice a year – at Christmas, New Year and Easter celebrations. The Church can reach them through social media platforms by displaying liturgical readings and reflections for their use. Thankfully, many priests in Nigeria now post their homilies online for the use of the faithful. While this is commendable, more can still be

done since New Evangelisation is targeted at those who are lapsed in the faith. Priests and Deacons who are no longer in active ministry should be reached physically or through social media. This is a way of showing them that they are not alone in their struggle.

Checkmating Cyber-Bullying, Sexing

Cyber-bullying and sexting have very negative impact on the faith and morals of the young. To reduce this trend, parents and guardians as well as the Church and government have a responsibility to the young. Indeed, if all stakeholders work towards a successful implementation of cyber laws, the ugly phenomena would reduce. It behoves children and the youth to resist every temptation that would reduce them to bullies and sex-toys as these could terminate their lives and shortchange their eternal destiny.

Countering Violent Extremism, Suicide

The activities of Boko Haram in North-Eastern Nigeria plus that of the horrendous kidnapers and killer-herdsmen have increased youth-radicalisation. Poverty and unemployment too have pushed many young people into crime and committing suicide. The question is who will bail the cat? I dare to say, the onus lies on Pastors of souls to use their God-given position to preach and also organize workshops on countering violent extremism and suicide amongst others in Nigeria. Perhaps this might bring light at the end of the tunnel.

CONCLUSION

From divine revelation through the submission of pious men and women, priests are said to have the best “job” in the world. This is because they go from God to men and from men to God. They stand in the breach for humanity reconciling men and women to God. This responsibility places a lot of burden on their shoulders. The burden relate to every facet of life. The Church expects them to carry out an all-round pastoral approach to issues.

However, since society is complex, the priest is unable to faithfully engage all sectors of life such as science, and media technology. Here, the caution of Pope Emeritus comes to the fore: “priests present in the world of digital communications should be less notable for their media savvy than for their priestly heart, their closeness to Christ. This will not only enliven their pastoral outreach, but also will give a ‘soul’ to the fabric of communications that makes up the ‘Web.’” (Benedict XVI, 2010). This is why the paper made a case for

examining the role of priests in Nigeria in *New Evangelisation* in the light of media and ministry. The thrust of the paper had been, stimulating discussion around the current challenges which the world of ICT poses to the priest and the Church. Such challenges as outlined include, taunting the Church about sex scandals, taking advantage of the silence of the Church in the wake of burning issues and the presence of ill-equipped personnel who speak a different language from that of the secular media. As a matter of urgency, priests are the right people who should “form a correct conscience on the use of the media” (Inter Mirifica, No. 5).

If the imagery which Pope Francis painted of the media as *Net* and *Community* in his latest 53rd WCD message (Francis, 2019) is anything to go by, effective synergy is required for media and ministry in Nigeria. Like we said earlier, if the Church in Nigeria prioritises pastoral communication, it should be able to hatch pastoral agents who are able to blend media and ministry well by navigating through the rough road of New Evangelisation so as to reap the required harvests in line with the mandate of the Universal Church.

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